

### Oman condoles Egypt over attack at Ismailia

The Foreign Ministry expressed the Sultanate of Oman's condolences to families of victims and the people of the Arab Republic of Egypt on the attack targeting a security checkpoint at the city of Ismailia, wishing the injured a speedy recovery. The Ministry also affirmed Oman's firm stance in condemning violence and terrorism in all its forms and motives.



■ **BRASÍLIA**

LULA RETURNS AS BRAZIL PRESIDENT

Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is set to be inaugurated on Sunday for a third term as Brazil's president, in a ceremony snubbed by outgoing leader Jair Bolsonaro, underlining the deep divisions the veteran leftist inherits. The swearing-in will cap a remarkable political comeback for 77-year-old Lula, who returns to the presidential palace less than five years after being jailed on controversial, since-quashed corruption charges.

SEE P6

■ **ZAGREB**

CROATIA JOINS EURO ZONE

Croatia on Sunday switched to the euro and entered Europe's passport-free zone -- two major milestones for the country after joining the EU nearly a decade ago. The Balkan nation bid farewell to its kuna currency and become the 20th member of the eurozone. It is now the 27th nation in the passport-free Schengen zone, the world's largest, which enables more than 400 million people to move freely around its members.

SEE P7

■ **NEW YORK**

THE WORLD IS BETTER OFF THAN YOU THINK

Enough with the doom and gloom! Our planet may be in better shape than you think. Human beings have a cognitive bias toward bad news (keeping us alert and alive), and we journalists reflect that: We report on planes that crash, not planes that land. We highlight disasters, setbacks, threats and deaths, so 2022 has kept us busy. But a constant gush of despairing news can be paralyzing.

SEE P9

## Two dams to be built to control floods in Salalah

**MUSCAT:** His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued two Royal decrees reading as follows: Royal Decree No. 2/2023 ascribes the public utility status to the project of constructing a dam for protection against flood water in Wadi Adounab (Project A1B) in the Wilayat of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar.

Article (1) states that the project of constructing a dam for protection against floods in Wadi Adounab (Project A1B) in the Wilayat of Salalah, Governorate of Dhofar, as defined in the memo and diagram attached to this decree, is henceforth deemed a public utility project.

Article (2) stipulates that the authorities concerned may expropriate, through direct implementation, the properties and lands necessary for the aforementioned project, along with all the installations therein in accordance with the Public Utility Expropriation Law promulgated by Royal Decree 64/78.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue.

Royal Decree No. 3/2023 ascribing the public utility status to the project of constructing a dam for protection against floods in Wadi Anaar and side protection for the Port of Salalah, as defined in the memo and diagram attached to this decree, is henceforth deemed a public

### Royal Decree Ratifies State's General Budget 2023

**MUSCAT:** His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday issued Royal decree No. (1/2023) on the ratification of the State's General Budget for the Fiscal Year 2023, after the same was presented before the Council of Oman.

Article (1) ratifies the State's General Budget for Fiscal Year 2023 according to the tables attached to this decree.

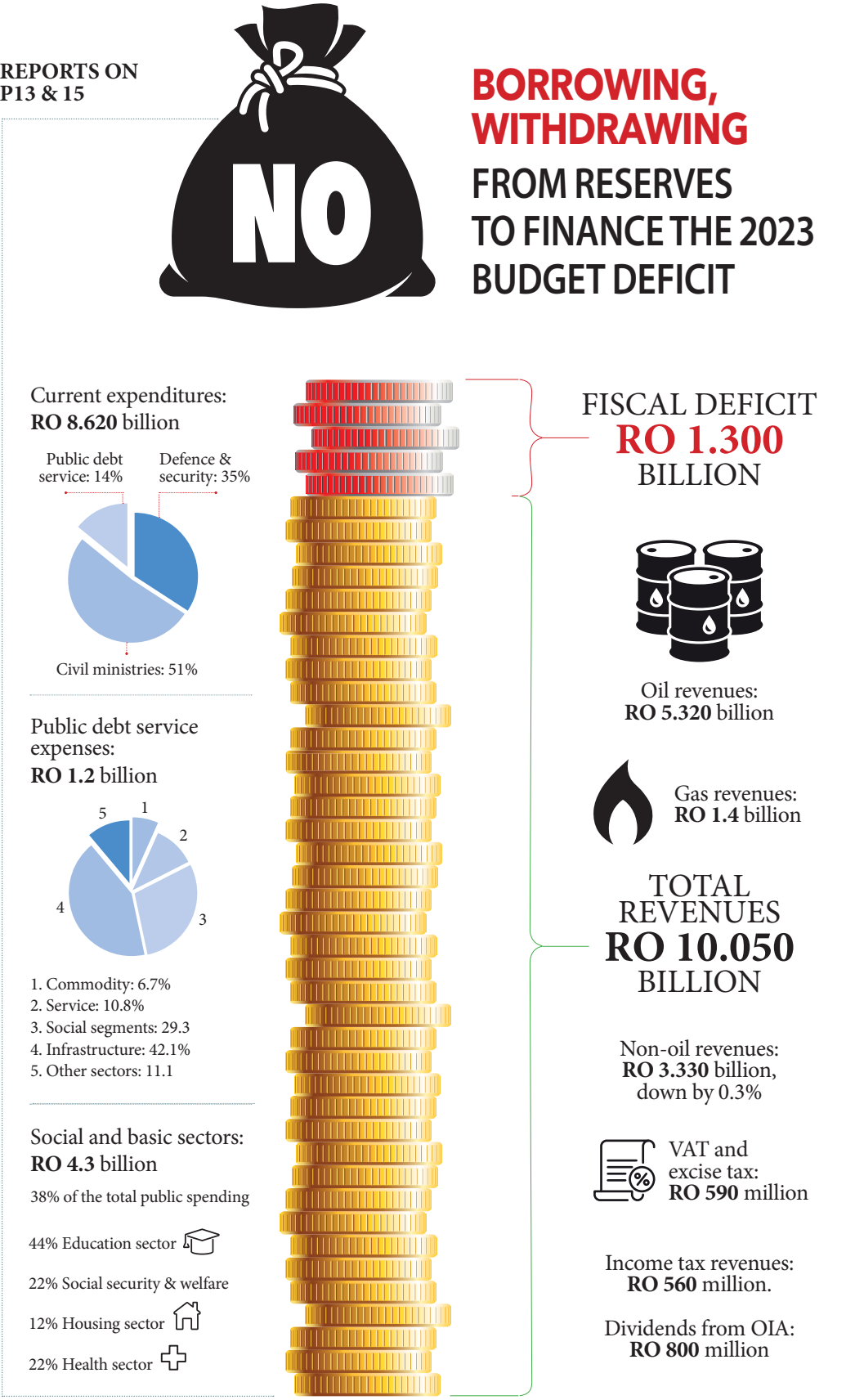
Article (2) instructs all units of the State's Administrative Apparatus and other public legal entities to implement the provisions of this decree, each within the scope of its prerogatives.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the 1st of January 2023. — **ONA**

utility project. Article (2) stipulates that the authorities concerned may expropriate, through direct implementation, the properties and lands necessary for the aforementioned project, along with all the installations therein in accordance with the Public Utility Expropriation Law promulgated by Royal Decree 64/78.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — **ONA**

REPORTS ON P13 & 15



Presenting the new identity of **Oman's energy transportation backbone.**

OQ Gas Networks is now **OQGN**

OQGN is a member of the OQ Group.



2000

Established as OGC

2004

First Export to Dolphin Energy, UAE

2008

First Import from Dolphin Energy pipeline, Qatar

2019

Integrated into OQ

2020

Renamed OQ Gas Networks

2021

Established as an independent company

2022

Rebranded as OQGN

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# Governors take oath before interior minister



**MUSCAT:** The Governors who are Chairmen of Municipal Council in the governorates on Sunday took the oath of office before Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior.

The governors are as follows: Dr Yahya bin Badr al Maawali, Governor of South Al Sharqiyah, Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, Shaikh Saif bin Hamyar Al Malik al Shehi, Governor of South Al Batinah, Shaikh Mu'dhid bin Mohammed al Yaqoubi, Governor of Al Wusta, Najeeb bin Ali al Rowas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah, Shaikh Ali bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Governor of North Al Sharqiyah and Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi.

The Minister of Interior wished the governors all success. He also underscored the importance of the role of Municipal Councils in the upcoming period through the additional powers granted to the councils to serve citizens and the nation. — ONA

## IZKI FORUM FOR FOLKLORE HELD



The Izki Cultural Centre organised the fifth Izki Forum for Folklore, which reflects the importance of adhering to the Omani folklore and its impact on various occasions. The forum comes as part of the interest in the Omani traditional heritage represented in the traditional Omani arts that represent originality and heritage, mixed with the voice of Al Kasir and Al Rahmani, in harmony with the artistic sense of the collective performance of the various folk arts groups in the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

# RAFO receives new batch



**MUSCAT:** The Royal Air Force of Oman (Rafo), in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, received a new batch of citizens who have passed the recruitment and evaluation stages and medical and physical tests, on Sunday.

The move comes in continuation to the efforts made by the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) to absorb national job-seekers. The new recruits will receive the fundamental military programme that qualifies them to join Rafo.

Rafo employed its entire capabilities, expertise, specialised manpower as well as administrative and health capacities to ensure smooth and speedy recruitment procedures.

SAF has drawn up plans and programmes that aim at employing national job-seekers and providing its units with qualified manpower.

# Fish production in Oman declines 22.4pc by Oct 2022

**MUSCAT:** The Sultanate of Oman's fish production declined by 22.4 per cent to stand at 556,151 tonnes till the end of October 2022 compared to 716,272 tonnes during the corresponding period in 2021, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total value of fish production grew by 2.2 tonnes of which worth stands at RO 339.592 million compared to the same period in 2021. Traditional fishing, which constitutes the largest share of Oman's fish production, dropped by 24.8 per cent to reach 515,318 tonnes by the end of October 2022 compared to 685,244 tonnes during the corresponding period in 2021.

On the level of governorates, the Governorate of Al Wusta came first in the volume of fish landing through traditional fishing as production stood at 182,460 tonnes, comprising a fall by 34.2 per cent by the end of October 2022.

The Governorate of South

**Small pelagic fish comprised the largest share of traditional fishing till October end**

Al Sharqiyah came second by producing 162,047 tonnes, constituting a drop by 29.2 per cent by the end of October 2022.

They were followed by the governorates of North Al Batinah and South Al Batinah as production stood at 58,307 tonnes, comprising a rise by 2.7 per cent.

Sectors of commercial and coastal fisheries grew by 34.5 per cent and 9 per cent, respectively. Small pelagic fish comprised the largest share of traditional fishing till the end of October 2022 to hit at 250,989 tonnes, comprising 35.9 per cent compared to the corresponding period in 2021.

Moreover, large pelagic fish declined by 10.5 per cent to stand at 140,157 tonnes compared to the corresponding period in 2021. — ONA





# ROP signs pact to combat money laundering

MUSCAT: Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Sunday signed a cooperation programme with the Tax Authority to cooperate, coordinate and exchange information in the field of financial audits and combating money laundering and terrorism financing.

The programme was signed by Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs

for Operations and Saud bin Nasser al Shukaili, Chairman of the Tax Authority.

The programme comes within the framework of coordinating efforts and activating necessary mechanisms through the exchange of information and expertise in the field of combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism.

— ONA



# ROP receives new batch



MUSCAT: A new batch of citizens on Sunday joined the Royal Oman Police (ROP) as part of ongoing national efforts by ROP in coordination with the Ministry of Labour to employ Omani youth.

The new batch encompasses general education diploma (GED) holders, post-GED holders in mechanical engineering,

electronic engineering and electrical engineering.

The new police recruits will join the Institute of Police Recruits at Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences to undergo an integrated training and qualification programme which includes law and police studies and military training.

— ONA

# Ejada scheme launched



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour on Sunday launched Ejada scheme of measuring institutional performance.

The system is aimed at providing appropriate instruments for developing the performance of government units and providing an instructional guide and standardised criteria for gauging the progress made by

the units in achieving their goals.

Ejada scheme also seeks to spread a culture of proficiency, improve knowledge about the best ways to improve the quality of public services, reward distinguished performance and promote the spirit of innovation and creativity in all government units.

The ceremony was held

under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour.

Ejada is envisaged as a means of realising the objectives of annual plans and ensuring the sustainability of the units in their drive to identify aspects of improvement and strengths in the unit.

Through Ejada, three

questionnaires will be launched to monitor the extent to which government institutions strive to develop the work environment, the satisfaction of service recipients and the level of cooperation among government units.

By this week, Ejada would have been fully implemented in all government units. — ONA

# L'elisir d'amore to be staged on January 5, 7

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat will present Gaetano Donizetti's opera L'elisir d'amore on January 5 and 7. It will be performed by the Orchestra and Chorus of Teatro Lirico di Cagliari.

This classical rendering of Donizetti's well-known opera with direction by Michele Mirabella takes place on an elaborate set with a large cast and a vibrant feast of costumes from heralded designers, Alida Cappellini and Giovanni Licheri.

Featuring an all-star cast of Nina Minasyan as Adina, René Barbera as Nemorino, and Erwin Schrott as Dulcamara conducted by the acclaimed conductor Jordi Bernàcer, the production is defined by the very best constituent parts. Enjoy a moralistic but light touch opera, a love story challenging social divisions, with a happy ending.



L'elisir d'amore tells the story of Nemorino, a simple country lad, who yearns for his childhood friend to return his love.

He is convinced by the

promises of a travelling 'doctor', who offers him a mysterious elixir, one which will render him irresistible to his true love.

Time is against him, as his love

welcomes the flirtatious advances of a dashing soldier, in haste he sells himself into the army to fund another bottle of the potion.

Enjoy a pacy, theatrical extravaganza, with a vibrant staging and beautiful costumes.

Donizetti (1797-1848) completed the opera in 1832 AD. When it was shown to the public, it won accolades from all quarters for its comic take on class differences and the situations facing those who challenge them.

The story takes place in a cough medicine factory, where the workers strive to save the factory from closure.

The story seamlessly blends with the creative vision of director Michele Mirabella's carefully designed paintings, performances by great artists, and the bright elaborate costumes created by designers like Alida Cappellini and Giovanni Legere.

# 'Salutes to Oman' inscribed on highest peak of Antarctica

KABEER YOUSUF  
@kabeeryousef

'Salutes to Oman' was inscribed on top of Vinson's Peak, the highest peak in Antarctica, some 5,000 metres above sea level (ASL) when adventurer Suleiman bin Hamood al Nabei conquered it on Saturday.

Known as Vinson Massif (16,067), located only 660 nautical miles from the South Pole, it is the highest peak in Antarctica and one of the 'Seven Summits'.

Hailing from Wadi al Maawil in the Batinah Governorate, Suleiman made his country proud by reaching the South Pole, the centre of the earth, on the same trip, and also became the first Omani to finish the ascent of the Seven Global Summits and the South Pole.

Speaking to the Observer from Chile, an excited Suleiman said he is proud to be an Omani which made him at the pinnacle of success.

"I'm indeed proud to be an Omani whose terrain formatted me into an adventurer. This is the new year gift to my country, which I gained after nearly seven years of hard work and attempts since



I began my goal to conquer the Seven Summits," Suleiman said.

It took nearly seven years (out of which two years of pandemic went without attempts or training) for Suleiman to mark his nation on the map of mountaineering after he started the mission in

2015. However, it took one month for the complete preparations and to excel the peak this time, and he left Oman on December 1, 2022.

A reception is planned to welcome Suleiman when he returns on January 7, according to sources.

"I've long experience in climbing, trekking and mountaineering because I am from Oman, the 'Land of Mountains,' which helped me fall in love with the ruggedness and get in terms with the cliffs and wilderness of the rocks," adds

Suleiman who is working for the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Suleiman began to trek at a tender age with his father's support. It continued through extreme weather conditions of summer and winter during all the

years. Later, he began to inspire his peers to conquer heights; today, he has a big team of like-minded people who frequently explore heights.

It's not the first time Suleiman is making Oman proud after climbing heights under extreme conditions. He climbed Mount Everest, 8,849m above sea level, and Lhotse peak, the fourth highest peak in the world, at 8,516m above sea level in 2015.

It was part of the strenuous preparations part of for the Grand Slam programme under which climbers aim to reach the seven summits, which include Mount Everest, Aconcagua, Denali, Kilimanjaro, Elbrus, Vinson, and Puncak Jaya or Kosciuszko on every continent and reach the south and north poles.

"Our youth needs to focus on one of the sports activities whereby his or her focus would be on health and fitness so that we can keep the dangers of drugs away from the society," Suleiman told the Observer, as a message to the youth, adding, 'youth should bear the national flag and aim to becoming a part of the global peace initiatives.'



# THE SCIENCE OF SHOPPING

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There is a close link between psychology and economics that determines how individuals behave towards their economic decisions. Behavioural economics is a branch of knowledge that combines aspects of economics, psychology and neurosciences. According to it, financial decisions are not the result of rational behaviour but rather the product of irrational motives on the part of consumers and investors.

According to experts, economic phenomena result from various psychological, social and cognitive factors influencing our decision-making and, in turn, the economy. Applications and concepts of behavioural economics can be used in making public policies or guiding the behaviour of individuals towards more and better decisions for public and private goals.

That includes stimulating or strengthening the economic sectors or the private sector in establishing fruitful national projects, promoting innovation and development, food security projects, behavioural stimulation in the context of energy consumption, increasing the rate of saving and investment, stimulation towards environmental issues, stimulation towards achieving development goals and influencing individuals with a better and healthier lifestyle.

Oman has realised the importance of this concept when in 2020 it established a department specialised in behavioural economics affiliated with the Ministry of Economy as one of the outputs of Oman Vision 2040.

The unit mainly aims to improve the effectiveness of public policies through behavioural studies, in addition to facilitating and activating public services for citizens through re-engineering various alternatives to consumers, in addition to

cooperating with the private sector in redesigning alternatives in order to achieve the public interest.

Explains Rashid al Shethani, an economics researcher, “when some people who suffer from obesity or are overweight plan to reduce their weight by eating healthy meals, their plans fail as soon as some celebrities on social media promote large discounts for a restaurant. The weight reduction project fails because people are affected emotionally and socially by those cuts and discounts”.

He added that for a broader understanding of behavioural economics, look to the arrangement of beverages on shops’ shelves. “Promoting the applications of this type of economy requires placing healthy drinks on the front shelf to be more prominent or in a place that makes it easier for the consumer to choose the healthy drink over the unhealthy one, which should be put at a less prominent place. This process is called “nudge”, as it directs people towards healthy options”.

Al Shethani confirms that what distinguishes behavioural economics from traditional economics is that the first cares about people emotionally and rationally, where a change can be made in their choices by motivating them to make decisions through specialised applications designed for that, taking into account human nature and its vulnerability to variables. While logic prevails when making decisions in the traditional economy.

“Thus, it is good to integrate the classical theories of economics with the principles and applications of behavioural economics to protect people from poor decision-making resulting from irrational and emotional behaviours”.

## BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS

Directing social media celebrities, or so-called influencers, in addition to active and influential news accounts, towards promoting behavioural economics applications is very important, according to Al Shethani. These methods are one of the modern methods favoured by the current generation to discuss its aspirations and challenges, as both celebrities and news accounts are one of the means that help direct public opinion and define its starting points.

IN 2020  
OMAN ESTABLISHED  
A DEPARTMENT SPECIALISED  
IN BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS  
AFFILIATED WITH THE MINISTRY  
OF ECONOMY AS ONE OF THE  
OUTPUTS OF OMAN  
VISION 2040



# Plan to streamline govt service procedures begins

MUSCAT: The first phase of a project named “Manjam Labs” kicked off on Sunday with the aim of streamlining government service procedures.

The project is undertaken in cooperation between the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, in addition to other departments concerned.

The opening session was held at Oman Oil Institute at Sultan Qaboos University.

The project, which stems from the principle of achieving common interests of all, will continue until March 2023. It constitutes part of the executive plan of the government digital transformation programme (2021-2025), which aims at facilitating access to services and meeting the aspirations of users.

The initiative targets more



First phase of the project named ‘Manjam Labs’ launched with the aim of achieving common interests will continue until March 2023

than 1,000 services within the government’s digital transformation programme. The participants will discuss three approved workflows, the business cycle and employment process

procedures.

The project sees the participation of more than 300 experts representing government and private stakeholders from various commercial, industrial and service sectors, municipalities and government institutions.

It deals with re-engineering the steps of service supply, specifically with the aim of improving them and presenting them in an innovative manner that ensures speed and efficiency in serving beneficiaries.

— ONA

# School project calls for treatment of grey water

AMAL AL RIYAMI  
NIZWA, JAN1

Irrational use of water is causing groundwater depletion. The situation in some areas has assumed an alarming proportion.

Jumah School for Basic Education has a dedicated team called ‘Belonging and Building’ to go into the details of groundwater depletion.

The idea is to treat grey water generated from laundry water, dishwashing, showering, and cooking water, as they are better quality than black water (mixed with human waste). This is the basis for ‘Belonging and Building’ project of the school.

Project Idea: Salmah al Hanshi, a specialist in school activities at Jumah School for Basic Education, said: “The affiliation and building team at the school saw the necessity of developing a filtration system in which filter balls



containing active carbon were used to filter bacteria and absorb heavy metals. Some beneficial bacteria quickly digest waste. Additionally, some vital rocks help purify the school’s washbasin water containing soapy waste, toxic ammonia, and harmful human organic compounds. The final result is pure water suitable to irrigate plants in the school nursery. The primary beneficiaries of the project are the school students and the local community in general.”

Project goals: “The most important objective of the project

is to teach the students the values of preserving and recycling available environmental resources and spreading the culture of rationalising water in daily life,” says Salmah al Hanshi.

Al Hanshi confirms that the project came to activate the educational curricula and direct students to use modern devices and equipment to study environmental sciences.

Salmah al Hanshi, the project’s supervisor, called for solutions to environmental problems, such as water scarcity and impurity in water.

# Biofuel use set to redefine transport dynamics

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@Afrahalbalushia

The use of biofuel by Mwasalat may well define the future of fuel in public as well as general transport. The Oman National Transport Company’s Mwasalat took its first trip from Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) to Al Alam Palace back and forth.

The trial run of a vehicle running on biofuel (derived from date stones) was successful, as the scientific research project is funded by the Petroleum Development Oman (PDO).

The scientific research team at SQU was able to produce 100 litres of biodiesel from date stones. The project was funded by the Ejad platform as part of its quest to achieve net zero emissions and was implemented by a research team from SQU. The “Ejad” platform is an electronic platform that allows the industrial sector to present the industrial challenges they face, and researchers in universities can view these challenges and propose solutions to them, which will lead to directing research in universities to applied research closely related to the industry.

Biofuel is a clean fuel, the production of which depends primarily on the conversion of



biomass into alcoholic ethanol or organic diesel, which means that it can be used in lighting, vehicle running and generator management by significantly reducing dependence on fossil fuel.

One of the advantages of biofuel is its low cost and the possibility of producing it at any time and in any part of the earth due to the availability of its raw materials and its non-adherence to any geographical or natural factors.

Biofuel is energy derived from living organisms, whether plant or animal, it is one of the most important sources of renewable energy, unlike other natural resources such as oil, coal, and all types of fossil fuels and nuclear fuels.

Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport,

Communications and Information Technology for Transport, mentioned the importance of intensifying efforts and cooperation between higher education and scientific research institutions and the public and private sectors to push for more of these national initiatives that will contribute to enabling the transport sector to achieve national goals and reach zero-carbon neutrality by 2050.

The produced biodiesel is subject to tests in an accredited international laboratory in the United Kingdom, and the Petroleum Development Oman Company announced its success in testing this fuel on a diesel generator in University Square. All that is to check its performance and the amount of CO2 reduced by its use and such research comes as part of the Sultanate of Oman efforts to use biofuels.

| MUC<br>كلية مجان الجامعية                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                |                                                |                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| BOARD REPORT FOR THE FIRST QUARTER ENDED 30 NOVEMBER, 2022                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| <b>Respected Shareholders,</b><br>On behalf of the Board of Directors of Majan College SAOG (Majan University College), I am pleased to present this report on Majan’s financial performance and the accompanying un-audited interim condensed financial statements for the three-month period ended 30 November 2022.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| <b>Financial Performance</b><br>In comparison to the same period in previous financial year, total income has decreased by 8% to be OMR 1.04 Million mainly from decrease in new and returning undergraduate students and decrease in other miscellaneous income. Total expenses have increased by 9% to be OMR 0.93 Million mainly increase in academic staffs to provide new programmes and increase in utilities consumption after discontinuation of online learning. Therefore, net profit before tax and taxation decreased by 60%. Consequently, overall net profit after tax has decreased by 60% to be OMR 0.09 Million. Earnings per share has decreased from 3 Baiza per share to 1 Baiza per share. |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| <b>Appreciation</b><br>On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to his Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for his unlimited support and guidance to higher education. Our sincere thanks to the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for its support to the private higher education sector.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| <b>STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION<br/>CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                |                                                |                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Standalone<br>11/30/22<br>OMR                  | Standalone<br>11/30/21<br>OMR                  | Standalone<br>31/08/2022<br>OMR |
| <b>ASSETS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| <b>NON-CURRENT ASSETS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| Property, plant and equipment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 3,387,773                                      | 3,676,361                                      | 3,448,621                       |
| Deferred tax asset                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 271,575                                        | 282,335                                        | 257,237                         |
| <b>Total non-current assets</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>3,659,348</b>                               | <b>3,958,696</b>                               | <b>3,705,858</b>                |
| <b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss, Current                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 1,263,340                                      | 1,061,408                                      | 1,322,350                       |
| Financial assets carried at amortized cost, current                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 7,042,047                                      | 6,860,266                                      | 6,418,857                       |
| Trade and other current receivables                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 2,193,086                                      | 2,365,514                                      | 1,157,200                       |
| Cash and bankbalances                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 220,465                                        | 784,935                                        | 712,965                         |
| <b>Total current assets</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>10,718,938</b>                              | <b>11,072,123</b>                              | <b>9,611,372</b>                |
| <b>Total assets</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>14,378,286</b>                              | <b>15,030,819</b>                              | <b>13,317,230</b>               |
| <b>EQUITY AND LIABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| <b>EQUITY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| Share capital                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 9,000,000                                      | 9,000,000                                      | 9,000,000                       |
| Statutory reserve                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 1,580,447                                      | 1,494,133                                      | 1,571,098                       |
| Retained earnings (Accumulated losses)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 1,426,696                                      | 649,870                                        | 1,342,553                       |
| Other equity interest                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | 0                                              | 0                                              | 0                               |
| <b>Total equity</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>12,007,143</b>                              | <b>11,144,003</b>                              | <b>11,913,651</b>               |
| <b>LIABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| <b>NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| <b>NON-CURRENT PROVISIONS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| Non-current provisions for employee benefits                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 566,929                                        | 624,226                                        | 566,933                         |
| Other non-current provisions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 264,405                                        | 285,205                                        | 260,555                         |
| <b>Total non-current provisions</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>831,334</b>                                 | <b>909,431</b>                                 | <b>827,488</b>                  |
| <b>Total non-current liabilities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>831,334</b>                                 | <b>909,431</b>                                 | <b>827,488</b>                  |
| <b>CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| <b>CURRENT PROVISIONS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| Trade and other current payables                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 1,338,008                                      | 1,366,747                                      | 396,448                         |
| Current tax liabilities, current                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | 201,801                                        | 305,638                                        | 179,643                         |
| Other current financial liabilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 0                                              | 1,305,000                                      | 0                               |
| <b>Total current liabilities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>1,539,809</b>                               | <b>2,977,385</b>                               | <b>576,091</b>                  |
| <b>Total liabilities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>2,371,143</b>                               | <b>3,886,816</b>                               | <b>1,403,579</b>                |
| <b>Total equity and liabilities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>14,378,286</b>                              | <b>15,030,819</b>                              | <b>13,317,230</b>               |
| Number of outstanding shares                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 90000000                                       | 90000000                                       | 90000000                        |
| Net assets per share                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 0.133                                          | 0.124                                          | 0.132                           |
| <b>PROFIT OR LOSS CONSOLIDATED AND SEPARATE PROFIT OR LOSS</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                |                                                |                                 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Standalone<br>01/09/2022-<br>30/11/2022<br>OMR | Standalone<br>01/09/2021-<br>30/11/2021<br>OMR |                                 |
| <b>Revenue</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>962,100</b>                                 | <b>1,007,588</b>                               |                                 |
| <b>Other income</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>42,355</b>                                  | <b>121,043</b>                                 |                                 |
| <b>Service expenses</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>74,052</b>                                  | <b>68,761</b>                                  |                                 |
| <b>Employee benefits expense</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>618,280</b>                                 | <b>554,495</b>                                 |                                 |
| Depreciation, depletion and amortisation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 85,951                                         | 88,633                                         |                                 |
| <b>Other operating expenses</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>143,549</b>                                 | <b>134,834</b>                                 |                                 |
| <b>Profit (loss) from operating activities</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>82,623</b>                                  | <b>281,908</b>                                 |                                 |
| Investment income                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 40,760                                         | 2,678                                          |                                 |
| Impairment loss (reversal) of non-financial assets                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 13,430                                         | 7,610                                          |                                 |
| <b>Profit (loss) before income tax</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>109,953</b>                                 | <b>276,976</b>                                 |                                 |
| Income tax expense, continuing operations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 16,461                                         | 41,489                                         |                                 |
| <b>Profit (loss) from continuing operations</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>93,492</b>                                  | <b>235,487</b>                                 |                                 |
| <b>Profit (loss) for period</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>93,492</b>                                  | <b>235,487</b>                                 |                                 |
| <b>PROFIT (LOSS), ATTRIBUTABLE TO BASIC AND DILUTED EARNINGS PER SHARE BASIC EARNINGS PER SHARE DILUTED EARNINGS PER SHARE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                |                                                |                                 |
| <b>Note:</b> The complete accounts are available on Muscat Stock Exchange ( <a href="http://www.msx.om">www.msx.om</a> )                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                |                                                |                                 |

SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

| Tender Ref.     | Description                                                                                                                                       | Last Date for Collection of Tender Document | Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00am Wednesday | Eligibility                                                                                              | Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| MOH/HQ-309/2022 | Expansion of Al Muabayah Health Center in Muscat Governorate                                                                                      | 12/January/2023                             | 08/February/2023                                         | Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The First Grade     | R.O 25.000 Per set          |
| MOH/HQ-310/2022 | Consultancy Engineering Services (Design and Supervision) for Expansion and Remodeling of Pediatric and Laboratory Services at The Royal Hospital |                                             |                                                          |                                                                                                          | R.O 28.100 Per set          |
| MOH/HQ-315/2022 | Expansion of Al Nahdah Health Center in Muscat Governorate                                                                                        |                                             |                                                          |                                                                                                          | R.O 25.000 Per set          |
| MOH/HQ-314/2022 | Upgrading of Shahab Asaayb Health Center to Hospital in Dhofar Governorate                                                                        | 19/January/2023                             | 15/February/2023                                         | Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in The Excellent Grade | R.O 110.000 Per set         |

Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.

Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: **24402200**, Email id [etenderhd@ita.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@ita.gov.om)



# Lula returns for 3rd term as Brazil president

BRASÍLIA: Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is set to be inaugurated on Sunday for a third term as Brazil's president, in a ceremony snubbed by outgoing leader Jair Bolsonaro, underlining the deep divisions the veteran leftist inherits.

The swearing-in will cap a remarkable political comeback for 77-year-old Lula, who returns to the presidential palace less than five years after being jailed on controversial, since-quashed corruption charges.

In a sign of the scars that remain from Lula's brutal election showdown with far-right ex-army captain Bolsonaro in October, security will be exceptionally tight at the pomp-filled ceremony in Brasilia.

Some 8,000 police have been deployed, after a Bolsonaro supporter was arrested last week for planting a tanker truck rigged with explosives near the capital's airport, a plot he said aimed to "sow chaos" in the South American country.

Bolsonaro himself left Brazil for the US state of Florida on Friday — reportedly to avoid having to hand the presidential sash to his bitter enemy, as tradition dictates.

The snub has hardly dampened the party spirit for Lula and the 300,000 people expected at the New Year's Day ceremony and a massive celebration concert that will feature acts ranging from samba legend Martinho da Vila to drag queen Pablo Vittar.

Thousands of Lula supporters from around the country formed massive lines to filter through the security cordon, belting out pro-Lula chants as they waited.



An inflatable doll depicting President-elect Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva is seen at the Esplanada dos Ministerios before his inauguration ceremony in Brasilia on Sunday. – AFP

"I'm excited beyond measure," retired teacher Zenia Maria Soares Pinto, 71, told AFP after travelling 30 hours by bus from the southern state of Santa Catarina.

"I have so much admiration for his humility, his commitment to ensuring the people live in dignity," added Pinto, part of a crowd cheering for Lula outside the hotel where the ex-metalworker turned president was staying.

Machine operator Valter Gildo, 46, called it a "historic day." "Today marks the return of a working man to the presidential

palace, someone who fights for social causes, for minorities, against racism and homophobia, a person who represents Brazil," he said.

Foreign dignitaries including 19 heads of state will be in attendance as Lula, who previously led Brazil through a watershed boom from 2003 to 2010, takes the oath of office for a new four-year term.

They include the presidents of a raft of Latin American countries, Germany, Portugal and the king of Spain. After being sworn in before

Congress, Lula will travel by car — traditionally a black convertible Rolls Royce, though officials said that could be changed for security reasons — to the ultra-modern capital's presidential palace, the Planalto.

There, he will walk up a ramp to the entrance and receive the gold- and diamond-embroidered presidential sash. Organisers of the ceremony — led by first lady-to-be Rosangela "Janja" da Silva — have kept secret who will give Lula the sash in Bolsonaro's absence.

It will be the first time since the

end of Brazil's 1965-1985 military dictatorship that an incoming president does not receive the yellow-and-green sash from his predecessor.

Lula faces numerous urgent challenges for Latin America's biggest economy, which looks little like the commodities-fuelled dynamo he led in the 2000s.

They include rebooting economic growth, curbing rampant destruction of the Amazon rainforest and delivering on his ambitious agenda to fight poverty and inequality. — AFP

## Kim orders new ICBM, bigger nuclear arsenal

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called for developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles and a larger nuclear arsenal to counter US-led threats, state media said on Sunday, amid flaring tension between the rival Koreans.

At a meeting of the ruling Workers' Party, Kim highlighted the need to secure "overwhelming military power" to defend its sovereignty and security. The meeting came amid cross-border tensions over last week's intrusion by North Korean drones into the South, and the North's series of missile launches, including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

South Korea's President Yoon Suk-yeol, during phone calls with military chiefs, called for "solid mental readiness and practical training" to ensure any North Korean provocations will be met with retaliation, according to a statement.

Kim accused Washington and Seoul of trying to "isolate and stifle" Pyongyang with US nuclear strike assets.

— Reuters

## Several killed, wounded in blast near Kabul airfield

KABUL: An explosion at the entrance to a military airfield in the Afghan capital killed and wounded several people on Sunday, an official told AFP.

The cause of the blast at the gate of the facility next to Kabul's international airport was unclear, interior ministry spokesman Abdul Nafy Takor said. "A number of our compatriots have been martyred and wounded in the blast," Takor said, adding that authorities were investigating the incident. A Kabul resident said late on Sunday his brother, an air force officer, was killed in the blast. "He had worked in the previous government too as an air force officer," Abdul Noor told AFP, referring to the ousted, Western-backed government of former president Ashraf Ghani.

"He and some of his colleagues were in a queue waiting to enter the military airfield when the blast occurred," Noor said, indicating the blast had caused more casualties.

Taliban officials including Takor did not offer any other details despite repeated requests for information.

The Islamist group claims to have improved security since storming back to power in August 2021 and often downplays casualty figures from such attacks.

— Reuters

# Thousands stranded at Philippine airports due to outage

MANILA: Tens of thousands of travellers were stranded at Philippine airports on Sunday after a power outage knocked out communication and radar equipment at the country's busiest hub in Manila, forcing hundreds of flights to be cancelled, delayed or diverted.

Aviation authorities detected a "technical issue" on Sunday involving the air traffic management centre at Manila's domestic and international airport.

More than 360 flights in and out of Manila were cancelled, diverted or delayed, affecting around 56,000 passengers. The outage hit as many people began returning to the capital for work and school after the Christmas and New Year break.

There were chaotic scenes at check-in counters across the country as thousands of people



Passengers look at a screen showing flight information at terminal 3 of Ninoy International Airport in Pasay, Metro Manila on Sunday. – AFP

tried to re-book tickets or find when their flights might take off.

Others who had boarded their aircraft before the glitch was announced waited for hours and were then disembarked.

But transportation department secretary Jaime Bautista said the air traffic management centre, which controls inbound and outbound flights, "went down" due to a power outage that resulted in the loss of communication, radio, radar and Internet.

"The secondary problem was the power surge due to the power outage which affected the equipment," he said.

Airport authorities said the air traffic management system was partially restored by 4:00 pm (0800 GMT) and flights were beginning to take off and land in Manila. — AFP

# UK man runs a marathon every day to hit charity goal

LONDON: A British fundraiser rang in the New Year by completing his quest to run a marathon every day of 2022, reaching his £1 million (\$1.21 million, 1.12 million euros) goal just as 2022 drew to a close.

Crowds cheered on Gary McKee, 53, as he completed his 365th marathon of the year under the rain in his native Cumbria, northwest England, on New Year's Eve.

By midday Sunday, he had raised £1,093,000 for cancer charity Macmillan Cancer Support and Hospice at Home



Gary McKee

West, Cumbria, and worn out 22 pairs of running shoes.

The father-of-three ran more than 9,500 miles in 2022, often completing his daily goal before heading to work at local nuclear plant Sellafield.

"The support has been phenomenal and it always is and the West Cumbrians get behind us, but cancer affects everybody so it isn't just a West Cumbrian thing, it's a national thing," he told BBC News as he set off on his final run of the year.

Macmillan Cancer Support executive director of fundraising

Claire Rowney said "Gary's achievement and selflessness is off the scale.

"There aren't enough words to express our heartfelt gratitude for everything that he has done to help Macmillan support people living with cancer at a time when they need us more than ever."

The runner was occasionally joined by high-profile supporters, including England rugby union defence coach Kevin Sinfield.

"He's a brilliant man and it was an honour to be with him in Cumbria to support what he's doing," said Sinfield. — AFP



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# Ukraine blasts 45 Russian drones

KYIV: Ukrainians cheered from their balconies while their air defences blasted Russian missiles and drones out of the sky in the first hours of 2023, as Moscow saw in the new year by attacking civilian targets across Ukraine.

Ukraine's Air Force command said it had destroyed 45 Iranian-made Shahed drones overnight — 32 of them on Sunday after midnight and 13 late on Saturday. That was on top of 31 missile attacks and 12 air strikes across the country in the past 24 hours.

Russian President Vladimir Putin signalled no let-up to his assault on Ukraine, in a grim and defiant New Year's speech that contrasted with a hopeful message of gratitude and unity from Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy.

As sirens blared in Kyiv, some people shouted from their balconies, "Glory to Ukraine! Glory to heroes!"

Fragments from the late-night attack caused minimal damage in the capital's centre, and preliminarily reports indicated there were no wounded or casualties, Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said on social media. Attacks earlier on Saturday had hit residential buildings and a hotel in the capital, killing at least one person and injuring more than 20.

US Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink said on Twitter: "Russia coldly and cowardly attacked Ukraine in the early hours of the new year. But Putin still does not seem to understand that Ukrainians are made of iron."

At the front line in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk Province, troops toasted the new year. Soldier Pavlo Pryzhehodskiy, 27, played a song on guitar he had written at the front after 12 of his comrades were killed in a single night.

"It is sad that instead of meeting friends, celebrating and giving gifts to one another people were forced to seek shelter, some were killed," he told Reuters. "It is



A serviceman collects fragments of missile in a crater left by a Russian strike in front of a residential building in Kyiv. — Reuters

a huge tragedy. It is a huge tragedy that cannot ever be forgiven. That is why the New Year is sad."

In a nearby front line trench, soldier Oleh Zahrodskiy, 49, said he had signed up as a volunteer after his son was called up to fight as a reservist. His son was now in a hospital in the southern city of Dnipro, fighting for his life with a brain injury, while his father manned the front.

"It is very tough now," he said, holding back tears.

Andrii Nebytov, chief of Kyiv's police, posted a photo on his Telegram messaging app, showing what was described as a piece of drone used in an attack on the capital, with a hand-written sign on it in Russian saying "Happy New Year".

Russia's Defence Ministry said it had targeted production, storage and launch sites of Ukrainian drones with long range missiles on New Year's Eve.

Russia has flattened Ukrainian cities and killed thousands of civilians since Putin ordered his invasion in February, claiming Ukraine was an artificial state whose pro-Western outlook threatened Russia's security. Moscow has since claimed to have annexed around a fifth of Ukraine.

Ukraine has fought back with Western military support, driving Russian forces from more than half the territory they seized. In recent weeks, the front lines have been largely static, with thousands of soldiers dying in intense trench warfare as Moscow defends its grip on captured territory.

Since October, Russia has launched mass missile and drone attacks on Ukraine's energy infrastructure, casting cities into darkness and cold as winter sets in. Moscow says the strikes aim to reduce Ukraine's ability to fight; Kyiv says they have no military

purpose and are intended to hurt civilians, a war crime.

"The main thing is the fate of Russia," a stern-faced Putin said in his New Year's Eve address, speaking in front of a group of people dressed in military uniform instead of the normal backdrop of the Kremlin walls. "Defence of the fatherland is our sacred duty to our ancestors and descendants. Moral, historical righteousness is on our side."

Zelenskiy delivered his own address in near darkness, in front of a fluttering Ukrainian flag. He described the year past as a national awakening.

"We were told: you have no other option but to surrender. We say: we have no other option than to win," he said.

"This year has struck our hearts. We've cried out all the tears. We've shouted all the prayers," Zelenskiy said. "We fight and will continue to fight. — Reuters

# Croatia switches to euro, enters Europe's passport-free zone

ZAGREB: Croatia on Sunday switched to the euro and entered Europe's passport-free zone — two major milestones for the country after joining the EU nearly a decade ago.

At midnight (23:00 GMT Saturday) the Balkan nation bid farewell to its kuna currency and become the 20th member of the eurozone.

It is now the 27th nation in the passport-free Schengen zone, the world's largest, which enables more than 400 million people to move freely around its members.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen visited Croatia on Sunday to mark the momentous occasion.

Experts say the adoption of the euro will help shield Croatia's economy at a time when inflation is soaring worldwide after Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent food and fuel prices through the roof. But feelings among

Croatians are mixed. While they welcome the end of border controls, some worry about the euro switch, with right-wing opposition groups saying it only benefits large countries such as Germany and France.

"We will cry for our kuna, prices will soar," said Drazen Golemac, a 63-year-old pensioner from Zagreb. Many Croatians fear that the introduction of the euro will lead to a hike in prices — in particular that businesses will round up price points when they convert.

For tourist agency employee Marko Pavic, "Croatia joins an elite club".

"The euro was already a value measure — psychologically it's nothing new — while entry into Schengen is fantastic news for tourism," he said.

Use of the euro is already widespread in Croatia. — AFP



Police officers shake hands near a customs checkpoint as vehicles pass without stopping at the Bregana border crossing between Croatia and Slovenia on Sunday. — AFP

# Death of Benedict overshadows New Year at Vatican

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis marked the Roman Catholic Church's traditional World Day of Peace on Sunday but the start of the new year at the Vatican was overshadowed by the death of his predecessor, Benedict.

Francis presided at a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica as the body of Benedict, who died on Saturday at the age of 95, was being prepared for three days of public viewing in the same church starting on Monday.

On Sunday the Vatican released the first images of the late Benedict, showing him dressed in red and gold liturgical vestments and laying in state in the chapel of the monastery where he died.

His body will be moved privately to the basilica, unlike what followed the death in 2005 of Pope John Paul, whose body was moved in a solemn outdoor procession that was televised live around the world.

In accordance with Benedict's wishes, his funeral on Thursday will be simple and solemn. It will be the first time in many centuries that a sitting pope will preside at the funeral of his predecessor. Benedict, who stepped down in 2013, had been the first pontiff in 600 years to resign.

Jan. 1 is also the feast of the



The body of former Pope Benedict lies in state at the Vatican on Sunday. — Reuters

Mother of God and in his homily, Francis asked the Madonna to accompany "our beloved" Pope Emeritus Benedict "on his passage from this world to God".

Benedict was also remembered in one of the prayers at the Mass.

In his homily, Francis urged his listeners to work actively

for peace, and not "waste time glued to a keyboard in front of a computer screen" but to "dirty our hands and to do some good".

Later at his Sunday blessing in St. Peter's Square, Francis made another appeal for an end to the conflict in Ukraine, saying it was "intolerable contrast" with the

theme of the day. On Saturday night the Vatican released Benedict's two-page "spiritual testimony" written in 2006, a year after his election as pope. There was no explanation why Benedict did not update it as he became older and more frail.

In it, he asked in a general,

spiritual way, that God would welcome him to internal life "despite all my sins and insufficiencies".

Francis on Saturday called Benedict a noble, kind man who was a gift to the Church and the world. While tributes to the former pope continued to

be made by world leaders, and conservative members of the faithful, others were highly critical of his pontificate. Some recalled the severe discipline he meted out to progressive theologians, particularly in Latin America, when he was head of the Vatican's doctrinal department under Pope John Paul II. Those actions prompted liberal Catholics to dub then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger "God's Rottweiler".

And while some have credited Benedict with taking important steps to formalise the Vatican's response to clergy sexual abuse, victims groups accused him of protecting the institution at all costs.

"In our view, the death of Pope Benedict XVI is a reminder that, much like John Paul II, Benedict was more concerned about the Church's deteriorating image and financial flow to the hierarchy versus grasping the concept of true apologies followed by true amends to victims of abuse," the anti-abuse group SNAP said.

Like many Vatican officials who worked with Benedict, Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet said he believed the German pontiff had left behind "a great legacy" as a man of God and a man of culture.

— Reuters

# Goodbye Google? Welcome AI



Khalid Alsafi Al Huraibi  
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The writer is an entrepreneur and innovation adviser

When was the last time you visited the library for research?

For me, it was a few years ago near Barcelona, Spain, because it was snowing outside, and I wanted to surf the internet. Chances are our traditional sources of knowledge and relationships for the past decades at least have been disrupted by FAANGA or Facebook (now Meta), Apple, Amazon, Google, Netflix, (Alphabet), in addition to Microsoft.

These global technology giants, that all a few years ago were just ambitious dream projects of a few visionary startup founders, represented the evolution of how our human mind pivots to benefiting from faster connections between people and information or data, in general.

Now, we are life witnesses to yet another information revolution- OpenAI.com's ChatGPT (Generative Pre-trained Transformer).

Millions of people already joined this ChatGPT since its launch in the last quarter of 2022, to try its chatbot service that can answer your questions by applying open, intelligent data gathering and analytics models.

Just imagine what this means for the new future!

An open resource that can have an intelligent dialogue with you about any topic and put it all in writing. Will we, especially this digital native generation need search engines like Google, when we have access to such intelligent dialogues?

AI HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BRING ABOUT SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN MANY AREAS OF SOCIETY. IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THESE CHANGES AS AI CONTINUES TO DEVELOP

Are we ready for this age of data-driven decision making, by such intelligent programmes? To share with you an example, let me leave you with ChatGPT's answer to my question - How will AI change the world?

Please notice that it did not give me links or definitions, but focused

the consequences and implications:

Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to change the world in many ways.

Here are a few examples of how AI might affect different aspects of society:

**1. Work and employment:** AI could automate certain tasks and processes, potentially reducing the need for human labour in some industries. However, it could also create new job opportunities in fields such as AI development and data analysis.

**2. Education:** AI could be used to personalise learning and improve the efficiency of education. It could also be used to develop new educational technologies, such as virtual tutors.

**3. Healthcare:** AI could be used

to analyse medical data and assist with diagnosis and treatment plans. It could also be used to monitor patient health and alert healthcare providers to potential issues.

**4. Transportation:** AI could be used to improve the efficiency and safety of transportation systems, such as through the development of self-driving vehicles.

**5. Social interactions:** AI could be used to enhance communication and social connections, such as through the use of virtual assistants or chatbots.

Overall, AI has the potential to bring about significant changes in many areas of society. It is important to consider the potential consequences and ethical implications of these changes as AI continues to develop.

## Pele's politics still a touchy subject in Brazil

LOUIS GENOT

Pele is revered in Brazil as the eternal "King of Football." But the legendary player's image is more complicated when it comes to the trickier terrain of politics in his home country, where he faced criticism for his failure to speak out on racism and his supposed closeness with the former military regime.

Widely regarded as the greatest footballer in history, Pele died on Thursday at age 82, triggering an outpouring of emotion in Brazil — and a national re-examination of his legacy.

Pele's surge to global superstardom overlapped with the rise of Brazil's Cold War-era military regime, which ruled the South American country with an iron fist from 1964 to 1985.

The legendary player was photographed rubbing shoulders with the likes of dictators Emilio Garrastazu Medici and Ernesto Geisel, two of the most hardline generals to preside over a regime that killed or "disappeared" hundreds of people.

Clutching his World Cup trophies and grinning alongside the generals, the black footballer also drew criticism for his silence on racism, at a time when Brazil — the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery — was presenting itself to the world as a harmonious "racial democracy."

"He acted like a submissive black who accepts everything and fights nothing," fellow player Paulo Cesar Caju, his teammate on Brazil's storied 1970 World Cup-winning squad, once said.

Pele drew fresh criticism when asked about the dictatorship years in a Netflix documentary on his life, released in 2021.

"For me, at least, it changed absolutely nothing," he said.

"Football kept going just the same."

In the same documentary, famed Brazilian sports journalist Paulo Cesar Vasconcellos underlines Pele's silence on political issues in those troubled times.

He "accepted the regime, which treated him well because it knew how important he was," Vasconcellos said.

But lesser-known archive photos show a different side of Pele. In one, he wears a yellow jersey stamped with the phrase "Diretas ja" — direct elections — the rallying cry of the anti-government protests that swept Brazil in the 1980s, triggering the dictatorship's downfall.

That 1984 picture appeared on the cover of leading Brazilian sports magazine Placar.

Other images resurfaced during the month Pele spent in hospital before he died, such as a 1989 press conference in which he announced he was thinking of running for president and declared himself a "socialist." — AFP



Jason Horowitz

The writer is the Rome bureau chief of The Times



Elisabetta Povoledo

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## With Benedict's death, an unprecedented moment for the modern church

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve, as Pope Francis rested in the quarters of his humble residence before an evening Mass, gendarmes closed off to visitors the winding walking paths that cross the Vatican gardens in case Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, frail as he was, walked out of his monastery to pray.

In the near-decade since Benedict stunned the Catholic Church and the world by becoming the first pontiff in nearly 600 years to retire, an awkward and captivating arrangement pervaded the church.

Two popes, past and present, traditionalist and reformist, both cloaked in white robes and invested with moral authority, coexisted on the same minuscule grounds.

That oddness, unprecedented in the modern era of the church, persisted after the death of Benedict on Saturday morning, as the church again found itself in rare territory, with a living pope set to preside over the funeral of his predecessor

The funeral of Benedict XVI will be held on Thursday morning and will be "presided over by Pope Francis, evidently," said Vatican spokesperson Matteo Bruni, who delivered what he called the "sad news" of the death in a short statement that made sure to refer to Benedict without fail as "pope emeritus" — in both Italian and English — to avoid any confusion.

He declined to answer questions. "I don't think now is the time for questions to leave us time for some sadness in our heart."

The timing was also inopportune because no one was quite sure what exactly would happen and what the first funeral for a pope emeritus would look like.

"The question is complicated," said Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, a historian of the papacy.

Those complications were immediately inescapable. Bruni said the funeral would be "simple," and "solemn but sober," in keeping with Benedict's wishes.

But Benedict, having retained his title of pontiff, if an emeritus one, was no simple cardinal, and it was not clear if he would receive the full procedural pomp and circumstance for a pontiff



A local daily newspaper with a portrait of the late Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI on the cover is seen on a newstand in Nairobi. — AFP

THE UNCERTAINTY SURROUNDING THE RITUALS HONOURING BENEDICT IN DEATH STEMMED FROM THE DECISION THAT GENERATED THE CONFUSION IN THE LAST YEARS OF HIS LIFE

who died in office, among other things.

Two official delegations will be present, those of Germany and Italy. But would other nations send representatives? Benedict's Fisherman's Ring — the seal used for papal documents — was already destroyed, so it wouldn't need to be. But would his study and bedroom be closed off?

When a pope dies, cardinals come from around the world to gather to mourn, but also to vote in the conclave that elects his successor. "Clearly that's not an issue in this case," Paravicini Bagliani said, adding that the cardinals who did come would do so solely "as mourners."

The Vatican said Benedict's body

will be displayed to the faithful for a final "farewell" in St Peter's Basilica on Monday morning.

Until then, his remains would stay at Mater Ecclesiae Monastery, where he lived during his nearly 10-year post-papacy.

Benedict had expressed a desire to be buried in the Vatican grottoes, underneath the basilica, in the niche where two former popes, St John XXIII and St John Paul II, were buried before the transfer of their remains to chapels in the basilica.

The Vatican on Saturday confirmed that he will be buried in the grottoes but hasn't yet announced exactly where.

All the decisions, according to The Seismograph, a website deeply sourced in the Vatican, belonged to Francis alone.

"At this moment, my thought naturally goes to dear Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, who left us this morning," Francis said during a church service on Saturday in St Peter's. "We are moved as we recall him as such a noble person, so kind."

And we feel such gratitude in our hearts: gratitude to God for having given him to the church and to the world; gratitude to him for all the good he accomplished; and above all, for his witness of faith and prayer, especially in these last years of his recollected life." — *New York Times*

# Adjust your sails, not wind direction

Nobody can change the direction of the wind, but we all can adjust our sails to reach the destination. Likewise, trees, usually, don't change their roots, but their leaves. In view of this, whatever we have planned in the past year and could not make it possible, there will be another chance to make it happen this year. The new book of this year has just flipped its first page and their will be over 360 more pages to make your dreams come true and fulfil all plans and ambitions.

The year 2022 bid farewell and 2023 has just opened up its 12-chapter book. Another year of success and happiness has just passed and with every new year, comes greater challenges and obstacles in life. There is no regret to the missed opportunities and unfulfilled dreams; just think of the great year and wonderful times. Have the courage, hope and faith to overcome all the struggles that comes across along the way.

Everyone had some dreams planned in 2022, but unfortunately some of which have not been fulfilled. Some people got disappointed and discouraged for not having their dreams come true. However, there is always a second chance to re-work on missed opportunities and unachieved plans. As it has been said after darkness, there is always light; we are reminded of this every morning, but somehow, we don't see it. All that we need is to stay positive and learn the lessons from the past year.

In fact, one has to think of himself as a product of the past, but s/he should not be a prisoner of the past. One becomes a prisoner when s/he sticks to what no longer exists. The rough days and unpleasant experiences build the character, endurance and strength. Hence, nobody shall get tired



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and distressed, rather keep persistent and don't quit whatever being chased or planned to achieve. Khalil Gibran, said "Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars."

Therefore, remember that if you are brave enough to say goodbye to the past, life will reward you with a new hello. It may be hard, but you can let go; you must do so in order to have a better start for the future. When a wall blocks your path, just knock it down and build steps out of its remnants. Don't just be who you are and stand where you are; move, evolve, change, grow and become better each day. Just never stop dreaming, chasing your dreams and believing in yourself. Step out of your comfort zone, let go your discomfort and stress.

Whatever did not happen last year, you will have the time to do it this year. The inability to make things on time is not a failure as lessons are learnt from unsuccessful experiences.

Our most beautiful dreams are born from our most unpleasant nightmares. Charlie Chaplin advised, "Smile, though your heart is aching. Smile, even though it is breaking. When there are clouds in the sky, you will get by if you smile through your pain and sorrow. Smile and maybe tomorrow, you will see the sun comes shining through for you".

Life can be hard and achieving goals can be difficult too, but one has to stay focused and positive as much possible. You never say die to challenges and disappointments, never be discouraged in life and never give up on your faith and hope. Just keep pressing and there is a light at the end of the tunnel. As the New Year dawns, I hope it is filled with promises of a brighter tomorrow. You just dare to make changes and improvements and adjust your sails to make your growth a priority.

IF YOU ARE BRAVE ENOUGH TO SAY GOODBYE TO THE PAST, LIFE WILL REWARD YOU WITH A NEW HELLO

## RINGING IN NEW YEAR



A performer takes part in the London New Year's Day Parade in London on Sunday. – Reuters

# The world is better off than you think

Enough with the doom and gloom! Our planet may be in better shape than you think.

Human beings have a cognitive bias toward bad news (keeping us alert and alive), and we journalists reflect that: We report on planes that crash, not planes that land. We highlight disasters, setbacks, threats and deaths, so 2022 has kept us busy.

But a constant gush of despairing news can be paralysing. So here's my effort to remedy our cognitive biases. Until the pandemic, I wrote an annual column arguing that the previous year was the best in human history. I can't do that this year.

But I can suggest that broadly speaking, much is going right and this may still be the best time ever to be alive.

Where 2022 excelled particularly was in technological strides.

Solar power capacity around the world is on track to roughly triple over the next five years and overtake coal as the leading source of power globally.

Technical improvements are constant — such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology researchers' developing a way to produce thin and flexible solar panels that can turn almost any outdoor surface into a power source.

There are parallel breakthroughs in batteries. Batteries, boring? No! They're one of the most exciting frontiers of technology, making remarkable advances crucial to storing green power.

Likewise, nuclear fusion as an energy source marked a milestone in 2022. Green hydrogen is also gaining ground and could be useful for shipping and energy storage.



Nicholas Kristof

IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE GAINS THAT OUR BRAINS (AND WE JOURNALISTS) ARE OFTEN OBLIVIOUS TO — IF ONLY TO REMIND OURSELVES THAT PROGRESS IS POSSIBLE WHEN WE PUT OUR SHOULDER TO IT

The upshot is that we are in the midst of a revolution of renewables that may soon leave us far better off.

If things go right, we'll be able to enjoy cheaper, more reliable and more portable power than ever before. Truly cheap energy, whether from solar or fusion, could be transformational: For example, it could run desalination plants to provide the fresh water that we're running out of.

To be clear: Climate change remains an existential challenge. What's new is that if you squint a little, it is now possible to see a path ahead in which we manage — barely — to avoid calamity.

Health tech has likewise made immense gains. Scientists are making significant progress on vaccines for malaria, reflecting what may be a new golden age for vaccine development. Immunotherapy is making progress against cancer.

(Among other feats, it is keeping one of my friends alive.) A new gene-editing technique may be able to cure sickle cell anaemia; Bill Gates argues in his annual letter that the same approach may eventually offer a cure for HIV/AIDS as well.

We haven't even mentioned the progress in artificial intelligence, including ChatGPT. (No, it did not write this column.) And of course, technology is not taking leaps just in research labs but is filtering down to improve individual lives.

I'm writing this on the family farm in Oregon with the help of our new Starlink internet service that is beginning to empower rural

America (and has been a game-changer for Ukrainians as they humble their Russian invaders).

It's true that what may be the most important trend in my lifetime — historic progress against global poverty — has stalled because of Covid-19, climate change and the impact of the war in Ukraine on global food prices. But it has not collapsed.

"The pandemic dip was not that bad on many outcomes," said Esther Duflo, an MIT professor and the youngest person to have won a Nobel in economic science. "It was much less of a cataclysm for Africa than for us."

Indeed, World Bank researchers estimate that the number of people living in extreme poverty actually declined a hair in 2022, although the figure remains higher than on the eve of the pandemic.

The number is about the same as it was in 2018 — and much better than in 2017 and previous years.

Remarkably, preliminary estimates suggest that global child mortality continued to fall during the pandemic. A child is now about half as likely to die by age 5 as in the year 2000, and one-quarter as likely to die as in 1970.

I don't minimise the global humanitarian crisis, and we must do better. Children around the world are suffering malnutrition that permanently impairs their faculties.

Young girls are being married off. Displaced boys and girls are missing school. But David Beasley, executive director of the United Nations World Food Program, notes that although the world is facing "a perfect storm" of calamities, the world

responded with an outpouring of assistance and an international push to allow exports of Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea. These measures have held off full-blown famine at least for the time being.

"Quite frankly," he said, "it could have been so much worse." You may have winced when I wrote above that "this may still be the best time ever to be alive."

That's deeply contrary to the public gloom. But would we prefer to live at some other time when children were more likely to die? Max Roser of the indispensable website Our World in Data puts the situation exactly right: "The world is awful. The world is much better.

The world can be much better. All three statements are true at the same time."

— The New York Times



A person wears 2023 glasses while awaiting the ball drop on New Years Eve, in Times Square, New York City, on Sunday. – AFP

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PHOTOS BY ABDUL WAHID AL HAMADANI

# Al Nasr lift ninth HM Cup crown

SALALAH SIDE FIGHT BACK TO THRASH AHLI SIDAB 5-2 IN FINAL



ANUROOP  
ATHIPARAMBATH  
MUSCAT, JAN 1

Salalah hockey giants Al Nasr fought back to claim their ninth His Majesty's Cup champions trophy with a 5-2 win against 12-time winners Ahli Sidab in the final in Muscat on Sunday.

The re-scheduled final at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex saw Al Nasr bounce back from a two-goal deficit and hammer five consecutive goals to emerge victors.

Chief guest Salim bin Mustahail al Maashani, Adviser to the Diwan of Royal Court, gave away the trophies in presence of top Oman Hockey Association officials and other dignitaries.

Ahli Sidab got into action early in the final as they struck in the fourth minute itself with a brilliantly converted penalty corner.

Ahmed al Shuaibi slotted it neatly into the net as Al Nasr goalkeeper Fahad al Noufali had no chance.

In the next minute itself, Ahli

Sidab increased the lead after a quick move and former Indian international Rupinder Pal Singh made it 2-0 with a firm shot.

Al Nasr earned their first penalty corner in the eighth minute but could not break the Ahli Sidab defence as they clearly dominated the first quarter.

In the second quarter, Al Nasr pressed hard from the start and won a penalty corner. After back-to-back two penalty corners, Ahli Sidab conceded a third one.

Abdul Hanan Shahid finally got through the defence of Ahli Sidab

goalkeeper Ibrahim al Farsi to make it 2-1.

At the start of the third quarter, Al Nasr were quickly up to their task as Osama al Khamis guided the ball to the net after a strong shot by his team-mate as the score became level at 2-2.

Coach Mohammed al Batrani had reinvigorated the team and Al Nasr were a better side after rectifying their mistakes in the first-half.

Ahli Sidab missed a close chance in the 37th minute as the onrushing forward could not tap

the cross inside to the Al Nasr net.

In response, Al Nasr's quick counter attack saw the chance missed by a whisker.

In the 41st minute, Al Nasr came up with a fine move and captain Bassim al Rajab hit the target past Ahli Sidab goalkeeper Fahad al Noufali. The referee first disallowed the goal but was reinstated after a video review by the third umpire.

Al Qadir al Nofli made it 4-2 in the 48th minute for Al Nasr. Al Noufali easily slotted in the ball to the net in a one-to-one situation

with Ahli Sidab keeper Fahad al Noufali. Ahli Sidab earned a penalty corner in the 52nd minute but could make use of it.

Three minutes before close, Ahli Sidab got another penalty corner but the shot was just wide as the score remained 4-2. Another two penalty corners also could not break the solid defence of Al Nasr.

In the counter, Al Nasr confirmed their triumph with the fifth goal to lead 5-2 with a minute to go. Abdul Hannan Shahid netted his second goal of the final.



Canadian Bianca Andreescu reacts during her first round match against Spanish player Garbine Muguruza in the WTA Adelaide International tournament in Adelaide yesterday. — AFP

# Andreescu makes gritty comeback to beat Muguruza in Adelaide

**ADELAIDE:** Bianca Andreescu staged a dramatic comeback on Sunday to topple Garbine Muguruza in a battle of former Grand Slam champions on day one of the Adelaide International. The Canadian, who won the 2019 US Open, was crushed in the first set and slipped 2-5 behind in the second before surging home 0-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 to get her 2023 season off to a winning start. It maintained her perfect record against two-time Grand Slam winner and former world number one Muguruza, improving to 3-0.

“In the second set I really had to change my game plan,” said the 22-year-old, who has slipped to 46 in the world. “I told myself to go for it, whatever happens happens. I put more returns in the court, more serves in the court. I’m so glad I pulled that out, I have no idea how.” Spain’s Muguruza, who won the French Open in 2016 and Wimbledon a year later, claimed the first set in commanding fashion, outnumbering Andreescu in winners eight to two, not facing a break point.

Andreescu started the second set more strongly, only for Muguruza to break for 4-2 then consolidate for 5-2 with serve. But she couldn’t close out the victory and Andreescu took it to a tie-break where a sizzling backhand winner gave her pivotal 4-2 lead. A demoralised Muguruza had no answers as the Canadian swept her aside in the third set to set up a second-round clash against either fourth seed Veronika Kudermetova or Amanda Anisimova.

In other singles action, Estonian veteran Kaia Kanepi also came from behind to outlast Belarusian Aliaksandra Sasnovich 4-6, 6-1, 6-4 and will next meet either Ekaterina Alexandrova or Marketa Vondrousova. Americans Shelby Rogers and Claire Liu also progressed. Top-ranked Novak Djokovic headlines the men’s field and is set to play France’s Constant Lestienne on Monday in his first match in Australia since being deported last year over his Covid-19 vaccination stance. — AFP

# Arsenal go seven points clear with 4-2 win over Brighton

**BRIGHTON:** Bukayo Saka and Eddie Nketiah grabbed early goals in each half for Arsenal as they won 4-2 away to Brighton & Hove Albion on Saturday in the final Premier League game of 2022 to open up a seven-point lead at the top of the table. Arsenal top the standings on 43 points with second-placed Manchester City, who were held to a 1-1 draw by Everton earlier in the day, on 36 and Newcastle United, who drew 0-0 with Leeds, two points further back in third. Saka scored just over a minute into the game as Gabriel Martinelli’s shot was deflected into his path, and he cushioned the ball with his first touch before deftly guiding it home with his second. Leandro Trossard had a couple of decent chances for the home side before Martin Odegaard added Arsenal’s second in the 39th minute, pouncing on a loose clearance and driving a shot that bounced up and into the net. The league leaders looked to have wrapped up the victory just after the break as keeper Robert Sanchez spilled another Martinelli shot into the path of striker Nketiah, and he bundled the ball



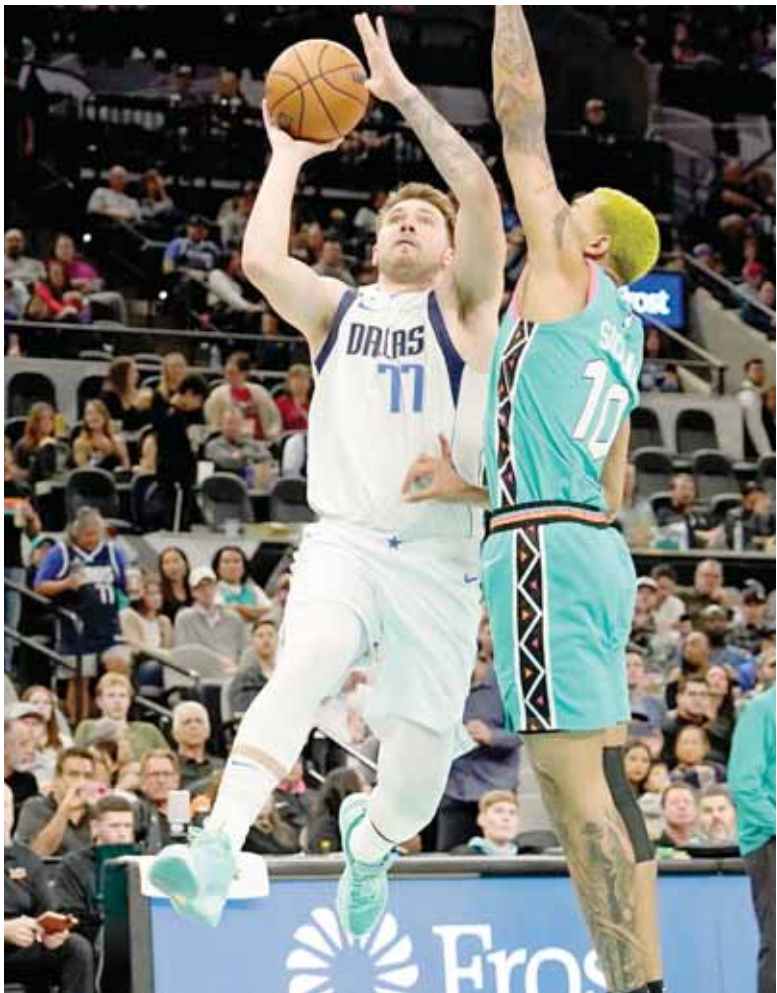
Arsenal’s Bukayo Saka celebrates scoring their first goal. — Reuters

home from close range. However, a Kaoru Mitoma goal in the 65th minute threw Brighton a lifeline and though Gabriel Martinelli netted a fourth for Arsenal from a stunning Odegaard pass, Evan Ferguson made it 4-2 to set up a grandstand finish. Mitoma thought he had made it 4-3 in the 89th minute but the goal was chalked off after a VAR review found that he had come from an offside position, as the Gunners held on to close out the year with a win. “We don’t care about the other teams, three points was everything today and we did it. Maybe we need to control the game a bit better, we let them in a couple of times, but they are a good team,” Arsenal captain Odegaard told Sky Sports. Fellow goal-scorer Saka said his side were delighted to be seven points clear going into the New Year. “Of course, at the start of the season if you asked us if we wanted this, we would bite your hand off. We are really happy,” he told Sky Sports. “It is a great opportunity we have, a great place we have put ourselves in.” — Reuters

# Doncic scores 51 as Dallas NBA win streak reaches six

**WASHINGTON:** Luka Doncic scored 51 points to lead the Dallas Mavericks to their sixth victory in a row while the Brooklyn Nets stretched their NBA win streak to 11 on Saturday. Doncic added nine assists, six rebounds, four steals and a blocked shot in a maestro performance for the Mavericks in a 126-125 victory at San Antonio. “I’m exhausted,” Doncic said. “Our defense wasn’t great. At the end we got a couple stops. Overall we win the game and that’s it.” The 23-year-old Slovenian guard sank two free throws with 4.1 seconds remaining for the last Dallas points, then grabbed a rebound after the Spurs’ Tre Jones missed a tying free throw attempt with 2.1 seconds remaining to seal the Mavs’ triumph. It was the third 50-point effort in five games for NBA scoring leader Doncic, who was at a loss to explain his high-point nights of the season. “I don’t know,” Doncic said. “Some games they are going to double (cover) me, some games they are going to let me run the pick and roll. I just accept the coverage and go from there.” Spurs coach Gregg Popovich joked that San Antonio’s goal had been to keep Doncic to 50 points after he had 60 in a triple double on Tuesday in a Dallas victory. Christian Wood, who added 25 points and seven rebounds for Dallas, marvelled at what he sees as a Most Valuable Player-style effort. “It’s incredible,” Wood said. “In my seven years in the league, I’ve never seen anybody do what he’s able to do. “He’s on an incredible run. He’s playing like an MVP, clearly one of the best players in the league.” Brooklyn’s Kyrie Irving scored 28 points and Kevin Durant added 23 to spark the Nets to a 123-106 victory at Charlotte, extending their win streak to 11. The Nets improved to 24-12 and moved into second place in the Eastern Conference, becoming only the second club this season to reach 24 wins.

LaMelo Ball had 23 points and 11 assists while Mason Plumlee added 22 points and 10 rebounds for Charlotte, which fell to 10-27. At the other end of the spectrum, the Minnesota Timberwolves suffered their sixth straight defeat, a humbling 116-104 home loss to league-worst Detroit (10-29). Bojan Bogdanovic scored 28 points to lead the Pistons while Anthony Edwards netted 30 in a losing cause. - Triple double by Embiid - Philadelphia’s Joel Embiid achieved his fifth career triple double with 16 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists in the 76ers’ 115-96 triumph at Oklahoma City. Tobias Harris led the Sixers with 23 points while Shake Milton added 18 and DeAnthony Melton had 17 points for Philadelphia. Ja Morant scored 32 points and the host Memphis Grizzlies beat New Orleans 116-101. New Zealander Steven Adams grabbed 21 points for Memphis (22-13), which pulled within a game of Western Conference leader Denver. Zion Williamson scored 20 points to lead the Pelicans (23-13), who fell half a game behind Denver. Tyler Herro sank a 3-pointer at the buzzer to give Miami a 126-123 victory at Utah. Bam Adebayo led the Heat with 32 points while Herro added 29 for Miami. Julius Randle scored 35 points and grabbed 12 rebounds to lead New York’s 108-88 romp at Houston, which snapped the Knicks’ five-game losing streak. Caris LeVert scored 23 points and the Cleveland Cavaliers snapped a three-game losing streak by edging Chicago 103-102 when DeMar DeRozan missed a winning jump shot for the Bulls at the buzzer. Myles Turner scored 34 points and Tyrese Haliburton added 24 to lead the Indiana Pacers over the visiting Los Angeles Clippers 131-130. Chris Paul scored a game-high 45 points for the Clippers. — AFP



Dallas Mavericks guard Luka Doncic (77) drives to the basket against San Antonio Spurs forward Jeremy Sochan (10) during the second half at AT&T Center. — USA Today Sports



# Oman team fly to Basra to take part in Gulf 25

WALEED AL JAHWARI  
MUSCAT, JAN 1

Oman national team and delegation of Oman Football Association left for Basra from Dubai to take part in the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup, which will be held in Iraq city from January 6 to 9.

Mohsen bin Hamad al Masrouri, Vice President of the

OFA Federation, is leading the 51-member delegation including Qutayba al Ghailani, member of the Board of Directors, and Hilal al Sanani Secretary-General, and Khamis al Balushi.

The Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic selected 23 for the squad. They are Ahmed al Rawahi, Mohammed al Muslami, Juma al Habsi, Salah al Yahya'i (Seeb), Harib al Saadi, Fayez

al Rashidi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Amjad al Harthy, Essam al Subhi, Khaled al Buraiki, Mahmoudal Mashifri (Suwaiq), Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Ahmed al Kaabi, Ali al Hinai, Al Mundhir al Alawi, Ahmed al Matroushi (Nahda), Moataz Abd Rabbo (Dhofar), Musab al Maamari, Ahmed al Adawi (Rustaq), Fahmy Beit Dur (Nasr), Zaher al Aghbari (Bahraini Khalidiyah), Omar



al Maliki (Bahrain Riffa), and Arshad al Alawi (Kuwaiti).

Six players were excluded namely Yazid bin Salem al Ma'ashani, Awad bin Mohammed al Shehri, Abdullah bin Salem al Mishrafi (Dhofar), Hatem bin Sultan al Rushdi (Jordan Faisaly), and Jamil Salim al Ahmadi.

Iraq will host the tournament for the second time in its

history after the first in 1979, when Baghdad, hosted the fifth edition, in which the Iraqi team won its first of three titles.

The Arabian Gulf Cup is held once every two years. The 25th Gulf draw placed Oman national team, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen in the first group. Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain are in the second group

# Masirah to take on Al Suwaiq Women's handball final today



ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, JAN 1

Masirah and Al Suwaiq clubs eye the first edition of the Women's Handball League Championship as both teams will meet in the final clash on Monday. The match will take place at the main indoor hall of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex at 4:00 pm.

In the major clashes of the league, Al Suwaiq managed to beat Al Bashaer by 30-10 while Masirah won against Al Bashaer 10-0. Salalah registered top result as they thrashed Al Khabourah 31-8 . Al Suwaiq won against Al Khabourah at 21-20. Al Bashaer tasted their first victory when they beat Al Khabourah 35-9 while Masirah blanked Salalah 23-11.

Five clubs took part in the league including Masirah, Al Suwaiq, Al Bashaer, Salalah and Al Khabourah clubs while Saham stayed away from the league. Masirah club topped the league with eight points while Al Suwaiq came in second with six points. Al Bashaer finished third with

four points while Salalah had two points.

Sarya bint Khalfan al Hadiyah, Member of the State Council, will be the chief guest for the final in presence of Dr Said al Shahri, chairman of Oman Handball Association (OHA), and Abeer al Zadjali, board member of OHA and head of women handball committee.

Salalah club was crowned recently as champions of the second division league after beating Khasab in the final match while Ibri team finished in third place. With the triumph, Salalah club confirmed their spot in the first division league in the next season and Khasab joined as well as they ended as runners up in the league order.

The first division league is underway as Nizwa defeated Al Shabab 32-24 on Saturday while Oman club managed to earn their match against Al Bashaer 29-23. Muscat club beat Ahli Sidab in a tight clash at 17-14 while Seeb blanked Al Sahbab 28-23.





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# State Budget to sustain Oman’s fiscal stability

The strong growth in revenue contributed to accelerating Oman’s economic recovery, improving financial and economic indicators, reducing public debt and enhancing social spending

QASIM AL MAASHANI  
MUSCAT, JAN 1

Oman’s Ministry of Finance unveiled on Sunday, January 1, 2023, a deficit budget for 2023 which, nevertheless, reflected the Omani government’s continued commitment to maintaining fiscal stability, while supporting socio-economic growth.

Total revenue for fiscal 2023 is projected at RO 10.500 billion, which is about 5 per cent lower than the 2022 Budget figure. Public expenditure is estimated at RO 11.350 billion, representing a 6.4 per cent decrease in comparison with the 2022 figure. The deficit for the year is projected at RO 1.300 billion, representing 3 per cent of GDP.

Thanks to buoyant oil and gas prices, revenues for fiscal 2022 were up 34.5 per cent to RO 14.234 billion, compared to projections announced at the start of the year. It resulted in a surplus of RO 1.146

billion for the year, sparing the government any need to resort to borrowings or withdrawals from state reserves this year.

Contributing to the growth in public revenues is a sharp increase in oil prices averaging \$94 per barrel in 2022 versus an assumed price of \$50 per barrel for the 2022 State Budget. Consequently, oil revenues were up 66 per cent, while gas revenues rose 29 per cent during the year.

Public expenditure climbed 7.9 per cent to reach RO 13.88 billion, compared to the approved expenditure of RO 12.130 billion announced at the start of the year.

The strong growth in revenue contributed to accelerating Oman’s economic recovery, improving financial and economic indicators, reducing public debt, enhancing social spending, and stimulating

economic growth in general.

It also enabled the government to pay off part of the public debt and manage its lending portfolio. The size of public debt was slashed from RO 20.8 billion at the end of 2021 to RO 17.7 billion in 2022.

At the same time, the Ministry underlined the government’s commitment to supporting the growth of the manufacturing, fisheries, mining and logistics sectors during the current 10th Five Year Development Plan.

It affirmed an important role for the private sector in enhancing the growth of education, scientific research and innovation. In particular, the green economy — a key objective of Oman Vision 2040 – has the potential to contribute to human welfare and social equity, while also safeguarding the environment by reducing carbon emissions.

The green economy, the Ministry noted, encompasses six key goals: Green buildings, renewable energy, sustainable transportation, water management, land management and waste management.

Importantly the most important strategic objectives of the Sultanate of Oman is to promote sustainable development and preserve human capital, as well as achieving balanced development for the governorates and enhancing the standard of living of citizens.

## 2023 budget based on oil price of \$55/barrel

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Finance has affirmed that the average price of oil barrel was calculated at \$55 in the State Budget for fiscal year 2023. The estimate is in line with the principle of hedging in accordance with the state’s financial policy.

The calculation takes into account potential fluctuation in global prices that might occur as a result of unstable geopolitical events. It also seeks to offset any uncertainty of future expectations about the performance of the global economy.

Through the “Guide to the State Budget for Fiscal Year 2023”, issued on Monday, the ministry pointed out that total revenues approved in State Budget 2023 were estimated at RO 10.050 billion, down by 5 per cent from estimates endorsed in State Budget 2022.

The decline was due to a projected decrease in gas revenues registered in State Budget 2023 following the establishment of the Integrated Gas Company (IGC) with a view to realising a number of goals. These include the improvement of Oman’s fiscal performance

Through the “Guide to the State Budget for Fiscal Year 2023”, issued on Monday, the ministry pointed out that total revenues approved in State Budget 2023 were estimated at RO 10.050 billion, down by 5 per cent from estimates endorsed in State Budget 2022.

indicators by removing gas purchase and transport expenses from the State Budget and transferring the net revenues from gas sales to the state treasury.

In State Budget 2023, oil revenues were estimated at about RO 5.320 billion, registering an increase of 18 per cent, compared to the endorsed Budget 2022, as oil revenues constitute about 53 per cent of total general revenues.

Gas revenues in State Budget 2023 were estimated at RO 1.4 billion, thanks to the establishment of Integrated Gas Company, which will purchase and sell gas and then transfer gas revenues directly into the

treasury. Gas revenues constitute 14 per cent in the revenues.

Non-oil revenues in the endorsed State Budget 2023 are estimated at about RO 3.330 billion, down by 0.3 per cent from Budget 2022 estimates.

Current revenues in State Budget 2023 are estimated to stand at about RO 3.280 billion. Of these, revenues from value-added tax (VAT) and excise tax are estimated to be about RO 590 million, while income tax revenues (on profits of companies and institutions) are estimated to be about RO 560 million. Revenues from the

distribution of dividends from the Oman Investment Authority (OIA) are expected to stand at about RO 800 million, while revenues from government service fees are set to be about at 1.330 billion.

Aggregate revenues and capital returns from State Budget

2023 were estimated to be about RO 50 million.

Budget 2023 is in pursuance of the government’s efforts to implement policies aimed at developing the management of the general finance and upgrading the efficiency of spending.

Hence, spending was estimated according to a set of variables. These include estimating the expenditures of civil ministries in accordance with the actual needs of all civil units, calculating employees’ periodic allowance and promotions of employees who are 2012 seniors, as stipulated by Royal orders. The estimate also comprises financial control procedures and the outcome of government departments’ initiatives to cut down public spending. The exclusion of expenses for purchasing and transporting gas as a result of establishment of the Integrated Gas Company also plays a role in the estimates.

Therefore, the volume of spending in Budget 2023 is estimated at about RO 11.350 billion, down by 6.4 per cent from spending endorsed in State Budget 2022.

TURN TO PAGE 15

# PASI signs agreement with Bank Muscat for direct debit solution

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) signed agreement with Bank Muscat for the introduction of collections of contributions through Direct Debit solution.

This solution will help enhancing the efficiency of revenues and expenditures, minimise the time and effort spent on managing and collecting contributions, and help handling the challenges of installment checks. It aims to shift from manual to automated work methods that are more efficient and accurate, and it can be accessed through various channels. It will help customers pay their contributions in timely manners, as well as enhance constructive partnership with local banks in Oman. The agreement was signed by Dr Faisal bin Abdullah al Farsi, General Manager, Public Authority for Social Insurance, and Ilham bint Murtadha al Hamaidyah, General Manager — Corporate Banking, Bank Muscat.

PASI attaches great importance to technological developments to provide high quality insurance services to customers. Digital services have witnessed a remarkable development over the past few years. It offers ease, speed and high security, and it provides innovative smart systems available in new advanced applications and software.



PASI is committed to contributing to digital transformation to help achieve strategic goals in line with the government's guidelines.

Bank Muscat has been a pioneer in Oman in implementing digital banking solutions for its customers and is focused on helping corporates to make a smooth transition towards efficient tech-focused processes and use cutting-edge technology to their best advantage.

Through this collaboration with the bank, PASI will offer the collections of contribution to the corporates, ministries and institutions through the Direct Debit solution. With the growing requirement and need for multiple avenues for making payments of contribution from the entities, Direct Debit solution

will be an added transformative digital solution that will make the entire collection process efficient and seamless. This collaboration further enhances the existing relationship of Bank Muscat with PASI which includes wide range of digital banking solutions and services comprising of Corporate Online Banking, Business to Business (B2B) and Bill Payments. Alia bint Marhoon al Hinaiyah, Head of Finance and Accounts, Public Authority for Social Insurance, said: "Direct debit is a payment order issued for debiting from the customer's bank account to the Authority's account directly based on the approved installment plan.

This project is one of the initiatives that PASI is working on to achieve strategic objective aimed at enhancing the efficiency of

revenues and expenditures, as well as providing integrated services by investing in digital transformation and provide electronic insurance services for customers.

Speaking on the occasion, Wafa bint Ibrahim al Ajmiyah, Assistant General Manager — Transaction & Government Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "As a foremost financial service provider in the country, we are constantly working towards empowering government and private institutions to succeed in rapidly changing digital environment. We are fortifying our already strong relationship with PASI, with our new age digital solution of Direct Debit which will make the Public Authority for Social Insurance the first government institution to implement this solution.

"We are excited and confident that this collaboration for collection of contributions from entities with our Direct Debit solution will enhance banking convenience for PASI and their clients. Through Direct Debit solution, PASI now will benefit with complete control over entire collection process and PASI's clients will have a convenient mode for paying contributions. We look forward to continuously bring sophisticated digital solutions for our customers and supporting Oman Vision 2040 for establishing a knowledge based digital society."

# Sohar International honours people with disabilities



MUSCAT: Sohar International has extended support to the Ministry of Social Development to sponsor the UN-mandated International Day of People with Disabilities. The event took place on December 29 at the Kempinski Hotel Muscat and was held under the auspicious of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, welcoming people with disabilities as well as their families, government delegates, and key decision-makers from the private sector. Representing Sohar International at the event was Mahira bint Saleh al Raisiyah, Chief Human Resources Officer.

Apart from honouring people with disabilities, the International Day of People with Disabilities' event was geared at spreading greater awareness about the various challenges encountered by them as well as applauding their efforts in overcoming such hurdles. Ministry of Social Development utilised the platform to highlight its intent and the importance of providing programmes in various fields of creativity that are tailored to suit the unique needs of people with disabilities.

Commenting on the bank's support towards the event, Mohamed bin Mahfoodh al Ardhi, Chairman of Sohar International said, "Sohar International has always been committed to promoting inclusivity, diversity, and equality in the community from every segment of the population. We strongly believe that every individual within the society can play a contributing role towards

our nation and henceforth acknowledging, supporting and nurturing people with disabilities is quintessential. Such ideology encourages and enables us to proactively support causes such as the International Day of People with Disabilities as well as uphold the socio-economic goals underscored in Oman Vision 2040."

The event drew attention to the importance of acting as responsible citizens and coming together to take a holistic approach to addressing the requirements of people with disabilities. The ministry also recognised the increasing number of individuals in the segment who have the potential to set new milestones across different fields like art, sports, and education and stressed the need to further support, encourage, and enhance their capabilities.

Mohamed bin Mahfoodh added saying, "Living with any disability poses its unique challenges that we should be more respectful and responsive towards. Being a source of inspiration and despite the challenges, there are a significant number of individuals from this segment that perform and outperform in their respective fields."

Sohar International, through its various initiatives, has continued to extend support to various segments of the society through direct and indirect backing towards various causes going the extra mile to understand the underlying requirements and addressing them.

# Omantel to build online marketplace using web services

MUSCAT: Omantel is set to break a new ground in e-commerce by working with Amazon Web Services (AWS) in the Sultanate of Oman. Omantel has announced plans to develop 'Omantel Marketplace', a one-stop online shop for businesses and individuals to securely discover, purchase and sell goods, services, and innovative solutions.

Omantel will work with AWS to develop the marketplace, which will run on AWS and leverage its machine learning and data analytics capabilities to provide a personalised customer experience.

The agreement comes as part of Omantel's efforts to leverage its capabilities and global partnerships to enhance the contribution of digital economy in the Omani GDP and enhance the reach of Omani SMEs boosting their competitiveness in the global markets in line with Oman Vision



2040. Commenting on the agreement, Talal al Mamari, the CEO of Omantel, said, "Omantel Marketplace marks a significant step towards realising the digital transformation journey of enterprises in the Sultanate of Oman. By working with AWS, we are confident we can develop a

successful platform that will play a pivotal role in enabling enterprises, including SMEs, to advance their business and achieve more."

Bernard Najm, Vice-President Telco MEA (Dubai, AE) at AWS said, "Innovative communication services providers, such as Omantel, are exploring new ways to add value to

their customers. This marketplace not only aims to help create a richer ecosystem of innovation for local enterprises, but also helps Omantel deepen the relationship with its consumer and business customers. And, by running on AWS, Omantel can easily scale this marketplace as it grows."

# 'Hilia' jewellery opens third outlet at Mall of Oman

MUSCAT: 'Hilia', a leading silver Jewellery brand for men and women in Oman, has opened the doors of its third showroom at the Sultanate of Oman's largest shopping destination — the Mall of Oman. The opening was held under the auspicious of Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The outlet's launch ceremony commenced with a brief introductory presentation about the brand, its history and development, right up to the opening of its first outlet.

Salim al Numani, CEO of Hilia in his speech detailed the brand's journey, right from the opening of its first showroom in Al Hail back in 2017, to the second branch in Al Araiimi Boulevard in 2019.



Speaking at the event, Salim al Numani stated: "The success of 'Hilia' and its ability to expand its customer reach and market presence in a short time, is based on our strategy of continuous growth

and development. Equipped with innovative solutions and rich expertise in the silver industry, we aim to provide a world-class customer service experience and exquisite offerings of silver



Jewellery in Oman." "Our Mall of Oman outlet offers a distinctive collection of men and women's silver jewellery, coupled with high-quality services from our experienced Omani staff to

ensure a seamless end-to-end experience for our customers," he added.

With 28 years of expertise in making silver products, 'Hilia' has a long-standing heritage. The

brand's new branch is located in level three of the biggest mall in Muscat — Mall of Oman — due to its strategic location in Bausher.

The new outlet's collections are an embodiment of luxury, tradition and sophistication, made from best quality silver grades, and encrusted with charming and sparkling stones.

In addition to Jewellery, a collection of men's products such as canes and khanjars are also available at the showroom. The outlet is also home to antiques, items for children, and other accessories.

It is noteworthy that all 'Hilia' outlets are managed by a team of talented, well-trained Omani staff, who have extensive experience; to offer a seamless experience for customers.



# PUBLIC SERVICE MINISTRIES RECEIVE 38% OF TOTAL OUTLAY

HIBBA AL KINDI

MUSCAT, JAN 1

More than a third of public expenditure earmarked in the 2023 General Budget will go towards public service ministries, affirming the Omani government's continued commitment to the welfare of the Omani population.

Overall social and basic services expenditures aggregate RO 4.3 billion this year, accounting for 38 per cent of total public expenditure as follows: 44 per cent for the education sector, 22 per cent for social security and care, 13 per cent for the housing sector, and 22 per cent for the

health sector.

Earlier, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik issued Royal Decree 1/2023 ratifying the State's General Budget for Fiscal Year 2023.

Public revenues are expected to amount to RO 10.050 billion, a decrease of 5 per cent from what was approved in the budget for the year 2022.

The contribution of hydrocarbon revenue will amount to 66.8 per cent at RO 6.720 billion. Oil revenue is estimated to amount to RO 5.320 billion, while gas revenue is estimated to amount to RO 1.400 billion.

Non-hydrocarbon revenue will



amount to a total of RO 3.330 billion.

Current revenues are estimated to amount to RO 3.280 billion,

including RO 1.330 billion from government service fees, RO 800 million in the form of dividend payments from Oman Investment

Authority (OIA), RO 590 million from value-added and excise taxes, and RO 560 million from corporate income tax.

Total public spending is set at RO 11.350 billion, 6.4 per cent less than the corresponding figure for the year 2022. Around 76 per cent of the total expenditure will be allocated towards Ministries and Government Units (RO 4.420 billion), Defence and Security (RO 3 billion) and public debt services (RO 1.2 billion).

The total expenditure allocated towards ministries and government units has been increased by 2.7 per cent from the previous year to factor in

periodical allowances and staff promotion.

The estimated deficit would amount to RO 1.300 billion, equating to 13 per cent of total revenues and 3 per cent of the gross domestic product. The deficit will be financed by domestic and external borrowing of RO 900 million and a withdrawal of about 400 million from the State's reserves.

However, the Ministry of Finance stated that it would not resort to withdrawing from State reserves in case of an increase in public revenues or the establishment of additional financial revenues.

# Subsidy allocations to stay at elevated 2022 trend

CONRAD PRABHU

@conradprabhu

Fuel subsidies for Fiscal 2023, as well as financial support to vulnerable segments of the Omani population, will be maintained roughly at the same levels as in 2022, figures released by the Ministry of Finance show.

Allocations towards 'Total Contributions & Other Expenses' – a budgetary subhead predominantly made up of government subsidies – amount to RO 1.830 billion for 2023, broadly mirroring last year's total of RO 1.898 billion. The latter figure itself represents a steep 77 per cent jump over the 2022 Budget allocation of RO 1.071 billion earmarked at the start of the year – a sharp increase that underscored government efforts to strengthen its safety net in the face of rising prices triggered by inflationary pressures and the knock-on effects of the Ukraine conflict.

Also contributing to the increase was a spike in energy related subsidies that climbed to a total of RO 725 million for the year, especially as the government decided to keep motor fuel prices capped for the entirety of 2022.



Significantly, electricity tariffs applicable to Omani homes will continue to be subsidised in line with a government decision to delay the complete rollback of support for the sector until 2031. Accordingly, a subsidy of RO 485 million has been earmarked for the power sector under the 2023 General Budget. This compares with an allocation of RO 500 million towards the electricity sector in the 2022 Budget.

The Social Protection Net gets an allocation of RO 384 million this year – a sizable outlay that includes, among other things, grants towards job security, training and reskilling, retirement benefits and other gestures.

Other sectors benefiting from government subsidy are: Transport (RO 84 million), Water (RO 75 million), Sewerage Services (RO 60 million), Oil Products (RO 39 million), SME & Other Economic

Activities (RO 45 million), Food Commodities (RO 25 million), and Development & Housing Loan Interest (RO 23 million).

Additionally, around RO 200 million in funding has been earmarked for Development Projects under the 'Total Contributions & Other Expenses' subhead. A further RO 400 million has been set aside as interest on sovereign debt payable during the year.



# New gas company to manage gas assets, transactions

QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, JAN 1

Natural gas's contribution to the 2023 budget revenues is estimated at RO 1.400 billion – a direct result of the recent establishment of the Integrated Gas Company (IGC), the Ministry of Finance affirmed here on Sunday.

The Ministry explained in a post that wholly state-owned IGC will specialise in the purchase and sale of and sale of gas, with its revenues transferable to the state treasury. Significantly, gas revenues constitute 14 per cent of total revenues for 2023, the Ministry noted.

Established last week, the Integrated Gas Company (IGC) is described as a state-owned enterprise that acts on behalf of the Government of Oman in the

management of all allocations, assets, rights and obligations of natural gas purchase, sales, transport, imports and exports, as well as all relevant products.

The IGC has been tasked with improving the fiscal performance of the Sultanate of Oman by removing the expenses of gas purchase and transport from the State Budget, while at the same time transferring net gas revenue to the treasury.

Its goal is to also enhance the efficiency of the gas sector, ensure the adherence of producers and consumers to the contracts and agreements signed in the gas sector. Additionally, it will implement the government's policies and plans related to gas prices and quotas allocated to each sector and undertake the selling of gas to gas-based industries.

# 2023 budget based on oil price of \$55/barrel

FROM PAGE 13

Current expenditures in State Budget 2023 were estimated to be RO 8.620 billion distributed as follows: 35 per cent as defence and security expenditures, 51 per cent as expenditures of civil ministries and 14 per cent as public debt service.

The allocations of the "ministries and government units spending item" in State Budget 2023 were raised by 2.7 per cent—estimated to be about RO 4.420 billion, including the cost of periodic allowance for employees and promotions of employees who are 2012 seniors.

In the item of public debt service expenses, sum of RO 1.2 billion was endorsed by calculating the expected interest payments on existing and planned loans for 2023.

The approved budget for 2023 allocated sum of RO 900 million for development projects, distributed as follows: 6.7 per cent for the

commodity production sector, 10.8 per cent for the service production sector, 29.3 per cent for the social segments sector, 42.1 per cent for the infrastructure sector, and 11.1 per cent for other sectors.

Spending on contributions and other expenditures in the 2023 budget was estimated at about RO 1.830 billion, which constitutes about 16 per cent of the total public spending.

It is worth noting that two items were introduced (projects with a developmental impact) with sum of RO 200 million and (supporting the social protection system) with sum of RO 384 million

The total endorsed spending in the state's general budget for the fiscal year 2023 for social and basic sectors amounted to about RO 4.3 billion, or 38 per cent of the total public spending, distributed as follows: 44 per cent for the education sector, 22 per cent for the

social security and welfare, 12 per cent for the housing sector, and 22 per cent for the health sector.

The estimated deficit in the 2023 budget is expected to reach about RO 1.3 billion, which means 13 per cent of total revenues and 3 per cent of GDP.

It is planned to finance the deficit of RO 900 million through internal and external borrowing, and about RO 400 million through withdrawals from reserves.

The Sultanate of Oman will not resort to borrowing and withdrawing from reserves to finance the 2023 budget deficit in the event of an increase in public revenues and the realisation of additional financial revenues, especially the increase in the average price of a barrel of oil compared to what is endorsed according to the principle of hedging by \$55 per barrel. The government may borrow to refinance government loans and

replace them with low-cost loans.

Regarding the investment spending, the volume of investment spending financed by Oman Investment Authority (OIA) in the 2023 budget was estimated at about RO 1.9 billion, while the contribution of the Energy Development Oman (EDO) in investment projects for oil and gas production was estimated at RO 1.5 billion.

On the other hand, preliminary results indicated that the state's general budget for the fiscal year 2022 witnessed remarkable positive development. The financial performance of the budget improved, recording an increase in revenues by 34.5 per cent compared to what was endorsed at the beginning of 2022, with expectations of achieving a financial surplus of about RO 1.146 billion compared to an estimated deficit at the beginning of the year of about

RO 1.550 billion.

Public revenues for the 2022 budget recorded about RO 14.234 billion, compared to what was endorsed at the beginning of the year, which amounted to RO 10.580 billion.

This rise is mainly attributed to the surge in average oil prices achieved to about \$94 per barrel, compared to \$50 per barrel approved in the budget, and the increase in oil revenues by 66 per cent, to reach about RO 7.457 billion, and total gas revenue by 29 per cent, to reach about RO 3.557 billion.

The preliminary results of the financial performance for the 2022 indicated that a financial surplus of about RO 1.146 billion was achieved. Therefore, the government did not resort to borrowing and withdrawing from reserves to finance the deficit, which is estimated at about RO 1.550 billion as approved in the

2022 budget.

The 2022 budget achieved additional financial revenues as a result of the rise in global oil prices. This contributed to accelerating economic recovery and improving financial and economic indicators, by directing these additional financial revenues towards managing the lending portfolio, reducing public debt, enhancing social spending, and stimulating economic growth.

The additional financial revenues enabled the government to pay off part of the public debt and manage the lending portfolio. This contributed to reducing the total volume of public debt from RO 20.8 billion at the end of 2021 to RO 17.7 billion in 2022. The public debt ratio decreased in 2022 to reach about 43 per cent of the GDP compared to the percentage estimated in the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan (83 per cent). — ONA



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MONDAY

JANUARY 2, 2023 JUMADA AL THANIA 9, 1444 AH

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## Eco-friendly solar cells

The project used graphene and polymer as an alternative layer to silicon, which is typically used in solar cells, in order to increase their efficiency. This concept was developed by Aisha al Wahaibi, Muzn al Abri, Al Hasnaa al Adwani, and Nusiba al Kharousi. **P20**

### READ

#### A TOUCH OF CHAOS BY SCARLETT ST CLAIR

A fight for humanity and battles between gods, it's a world Persephone never thought she would see. To end the chaos, she must draw upon her darkness and embrace who she's become—Goddess, Wife, Queen of the Underworld.



### CELEBRITIES

Vivienne Westwood died in London on Thursday at the age of 81, peacefully and surrounded by her family, in Clapham, South London. The world needs people like Vivienne to make a change for the better —AFP



### LIFESTYLE

The French artist, Eli Jadelot, plays guitar and sings in a wedding dress in the streets of Paris, usually near the Sacré Coeur basically in Paris' Montmartre neighbourhood —AFP





# Inside an underground network of Los Angeles museums

**THE BHAGAVAD-GITA** Diorama Museum is not easy to find. It is hidden down a passageway in the Hare Krishna temple complex on a side street in Culver City. Although a sign outside advertised the museum as open, the front door was locked one fall morning; it took five minutes for a worker to arrive and reveal its warren of 11 dioramas depicting Hare Krishna history.

The Martial Arts History Museum, 22 miles away by car in Burbank, is more conducive to a visit. It's on Magnolia Boulevard, one of the main thoroughfares in the San Fernando Valley — but at 2,000 square feet, it is so cramped that the museum has turned away buses of schoolchildren who wanted to view, among other artefacts, a headband worn by Ralph Macchio in "The Karate Kid Part II."

"This is the first and only museum of its kind, can you believe it?" said its president, Michael Matsuda. "The only one in the world that covers all the martial arts."

Over the past decade, Los Angeles has emerged as a global arts centre, renowned for such prominent museums as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the J Paul Getty Museum, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Broad and, most recently, the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. But less visible is an extensive and important network of smaller museums, catering to niche audiences interested in topics like olive growing and the Garifuna people of the Caribbean.

These museums, hundreds of them, reflect the idiosyncrasies and specialised interests of their founders while offering a window into the ethnic, cultural and historical diversity that has come to define Southern California.

"These alternate spaces have transformed LA," said Jordan Karney Chaim, a contemporary arts historian in San Diego.

The variety and breadth of museums in Los Angeles reflect

the overall expansion in the art scene here that began in the 1970s, when space was more plentiful and rents were lower.

Many are little known for a reason: They have odd hours or barely advertise their existence, or are the passion projects of one or two people, with no paid staff. And many of them are not

trying for mass market appeal. There are museums devoted to skateboarding, tattoos, automobiles, bunnies, neon, sneakers, aviation, citrus trees and the Salvation Army.

Todd Lerew, the director of special projects at the Library Foundation of Los Angeles, has spent the past eight years trying to visit every museum in the region — 760, by his estimate. He has

chronicled his first 650 visits on a spreadsheet and is preparing a book on his discoveries.

"I take an obsessive approach to all of my interests," said Lerew, who often drives as far as 200 miles in a day. "When I want to know something, I want to know everything."

His estimate reflects an

expansive definition of Los Angeles — in this case, the entire metropolis, from the Pacific Ocean to the Mojave Desert — and an expansive definition of the word "museum," which includes a one-wall exhibition chronicling the history of the original bakery at what is now the Helms Bakery District, a collection of design shops and restaurants. But if imprecise, his findings are

testimony to the concentration of museums, scholarly and quirky, that arts leaders view as part of the cultural core of Southern California.

"LA is a very big, sprawling city, and it is not surprising that museum spaces would be found in pockets of neighbourhoods all across the city," said Patricia Hills, a retired professor of art and architecture at Boston University. "Many ethnic groups have their own pride of place, and public space galleries and museums are one way to express their culture and creative output."

Some of the museums, unknown and located in remote parts of a large county, struggle to get people through the door. The Ararat-Eskijian Museum, which claims to be the only Armenian museum on the West Coast, and lies on a sprawling assisted living facility for older Armenians in Mission Hills, is lucky to draw 25 people a week. Its main floor exhibition space displays paintings, jewellery, ceramics, religious artefacts and rugs, including several made by Armenian orphans.

The museum has organised lectures on Armenian history to try to increase attendance, but truth be told, its audience is people who stumble across it while visiting relatives.

"People will say, 'I'll go to the Getty,'" said Marguerite Mangassarian Goschin, the museum's director. "But 'I'll go to the Eskijian?' This is a very isolated area."

There are 1,100 museums nationwide that are accredited by the American Alliance of Museums; 76 of those are in California, with 10 in the city of Los Angeles. But that is just a small fraction of the 30,000 museums that the alliance estimates exist nationwide. Most have not submitted to the accreditation process, which requires a formal structure — such as a rigorous mission statement — that can be daunting for these freewheeling organisations. — **NYT**



## A LOOK AT THE ACADEME



By Dr Zainab al Ajmi  
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## How to enhance students' motivation?

**STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IS** one of the essential learning elements that either teachers or parents work on to improve learning. To this end, numerous studies have sought to investigate motivations to understand and enhance students' motivations, in turn improving their academic performance and learning process. (Williams& Williams, 2011) stated that no single motivation theory seems to adequately explain all human motivation, as the fact is humans in general and students, particularly, are complex creatures with complex needs and desires. Regarding students, very little if any learning can occur unless students are motivated on a consistent basis. Nonetheless, the authors indicate that there are five key ingredients impacting student motivation including student himself, the teacher, content, method/process, and environment.

Considering the importance of students' motivations to improve learning performance, several studies have been conducted to find out the appropriate methods, procedures, and activities that could be applied by teachers to create a motivating learning environment. Among these studies, (Williams& Williams, 2011) propose in their studies that student motivation is enhanced when these factors pertinent to students as follows:

1. Enhancing Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Intrinsic motivational factors include (the desire to be involved), curiosity (finding out more about their interests), challenge (figuring out the complexity of a topic), and social interaction (creating social bonds). Extrinsic motivational factors include compliance (to meet another's expectation, to do what one is told); recognition (to be publicly acknowledged); and competition. Individuals who are motivated intrinsically tend to develop a high regard for learning course information without the use of external rewards or reinforcement. On the contrary, individuals who are motivated extrinsically rely solely on rewards and desirable results for their motivation, e.g., tests and GPA. Students with external motivation are at a greater risk of performing lower academically than intrinsically motivated students.

2. Various individual and social factors: Intrinsic motivation is affected by the purpose of learning, the future expectation, and the distinctiveness of testing and measuring activities at the school. Whereas Extrinsic motivation is significantly affected by the probability of finding a job after graduation, the attitude towards the teacher, the peer group, the level of income, the appropriateness of the classrooms, and the adequacy of teaching materials. Educators agree that intrinsic motivations are more important than extrinsic to induce students to learn.

3. Hierarchy of needs: If a student is hungry or thirsty, it is difficult to focus on learning. Also, if the environment is physically, mentally, or emotionally unsafe, then it will be hard for the student to put all his attention on learning. If the teacher always is critical of the student, then the student probably will not feel accepted. As such, the educator must do what is necessary to support the student to a higher level of need satisfaction so that the student can focus his or her attention on learning.

4. Perceived well-being: Students' perceptions may be affected by their perceived well-being, e.g., bad mood, or having a disagreement with someone before class. Well-being is the degree to which a student is compatible with his life including pleasure in daily activities, and social contact. That is, factors beyond the quality of teaching can affect student motivations including course level, grade expectations, and type of academic field.

In summary, in the simplest terms, to increase students' satisfaction with learning, students' role in education is crucial, affecting overall academic motivation as influenced by psychological and environmental factors. Yet, teachers could provide incentives that enhance students' motivation in the learning environment as well as performance.



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## AROUND THE WORLD

### TRADITIONS

Bearskin dance reconnects Romania youth with tradition



**ROMANIAN TEENAGER** Cosmin sweats profusely under a gigantic bearskin costume as he prances to the exhilarating sound of drums, flutes and whistles to welcome the New Year.

The parade Cosmin stars in has ancient roots and is increasingly a tourist attraction in Romania, especially for youngsters looking to reconnect with national traditions.

Performing in a costume made of real bearskin and weighing 40 kilograms (88 pounds) is physically demanding, but Cosmin would not miss the dance for the world.

"The skin I'm wearing belonged to my grandfather," the 17-year-old student says with pride, swaying the animal's head from side to side.

The northeastern town of Comanesti puts on the colourful and noisy display between Christmas and New Year's Day to chase away evil spirits.

The centuries-old tradition is held across the country but is most fervently celebrated in the region that includes Comanesti, which has emerged as the hub for troupes of bearskin-clad dancers.

Preparations begin in autumn and the local council selects the hundreds of mostly young performers, with their ages starting from as young as eight and rarely exceeding 30.

The most expressive acts win prizes, while the imposing bearskin costumes come with the animal's most fearsome features, including the paws, claws and mouth.

Small traditional "mici" sausages and kebabs are on the menu for spectators and dancers, and boards list the names of the participants' home villages.

Romania is home to more than half of Europe's brown bear population, an animal believed to embody strength and bravery but now protected as threatened by deforestation.

The dance, which has pre-Christian roots, has become a magnet for tourists and an important source of income in recent years.

### SEARCH FOR AN IDENTITY

Anthropologist Valer Simion Cosma believes the festival has undergone a "renaissance" since 2007 and Romania's entry into the European Union.

As many citizens choose to leave the country of 19 million people for brighter prospects abroad, the younger generation has grasped the event's value as part of a "search for an identity," he said.

Cosma noted that the almost six million Romanians living abroad want to preserve local customs with family when they come back home.

That breaks with the recent trend whereby Romania's "cultural interest was directed towards the outside" and folklore was "seen as outdated and confined to the older generations", the researcher added.

The renewed enthusiasm for the bear dance, encouraged by television coverage, has given a new lease of life to the industry producing the costumes and attracted tourists in their thousands.

"The value of folklore no longer lies in the meaning it was once given, but in its role as a spectacle and its economic impact," Cosma said. — **AFP**

### FASHION

## The Westwood brand: cocky, brazen and resolutely independent



### IRREVERENT BRITISH

designer Vivienne Westwood, who died on Thursday, succeeded in keeping her fashion house financially independent, even as others sought stock market listings or security within major luxury groups.

She weathered the Covid pandemic, inflation and other storms thanks to the support of celebrities such as actor Emma Watson, singer Dua Lipa and British Queen Consort Camilla.

The punk icon's fashion house had just two board members — Westwood herself and long-time director-general Carlo D'Amario — until Jeffrey Banks joined them just two weeks ago on December 16. In 2018, the company went into the red and was restructured. But it stayed afloat.

"Vivienne did have ups and downs because of Covid, as well as inflation, especially in Europe," said Andrew Burnstine, associate professor in marketing at Lynn University in Florida.

"One of the reasons she was able to weather the recent storm was because of the incredible celebrity client base she had," Burnstine told.

"Having a loyal and solid client base, licences, franchises and yearly collections are the best way to continuing your brand name and identity," he added.

"Vivienne was very good at making calls, meeting with clients and, most importantly, marketing her brand and name on social media and the

media."

### BUY LESS. CHOOSE WELL

The latest financial results for Westwood's fashion house published on the UK government's Company House website — covering the 2020 financial year — showed a pre-tax profit of 3.9 million pounds (\$4.7 million) on sales worth 42 million pounds.

The label had around 500 employees.

The trade press made much of a past run-in Westwood had with the UK tax authorities.

She was accused of underestimating the value of her label by means of payments to a Luxembourg-based subsidiary and was forced, about a decade ago, to pay around 500,000 pounds in extra tax.

Westwood was an environmental and anti-capitalist activist, and coined the phrase "Buy less. Choose well. Make it last."

But she was accused of hypocrisy for continuing to produce several collections every year, including men's and women's ready-to-wear, accessories, perfumes and wedding dresses.

The Westwood label nonetheless prides itself on using organic or recycled synthetic materials, has stopped using plastic packaging and regularly publishes its carbon emissions.

While the majority of the label's sales are in the UK, where it owns six boutiques, the brand also has one outlet each in France and

Italy, and two in the United States.

It is also making inroads in Asia, notably in China, Japan, Thailand and Singapore.

It has production sites in the UK, China, Italy and Kenya, with a "Made in Kenya" line that aims to develop a sustainable supply chain in Africa.

### SUBVERTING CONVENTIONS

Since 2016, the company's artistic direction has been steered by Westwood's husband and long-time business partner Andreas Kronthaler, who has made a significant contribution to the style of the brand since the couple met in 1989.

That style cocks a snook at bourgeois and aristocratic conventions by subverting traditional British clothing habits.

The cuts are sophisticated but asymmetrical.

Westwood uses traditional florery or tartan prints, along with tweed and romantic tulle fabrics. But the prints and colours clash.

Tucked-up skirts and crumpled crinolines make for a mad princess or wonky ballerina look — always provocative, always tongue in cheek.

SM apparel combines with the corsets of romantic heroines. Taffeta dresses are worn as mini skirts with fishnet tights — a look Westwood herself sported when she collected an award at the Florence Biennale in 2021, at the tender age of 80. — **AFP**

McCartney daughter gives intimate tour of Abbey Road



**THE DAUGHTER OF** pop megastar Paul McCartney has given an intimate peek into the hallowed halls of Abbey Road, the studio where he — and many other music stars — recorded masterpieces.

Mary McCartney directed the new documentary, "If These Walls Could Sing", which gets a worldwide release on Disney+ on January 6 after premiering in North America in December.

The London studio gave its name to arguably The Beatles' most beloved record, 1969's "Abbey Road", and it was on the nearby zebra crossing that the Fab Four shot their legendary cover photo.

"I have a personal connection with the studio," Mary McCartney told.

"I grew up coming here, we lived nearby. I have a very funny picture that I love — my mum (Linda McCartney) leading a pony across the zebra crossing."

Inevitably, The Beatles occupy a major part of the 90-minute documentary, since they recorded no less than 190 of their 210 songs there.

But Abbey Road has a long history, established in 1931 by record company EMI.

Initially dedicated to classical music, it had cutting edge technology for the time, and was used by composer and conductor Edward Elgar shortly before his death in 1934.

"So many people come to Abbey Road to the zebra crossing but don't come inside because it's a busy working studio, so I wanted to bring the viewer inside," said McCartney.

The studio became "the bunker" for The Beatles after the hysteria surrounding the group led them to quit touring in 1966, recalls Giles Martin, son of their producer George Martin, in the film.

Many stars have since sought to tap into the magic of the place, from Elton John and Pink Floyd to Led Zeppelin and Oasis — all of whom feature in the new film.

"Each person tells a different story, different aspects of what makes Abbey Road a whole," said Mary McCartney.

Beatles fans have been spoiled recently, with the new documentary coming little over a year after "Get Back" in which director Peter Jackson painstakingly reworked footage of the band writing and rehearsing the album "Let it Be", including their famous performance on the roof of Abbey Road. — **AFP**



# art & life

## Local Scene

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## Eco-friendly solar cells



Arwa Al Hashimi

A group of women students from SQU who planned a graduation project with an original concept that advances the use of alternative energy ended up winning the Upgrade Programme. The project used graphene and polymer as an alternative layer to silicon, which is typically used in solar cells, in order to increase their efficiency. This concept was developed by Aisha al Wahaibi Muzn al Abri, Al Hasnaa al Adwani, and Nusiba al Kharusi and uses solar cells that are currently on the market.

It all began when the students came up with this novel idea that had never been put forth before, leading to a greater reliance on clean, renewable energy.

The concept is entirely original to Oman, and the materials will be produced there, specifically in the labs of Sultan Qaboos University. This project is made even more promising by the fact that the team

took first place in the Third Solar Decathlon, a competition designed to support the clean energy workforce. This has motivated them to launch their own business in order to advance their project.



The winning upgrade programme has its share of difficulties, just like any other project. However, the students were only interested in the prize. Even though they struggled to find the right scientific papers to

support their work, they managed to launch their concept into the market just in time.

The accomplishment of the students is undoubtedly a source of pride for both them and the



the announcement. They were even happier to see so many other researchers who were passionate about the same things. The programme offers excellent financial and scientific support that aids participants in effectively promoting their projects.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation is in charge of planning the programme. It brings together recent graduates from various institutions and showcases the best capstone initiatives. By transforming them into emerging businesses in the information and communication technology and industry domains, it seeks to have a socio-economic impact.

A completed application form must be submitted along with a number of required attachments, including a letter from the student's educational institution confirming that the project is a capstone endeavour. They must also include a complete report on the project as well as their final project plan.