

Crude output increases 10%

Oman's production of crude oil and condensates recorded a rise by 10% till the end of November 2022 to stand at 355,473,100 barrels compared to 323,174,600 barrels during the corresponding period in 2021, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

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AL NASR REJOICE COMEBACK HM CUP WIN



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OIA AFFILIATES REPORT SUCCESS IN LNG, MINING, CIRCULAR ECONOMY



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FIVE WEEKNIGHT DISHES: RESET YOUR ROUTINE



MUSCAT

HM RECEIVES THANKS FROM KAZAKHSTAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received thanks from President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan in reply to His Majesty's congratulatory cable on being re-elected for a new presidential term. President Tokayev expressed his appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sentiments. He also wished His Majesty good health and well-being and the Omani people further progress and prosperity. The President of Kazakhstan also wished the bilateral relations further development and growth.

HM CONGRATULATES SWISS PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent congratulations to President Dr Alain Berset of the Swiss Confederation on being elected as his country's President. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of success to President Dr Alain in leading the people of his country. His Majesty also wished the Swiss people further progress and prosperity.

KYIV

UKRAINE SHOOT'S DOWN ALL DRONES

Ukraine said on Monday it had shot down all Russian drones in a massive wave of attacks, after Moscow launched an unprecedented third straight night of air strikes against civilian targets, intensifying its air war for the New Year holiday. Russian officials meanwhile were reeling from reports that 63 freshly mobilised Russian troops had been killed in a strike on a college converted to a barracks in occupied Ukraine.

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INSIDE



GLOBAL ECONOMY FACES TOUGHER YEAR IN 2023: IMF

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SOME IN CHINA ACTIVE AFTER COVID INFECTIONS

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ADRENALINE RUSH



Balad Sayt hides another charm for adventure tourism lovers – the snake canyon, which ranks high on the bucket list of must see places in Oman. It offers a combination of trekking, abseiling down large cliffs and swimming. REPORT ON P2

Design logo for Muscat International Book Fair and win RO 1,000

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

A competition to design a logo for the 27th Edition of Muscat International Book Fair, which will be held from February 22 to March 4, the Main Committee Responsible for MIBF announced on Monday. The winner will get a reward of RO 1,000.

As per the conditions and specifications for the competition, the design's content should reflect the Sultanate of Oman's civilisational role, cultural depth and love of reading.

The design should be unique, modern, non-traditional, and not quoted or similar to any other design known locally or

The competition is open to all specialised companies and residents - an individual or a single company is entitled to participate with a maximum of two entries

internationally. The logo should have four colours.

A brief explanation of the idea of the theme, including the meanings of the symbol, should accompany the design.

The slogan should be phrased in Arabic and English, and the

design should be of high quality. The competition is open to all specialised companies and residents - an individual or a single company is entitled to participate with a maximum of two entries. The last date for receiving the designs from the participants is January 22. Owners of designs have the right to retrieve their designs from the book fair administration within two months from the date of announcing the results. The event will include a diverse range of cultural programmes appealing to the tastes of avid readers across different categories, including academic, cultural, literary and scientific.

Theyazin to preside over ROP Annual Day fete

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will grace Royal Oman Police (ROP)'s celebration of its anniversary, which falls on January 5. The ceremony, which will take place on the military parade grounds of Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences in the Wilayat of Nizwa, includes the passing out parade of officer cadets. The ROP has been accorded great attention by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander. Under His Majesty the Sultan's patronage, the



ROP, has undergone major transformation in different fields of police action and realised tangible success in various security, service, traffic, customs and technical aspects. — ONA

Budget gives priority to social security

RO 384 million allocated

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnassri

Budget 2023 has allotted RO 384 million for social security in line with Oman Vision 2040, which aims to ensure standard of living for citizens. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik referred to social security in his speech on the 50th National Day in November 2020. "In affirmation of our interest in providing the necessary protection and care to our citizens, we have directed to expedite the establishment of the social protection system to ensure that the state fulfills its basic duties, provides people with a decent life and spares them the effects that may result from some measures and financial policies. We will also be keen to direct part of the revenues of these financial policies to the social protection system, to become a comprehensive national umbrella for the various efforts and actions of protection and social care". In April 2021, Royal Decree No. 33/2021 established Social Protection Fund', which includes integrated civil sector pension funds in the Sultanate of Oman.



The social protection system includes several programmes based on national targets and best practices and addresses many problems, such as the inclusion of years of service and temporary work contracts. According to Ali al Matani, a journalist, the social protection system is a set of procedures, policies and programmes concerned with well-being by enhancing work efficiency and pushing citizens towards exploiting their capabilities and competencies. "We hope the social protection system will support solidarity and justice between generations and be a unified central system that includes all data of workers and retirees across sectors."

TURN TO P2



Ejada system launched in Dhofar

BAKHEET KIRDAS AL SHUHRI
SALALAH, JAN 2

The Governorate of Dhofar launched Ejada Institutional Excellence System at all the administrative units in the presence of HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, on Monday.

The governor of Dhofar said: “It is extremely important that every employee contributes to the development of his/her institution through this system and to make a positive effect in improving the performance at the institutional level.”

“We should all take part in improving and upgrading the work system which consequently leads to improving performance and achieving the desired goals. We should all communicate and cooperate in all that serves the public interest.”

An induction display of Ejada system was staged during the



launch ceremony by Talal bin Abdullah al Balushi, director of the training and change management team at Ejada, Ministry of Labour.

He noted that the system is a

tool for upgrading performance efficiency at the units of the state’s administrative apparatus through assessing the fields that affect the realisation of the unit’s objectives.

The launch ceremony was attended by the chairman of the municipal council, walis, directors-general and employees at the government institutions of Dhofar Governorate.

Budget gives priority to social security

FROM PAGE 1

“It is very important to stress the need to direct this fund as a social investment tool, and it is managed by national competencies characterised by a social presence, an academic economic vision and investment expertise that undertakes the development, collection and integration of data” adding that time is running out, and the Royal Decree ruling the merger gave a deadline of 12 months to prepare the draft law from the date of its issuance, and until that moment the vision has not yet become clear.

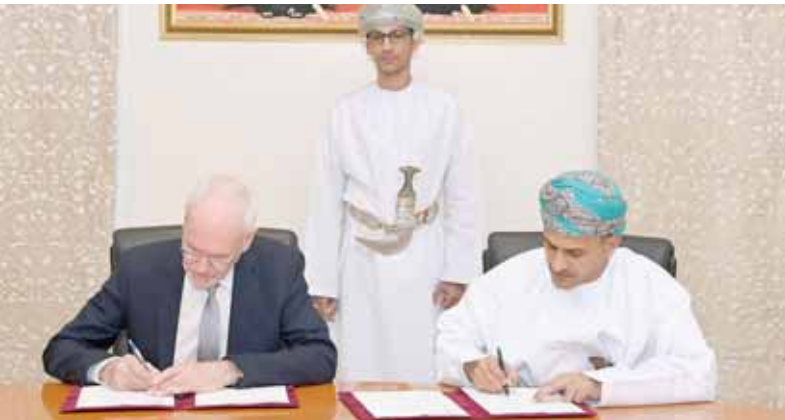
He said, “The social protection system, the largest fund in the Sultanate of Oman, will include all retirees and workers in 11 pension funds and includes all state employees in one of the largest mergers the country has witnessed. Thus, it is a major step in drawing paths of social protection in the country and establishes a protection programme that is universal to provide areas of social protection against diseases and epidemics in addition to old-age benefits, coverage against work accidents and occupational diseases, family benefits, maternity benefits, disability grants, unemployment and heirs benefits”.

Environment Authority, GUtech sign cooperation programme

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority and German University of Technology (GUtech) signed a cooperation programme in academic and development fields.

The programme seeks to consolidate cooperation in the areas of research, consultancy and support for social, economic and environmental development.

It also serves the goals of sustainable development in Oman and contributes to Oman Vision 2040, notably in the field of training for job seekers.



The programme was inked by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment

Authority, and Prof Michael Brown, Vice-President of GUtech. — ONA

Snake Canyon offers combo of trekking, abseiling and swimming

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 2

Balad Sayt, a stunning village in picturesque surroundings and terrace farms, sits high on the Western Hajar Mountains in the Wilayat of Rustaq. This village hides another charm for adventure tourism lovers -- the snake canyon, which ranks high on the bucket list of must see places in Oman.

Snake Canyon or Seer Al Zamah or Wadi Bimah has its awe-inspiring tall cliffs, impressively narrow paths and turquoise pools. Snake Canyon offers a combination of trekking, abseiling down large cliffs and swimming.

The people of Balad Sayt have cashed in on these tourism opportunities by setting up small and medium companies. They have often played a prominent role in rescuing stranded tourists in the Snake Canyon and providing them with first aid.

Saleh bin Hilal al Dhahli, a resident of the village, said, “The tourist village of Balad Sayt is located between the mountains separating the governorates of South Al Batinah and Al Dakhiliyah. Mountains and valleys have been a source of attraction for lovers of adventure



inexperience of outside guides who don’t know the challenges of terrain. “We risked our lives to save tourists. We look forward to the support of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to enrich tourism in the village of Balad Sayt by providing us permits. We also call on the Royal Oman Police to conduct training courses for youth in the village in rescue and first aid,” Al Dhahli said

We have asked the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to fence the middle of the Snake Canyon, and to provide the necessary facilities for our small projects and enable them to play their role in enriching the tourism sector.

Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Dhahli, another villager, said: “Balad Sayt is a tourist destination due to its mountainous nature and rugged terrain, as it is frequented by many Omani and foreign tourists throughout the year.”

The village is distinguished by the presence of a natural climbing wall and there are more than 60 trekking tracks which range from easy to difficult.

The long path starts from the village of Al Hajer and ends in the village of Al Zama. The valley is also home to more than 13 natural pools. As for the second path, which is called Basir Al Zama or the short path.

tourism such as climbing and trekking. This has encouraged the youth of the village to start small companies projects to serve tourists visiting the village and depend on it as a source of income.

These entrepreneurs have often played the role of saviours for tourists in distress due to the

Ban on import of plastic bags comes into force

MUSCAT: The ban on the import of plastic bags issued by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) came into effect on Sunday, January 1, 2023.

This decision 519/ 2022, which was issued in September, that companies, institutions, and individuals will be prohibited from importing plastic bags, while Article 2 states that RO1,000 will be fined in case of violations. The fine will be doubled if the violation is repeated.

The Environment Authority



(EA) of Oman implemented the ban on single-use plastic shopping bags, which came into effect on January 2021.

The ban was part of the plan set by the authority to preserve

the Omani environment from pollution and waste harmful to the rich environment and wildlife.

EA had imposed an administrative fine of not less than RO100 (\$259) and no more than RO 2,000 is set on whoever violates the provisions of this decision, and it will be doubled if the violation is repeated.

While single-use bags have been almost phased out in the country, most retailers, including supermarkets, currently provide recyclable bags, including plastic, on demand.

Oman Air named most punctual airline in MENA

STAFF REPORTER
LONDON, JAN 2

Oman Air has been named as the Middle East and Africa leader for airline on-time performance for 2022 by Cirium, the global aviation analytics leader.

The Cirium 2022 On-Time Performance Review is the global gold standard for airline and airport performance, and it will be published later this week, containing results for all airline categories, more detail and analysis.

The past year saw a challenging operational environment across the world, particularly in Europe

and North America, with many airlines and airports experiencing delays, disruptions and resource challenges, while others continued to emerge from Covid restrictions, especially in the Asia Pacific region. Despite this climate, many airlines and airports worldwide excelled.

For the second consecutive year Delta Airlines was honoured with the Cirium Platinum Award for global operational excellence. This award considers a number of factors including on-time performance, operational complexity and an airline’s ability to limit the impact of flight



disruption to its passengers.

Alongside Delta’s Cirium Platinum Award, Azul Brazilian Airlines was the leader for on-time performance worldwide with the winners in the other global regions being Delta Air Lines in

North America, Iberia for Europe, Azul for Latin America and Thai AirAsia in Asia Pacific.

An on-time flight is defined as a flight that arrives within 15 minutes of the scheduled gate arrival. For an airport it is defined as departing

within 15 minutes of its scheduled departure.

Jeremy Bowen, Cirium CEO, said: “Ramping back up operations so quickly after an enforced slowdown is not easy to do and the top-ranked airlines in Cirium’s 2022 On-Time Performance Review deserve their recognition for this well-orchestrated achievement.

“Congratulations to Delta Air Lines for its excellent performance in Cirium’s 2022 On-Time Performance Review, as well as Oman Air for its success in the Middle East and Africa region, getting its passengers to their destinations on time as the sector

revived during 2022”

During 2022 airlines had difficulty anticipating the sudden recovery in demand. They had been disappointed on several previous occasions throughout the pandemic, when it looked like demand was picking up, only for it to reverse course in the face of new Covid variants.

When the recovery finally came this past year, the industry - including airlines, airports, air navigation providers and other stakeholders — struggled with understaffing and insufficient capacity. Delays and cancellations became an issue.



Municipal Council members elect deputy chairman in Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi and North Al Batinah



SUHAR: The Municipal Council of North Al Batinah Governorate held its first meeting for the third term. During the meeting, chaired by Mohammed bin Suleiman al Kindi, Governor of North Al Batinah, the members of the Council were sworn in for the third term. They also elected a Deputy Chairman for the Council and formed standing committees.

The Deputy Chairman was chosen through the use of 'Tanmia' app, which was launched for the first time. The position went to Abdullah bin Yahya al Jabri, who won 14 out of the 21 votes.

The meeting also saw the selection of heads of standing committees, which were the Legal Committee, the Social Affairs Committee, the Health and Environmental Affairs Committee and the Governorate's Development Committee. — ONA



IBRI: The Municipal Council in Al Dhahirah Governorate on Monday held its first meeting since the start of Municipal Councils Third Term. The meeting was headed by Najeeb bin Ali al Rowas, Governor of Al Dhahirah, Chairman of the Council.

The members of the Municipal Council took the oath of office before the council's Chairman. They also elected a Deputy Chairman during an electronic voting process in which the new 'Tanmia' app was used.

The position went to Hamdan bin Nasser al Yahyaee, who won majority of the votes.

The meeting also saw the formation of standing



committees, which were the Legal Committee, the Social Affairs Committee, the Health and Environment Committee and the Governorate's Development Committee. — ONA

AL BURAIMI: The Municipal Council in Al Buraimi Governorate held its first extraordinary meeting, marking the opening of the Third Term of Municipal Councils.

The meeting was chaired by Sayyid Dr Hamad bin Ahmed al Busaidy, Governor of Al Buraimi.

During the meeting, Mohammed bin Khalifa al Jabri, was elected as Deputy Chairman of the Municipal Council, after an electronic voting process in which 'Tanmia' app was used.

The meeting also saw



the formation of standing committees, which were the Governorate's Development Committee, the Health and Environmental Affairs Committee and the Social Affairs Committee. — ONA

Seminar on empowering rural women held in Musandam

KHASAB: The Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in the Governorate of Musandam organised on Monday in cooperation with the Oman Development Bank, a 'Rifi Seminar' to empower rural women's projects for agricultural, fisheries and related products.

The activities of the symposium were sponsored by Shaikh Dr Saeed bin Humaid al Harthy, Wali of Khasab.

Engineer Hussain bin Ali al Shehhi, Director of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources in Khasab, in his speech hailed the role played by rural women in highlighting their products and raising their quality.

He also highlighted the role played by the Directorate General of Agriculture, Fisheries and

Water Resources in Musandam Governorate to empower rural women through empowerment programmes. carried out throughout the year.

Mubarak bin Rashid al Maamari, Director of the Oman Development Bank, Khasab, gave a visual presentation in which he dealt with the bank's services and financing programmes in support of rural women's projects.

He also discussed the financing loans offered by the bank.

Ahmed bin Ali al Shehhi, Chairman of the Public Authority for Social Insurance, Khasab, gave a visual presentation on the Social Insurance Law in the Sultanate of Oman and the Authority's initiatives to register owners of small projects to benefit from these initiatives. — ONA



■ SALALAH THEATRE COMPANY AT SHARJAH GULF FESTIVAL



The Salalah Al Ahlia Troupe for Performing Arts will participate in the 'Sharjah Gulf Theatre Festival', which will be held in February in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, which was stopped earlier due to the Corona pandemic. The troupe has chosen the play 'Sidrat Al Sheikh' to represent the Sultanate of Oman at the festival in its fourth session from among 15 scripts presented by Omani theatre. 'Sidrat Al Sheikh' is written and directed by writer Imad bin Mohsen al Shanfari, starring Abdullah bin Marei al Shanfari, Abdulmalik al Shizawi, Amal al Nuwairiyah, Hisham Saleh, Issa Ajzon, and Jihad al Yafei, with the participation of other artists. — ONA

Tender Number

T-50-2022

Tender Announcement

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:

Tender Name

Framework Agreement for Provision of Cleaning Services to MWASALAT Offices & Staff Accommodation in Khasab, Lima, Dibba

Project Summary

Within the framework of this tender, MWASALAT would like to have a qualified contractor to provide Cleaning Services required to Offices & Staff Accommodation in Khasab, Lima, Dibba for 2 years.

Tender Fee

NIL

Grade & Specialty

Local Companies in the field.

Start date for tender document distribution

Tuesday, 03 January 2023

Last date for tender document distribution

Wednesday, 11 January 2023

Last date for submission

Monday, 23 January 2023

The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00A.M - 2:00 P.M.

Tenderers are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email

All Tenderers shall submit with their offers a Tender Bond in the amount of not less than one percent (1%) of the Tender Value, valid for 90 days from the date of Tender Submission obtained from a locally registered Bank, drawn in favor of The Chairman of Procurement Committee, National Ferries Company LLC "MWASALAT". Any bid without tender bond will be rejected.

The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.

Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head-quarter National Ferries Company LLC (MWASALAT) at Ghala, Muscat (Jabal Shams Building 3th floor). Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.

"Mwasalat"

Head Quarter, Ghala Tel: +968 24121500/24121555

P.O.Box: 911, Al Khawar, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman

For more information please send to: tenders@mwasalat.om



HEALTH EXPERTS
SAY THERE IS NO NEED FOR PANIC
AS THE CURRENT SPIKE IS CURRENTLY
LIMITED TO CHINA.
HOWEVER, BASIC PRECAUTIONS SUCH AS
HAND WASHING AND WEARING MASKS SHOULD
ALWAYS BE FOLLOWED



VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

LESS than a year when all restrictions were imposed to limit the spread of Covid-19, the world fears another spell of travel curbs or new health protocols. The current spell of Covid-19 infections has been limited mainly to China, some countries have been witnessing a slight surge in the number of positive Covid-19 cases in recent days, and it may be noted that international travel to China is not yet at the pre-Covid levels.

On Monday, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) issued an internal directive asking all employees and visitors of the University Hospital to wear face masks.

According to sources in the hospital, the decision has been taken because the hospital administration noticed an increase in the number of patients with Covid-19 positive results in recent days.

All employees and visitors must enter the hospital from the main entrance and should avoid the emergency department entrances. The hospital administration will continue to monitor the situation to determine the next course of action, the directive said.

Qatar became the first country in the region to require travellers arriving from China to provide a negative Covid-19 test result within 48 hours of departure, the state news agency said. The testing requirement is imposed on all travellers regardless of vaccination status.

Speaking to Observer, citizens and residents said that it is better to take small precautionary steps than being forced to take drastic measures in the later stages, which will derail human lives and the economy.

The BE.7 sub-variant of Omicron is responsible for the latest surge in Covid cases. Several countries have already detected positive cases in international travellers, mainly those travelling from airports used by outbound passengers from China as transit.

“This current spike is only a temporary scare but if we

TAKE
CARE,
DO
NOT
PANIC

remember many countries, including the Sultanate of Oman, lost thousands of citizens and residents, from the Omicron variant, which was said to be relatively mild compared to the earlier versions,” said Nilesh Gupta, who lost a close and young friend during the Covid waves.

“The two years of online education was only effective as a temporary alternative, but it did have a major adverse impact on the overall all-round development of children,” said Alisha, a schoolteacher.

Health experts told the Observer that there is no need for panic as the current spike is currently limited to Chinese boundaries. Still, basic precautions should always be followed, such as hand washing and wearing masks.

“We are not yet sure whether vaccinated people are insulated by this Covid-19 attack.”

Around a dozen countries have imposed fresh travel regulations on travellers from China as it faces a surge in Covid cases following its decision to relax strict virus restrictions.

As of January 5, the United States will require negative Covid tests taken within two days of departure — or documentation proving passengers have recovered from the virus within the last 90 days - for all entries from China.

Acceptable tests include “a PCR test or an antigen self-test administered and monitored by a telehealth service or a licensed provider”, according to the US Centers for Disease Control.

While Italy and Spain have also imposed Covid test requirements, European countries are set to meet this week to discuss a joint response to the issue,

The UK government also said it would test “a sample of arrivals” to monitor for new variants. Japan was one of the first countries to impose new rules on arrivals from China, requiring them to submit a negative Covid test. India will require travellers from China and a spate of other Asian countries to provide a negative Covid test taken within 72 hours of departure to the country.

Morocco has also has taken some of the strictest measures, banning entry outright for all travellers from China. The ban takes effect from January 3 and will last until further notice.



MoSD holds workshop for social workers

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), represented by the Department of Family Counselling and Guidance, organised on Monday a workshop on “Strategies to reduce and prevent bullying” for psychologists and social workers working at the MoSD.

The workshop aims to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes to limit and prevent bullying among students.

Dr Jalal bin Youssef al Mukhaini, Director of Family Counselling and Guidance Department at the Ministry of Social Development, presented three working papers on “The Concept of Bullying, Its



Forms and Effects’, ‘School Environment and Bullying’, and ‘Strategies for Reducing and Preventing the Phenomenon of School Bullying’.

Dr Jalal reviewed the “Institutional Alliance”, which is intended to mobilise the school and society for the cause of improving students’ learning, which is part of the job of every educator.

He also reviewed a number of recent studies and their results, the extent of the problem locally and globally, strategies and policies to reduce the phenomenon of bullying, as well as international programmes to prevent them.

— ONA

Sultanate of Oman
Ministry of Defence
ENGINEERING SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Ministry of Defence invites Contractors/consultant specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

Tender No.	Tender Name	Contractors Grade	Last Date to Obtain Tender	Tender Submission Date	Tender Price (RO)
39/2022	Maintenance work - MOD CAMPS	Excellent	12 th January 2023	30 th January 2023	500/- RO

**For more information about the above Tenders please visit gate number (14)*

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 – 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer & that queries must be on electronic (Microsoft word).
- You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
 - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Labour (Updated Copy).
 - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope of works and drawings.
 - Full set of stamped drawings and documents, Tender Form and Tender Bonds to be submitted as hard copy and others documentation shall be as **SOFT COPY** (USB) in two separate files:
 - Financial.
 - Technical files.
 - Confirmation of site visit.
 - All addendums and circulars.
 - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
 - List of current and executed projects for the last Five years.
 - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
 - Financial Statement for the last Three years.

CBFS students launch ‘Eidaad’ programme

MUSCAT: As part of a national programme of skilling Omani youth, the College of Banking and Financial studies (CBFS) conducted an introductory session to develop student awareness on the ‘Eidaad’ programme.

This exclusive programme is an ambitious national initiative that is in line with the goals of Oman Vision 2040 by providing students with competitive skills and competencies that keep pace with the local and international labour market.

Dr Zahran al Salti, Dean of the College, welcomed Eng Hamed al Hadharami, Eidaad programme director and team members. The importance of ‘Eidadd’ programme is to bridge the gap between industry and academia which was evident in the dean’s opening speech. He further emphasised that Eidaad is an applied learning



programme that will give students an opportunity to realise the actual working experience.

Eidaad offers a platform that encourages collaboration and intellectual interchange between academia and industry. The programme offers college and university

students the chance to obtain experience that will give them a leg up when they graduate and enter the workforce, targeting students in their pre-final year with a minimum GPA of 2.5, Eng Hamed stated.

This initiative is managed by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) but sponsored by The

Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation (MoHERI).

Eng Hamed demonstrated the benefits in enrolling with Eidaad programme. The current internship programmes last for 8 weeks and are insufficient for students to gain real-world experience.

Hence, the programme is a structured one that includes a comprehensive plan for students to develop both technical and soft skills. The programmes prepare youth for both local and global experiences in the workplace.

Currently, the programme is offered to 10 academic institutions through 17 private sector hosts. The intention for the coming year is to include all other academic institutions. He also displayed the statistics of student satisfaction survey with high satisfaction level.

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Center

Tender Advertisement

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Tender Fees	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing
CCCCRC/T/001/2023	Retender: Supply of Disaster Recovery Hardware and Software Requirements for SAP-HIS, Laboratory Information System: MediLab and Dietary System: MenuLogistics	200 OMR	15/01/2023	19/01/2023

Qualified companies interested in participating in this tender shall collect the tender specifications from the date of this advertisement from the following address:
Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre – Purchase Department.

Biddings that meet the above requirements should be submitted in a sealed envelope (hardcopy & softcopy) and should be delivered and deposited in the tender box at SQCCRC.

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than One week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact via e-mail: purchase@cccrc.gov.om
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.

SQU Hospital makes masks a must for employees, visitors

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University Hospital (SQUH) has issued an internal directive that stipulated that all employees and visitors of the University Hospital must wear face masks from Monday.

According to sources, the decision has been taken because the hospital administration noticed an increase in the number of patients with Covid-19 positive results in recent days.

All employees and visitors must enter the hospital from the main entrance and they are not allowed to use the emergency department entrances.

The hospital administration will continue to monitor the situation to determine the next course of action, the statement said.

Around a dozen countries have imposed fresh travel regulations on travellers from China as it faces a surge in Covid cases following its decision to relax strict virus restrictions.



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان
وزارة التراث والسياحة
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

Tender No.	75/2022/MHT/HQ-52	Tender Name	Rebuild of AL Seeb Castle at Muscat Governorate.
Tender No.	2/2023/MHT/HQ-2	Tender Name	Oman Botanic Garden: Phase II - Repair/Rehabilitation of Phase II Buildings: Consultancy Services.
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	75/2022/MHT/HQ-52	30 O.R	
	2/2023/MHT/HQ-2	150 O.R	
Tender Document Sales End Date	22/1/2023		
Last Date for Bid Submission	14/2/2023		
Grade	First		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		
Support and inquiries	Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website: against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.		
	Bids are submitted that fulfill the technical conditions and specifications, accompanied by a tender bond from a local bank not less than (1%) of the bid value, valid for (90) days from the date of its submission. - Any bid that does not meet the required tender bond will not be considered - The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids		
For further information	The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).		
Support and inquiries	For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		
	For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or 24402200		
For further information	Email : sotic@mht.gov.om Phones : 22088348 - 22088085		



RUSSIA SAYS 63 SERVICEMEN KILLED IN MAKIIVKA

Ukraine says it shoots down all drones

KYIV: Ukraine said on Monday it had shot down all Russian drones in a massive wave of attacks, after Moscow launched an unprecedented third straight night of air strikes against civilian targets, intensifying its air war for the New Year holiday.

Russian officials meanwhile were reeling from reports that 63 freshly mobilised Russian troops had been killed in a strike on a college converted to a barracks in occupied Ukraine, where soldiers were housed with an ammunition dump.

A source close to the Russian-installed authorities told Reuters dozens had died.

Russia has seen in the new year with nightly attacks on Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv, hundreds of kilometres from the front lines.

That marks a change in tactics after months in which Moscow



A member of the Ukrainian Red Cross prepares a barbecue on a street in the southern city of Kherson, on Sunday amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

usually spaced such strikes around a week apart. After firing dozens of missiles on December

31, Russia launched dozens of Iranian-made Shahed drones on January 1 and January 2. But Kyiv

said on Monday it had shot down all 39 drones in the latest wave, including 22 shot down over the

capital. Kyiv said the new tactic was a sign of Russia's desperation as Ukraine's ability to defend its air space had improved.

Russia had been trying to destroy Ukraine's energy infrastructure for months but had failed as Ukraine obtained better defences, presidential chief of staff Andriy Yermak said on Telegram.

"Now they are looking for routes and attempts to hit us somehow, but their terror tactics will not work. Our sky will turn into a shield"

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy praised Ukrainians for showing gratitude to the troops and one another and said Russia's efforts would prove useless.

"Drones, missiles, everything else will not help them," he said of the Russians. "Because we stand united. — Reuters



Israeli FM sees 'Abraham Accords' summit in Morocco

JERUSALEM: Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen (pictured) said on Monday he planned to attend a summit in March with counterparts from Arab countries that have drawn closer to Israel following a US-sponsored diplomatic drive in 2020.

Cohen, who took office last week as part of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's new hard-right coalition government, said the summit would be hosted by Morocco, according to a Foreign Ministry statement.

The statement did not name other countries. Israel has in the past cited Morocco, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan as belonging to the normalisation agreements dubbed the "Abraham Accords".

"Expanding the accords to other countries is not a matter of 'if' but of 'when,'" said Cohen, adding that Israel's ties with current partners had yielded \$2.85 billion in 2022 trade and "a significant contribution to security (and) regional stability".

Netanyahu, now in his sixth term, has voiced hope of establishing relations with Saudi Arabia, which shares Israel's worries about Iran.

— Reuters



A view of the Quneitra checkpoint across the fence separating the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights from Syria. — AFP

Israeli strikes on Syrian capital's airport kill four people

BEIRUT: Israeli missile strikes on the Syrian capital's airport on Monday killed four people including two soldiers and closed the runways for several hours, a rights monitor said.

This is the second time in less than seven months that Damascus International Airport — where Iranian-backed armed groups and Lebanese Hezbollah fighters are present — has been hit by Israel.

The attack around 2:00 am (23:00 GMT) put the airport out of service until 9:00 am (06:00 GMT), Syria's state news agency SANA and officials said.

Israel carried out the strike with "barrages of missiles targeting Damascus International Airport and its surroundings," a military source told SANA, which reported

that two Syrian soldiers were killed and two others wounded.

But the Britain-based monitoring group Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which relies on a wide network of sources on the ground in Syria, said "four fighters including two Syrian soldiers were killed".

The missiles also hit "positions for Hezbollah and pro-Iranian groups inside the airport and its surroundings, including a weapons warehouse", said Rami Abdul Rahman, head of the Observatory.

Flights later resumed after repairs of "the damage caused by Israeli aggression", Syria's transport ministry said in a statement.

"Air traffic has returned after we restored work on one of the

runways, while the process of repairing the second runway continues," transport ministry official Suleiman Khalil told AFP.

Since civil war broke out in Syria in 2011, Israel has carried out hundreds of air strikes against its neighbour, targeting government troops as well as allied Iran-backed forces and fighters from Lebanon's Shiite militant group Hezbollah.

The Israeli army, which said on Monday that "it does not comment on foreign reports", has repeatedly said it will not allow its archfoe Iran to gain a foothold in Syria.

On December 28, the head of the Israel Defence Forces Operations Directorate, Major General Oded Basiuk, presented

the military's "operational outlook" for 2023, where he said that the force "will not accept Hezbollah 2.0 in Syria", the army said on Twitter. "Our course of

action in Syria is an example of how continuous and persistent military action leads to shaping and influencing the entire region," Basiuk added. — AFP

Global economy faces tougher year in 2023: IMF

WASHINGTON: For much of the global economy, 2023 is going to be a tough year as the main engines of global growth - the United States, Europe and China - all experience weakening activity, the head of the International Monetary Fund said on Sunday.

The new year is going to be "tougher than the year we leave behind," IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva said on the CBS on Sunday morning news program "Face the Nation."

"Why? Because the three big economies - the US, EU and



Kristalina Georgieva

China - are all slowing down simultaneously," she said.

In October, the IMF cut its outlook for global economic growth in 2023, reflecting the continuing drag from the war in Ukraine as well as inflation pressures and the high interest rates engineered by central banks like the US Federal Reserve aimed at bringing those price pressures to heel.

Since then, China has scrapped its zero-Covid policy and embarked on a chaotic reopening of its economy, though

consumers there remain wary as coronavirus cases surge. In his first public comments since the change in policy, President Xi Jinping on Saturday called in a New Year's address for more effort and unity as China enters a "new phase."

"For the first time in 40 years, China's growth in 2022 is likely to be at or below global growth," Georgieva said.

Moreover, a "bushfire" of expected Covid infections there in the months ahead are likely to further hit its economy this year

and drag on both regional and global growth, said Georgieva, who travelled to China on IMF business late last month.

"I was in China last week, in a bubble in a city where there is zero Covid," she said. "But that is not going to last once people start travelling"

"For the next couple of months, it would be tough for China, and the impact on Chinese growth would be negative, the impact on the region will be negative, the impact on global growth will be negative," she said. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka freezes recruitment in fresh austerity drive

Sri Lanka began a fresh austerity drive on Monday, freezing government recruitment as new taxes and higher electricity prices kicked in with authorities trying to secure an IMF bailout.

The nation needs to achieve debt sustainability as a precondition to a \$2.9 billion bailout from the Washington-based lender after it defaulted in April as its economy went into crisis. The IMF has also asked Colombo to trim its 1.5 million strong public service, sharply



raise taxes and sell off loss-making state enterprises. A record 20,000 civil servants retired at the end of December after President Ranil Wickremesinghe reduced their retirement age from 65 to 60.

SRINAGAR

10 people killed in Kashmir violence

Ten people have been killed within six days in a sudden uptick in violence in Kashmir, officials said on Monday. Two gunmen suspected to be anti-India rebels opened fire on houses in the remote village of Dangri on Sunday, leaving four residents dead and five injured, police officer Mukesh Singh told reporters.

On Monday a seven-year-old child and another person were killed in an explosion near one of the houses, another police officer



said. An unexploded device was also found nearby and neutralised by a specialist squad, officers said. The deaths followed a firefight between government forces and suspected rebels.

WASHINGTON

Renner hospitalised after snow plow accident

Actor Jeremy Renner, who played Hawkeye in the Marvel "Avengers" movies, was in "critical but stable" condition in the hospital in Nevada, on Monday, the day after suffering a "traumatic injury" plowing snow, his publicist and officials said.

"As of now, we can confirm Jeremy is in critical but stable condition with injuries suffered after experiencing a weather-related accident while plowing snow earlier today," publicist, Samantha Mast said.



Oscar-nominated Renner, 51, has owned a home in Washoe County, Nevada for several years. That area in northern Nevada received heavy snowfall on New Year's Eve.



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In brief

■ LONDON



HARRY: I WANT MY FATHER AND BROTHER BACK

Britain's Prince Harry said his troubled relationship with the royal family "never needed to be this way" and he wants to get his father King Charles and his brother "back", in an excerpt from an interview with broadcaster ITV released on Monday.

"It never needed to be this way," he said in the clip. "They've shown absolutely no willingness to reconcile," he said. "I would like to get my father back; I would like to have my brother back."

Harry and his wife Meghan, officially known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, stepped down from royal duties in March 2020, saying they wanted to forge new lives in the United States away from media harassment.

■ BLANTYRE



MALAWI DELAYS REOPENING SCHOOLS OVER CHOLERA

Malawi has delayed the opening of public schools in the southern African country's two major cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe, the health minister said on Monday, to try to slow down a surge in cholera deaths.

The total number of cases and deaths has accelerated to 17,824 and 595 respectively since cases were first reported in March, with the mortality rate increasing to 3.34 per cent, according to the Health Ministry. Cholera is an annual problem during Malawi's rainy months from November to March, where the number of deaths is around 100 a year. But the current outbreak is expected to be the worst yet.

■ BERLIN



GERMAN MINISTER UNDER FIRE FOR NEW YEAR'S VIDEO

Filmed on the streets of Berlin amid chaotic New Year's celebrations a video address from the German defence minister posted on social media drew criticism on Monday for its tone-deaf message.

Barely audible above the sound of exploding fireworks, Christine Lambrecht reflected on a year ending with "war raging in the middle of Europe".

The conflict in Ukraine had led to "a lot of special experiences" and the chance for "many encounters with great and interesting people", Lambrecht said in the clip posted on her personal Instagram account.

QATAR IMPOSES SCREENING FOR TRAVELLERS FROM CHINA

Some in China active after Covid infections

BEIJING: Some people in the Chinese cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Wuhan braved the cold and a rise in Covid-19 infections to return to regular activity on Monday, raising the prospect of a boost to the economy as more recover from infections.

Among those who gathered to sled or ice skate on a frozen lake in the capital's Shichahai Lake Park, some were upbeat about the opening-up after China dropped stringent "zero-Covid" measures on December 7 to adopt a strategy of living with the virus.

The switch followed protests over the policy championed by President Xi Jinping, marking the strongest show of public defiance in his decade-old presidency and coinciding with grim growth figures for the country's \$17 trillion economy.

However, a wave of infections has erupted nationwide since the dismantling of the zero-Covid



Women walk along an alley in Beijing on Monday. – AFP

policy, fuelling international concern and prompting some countries to impose curbs on travellers from China.

"After the end of this lockdown, we don't have to scan the health

code any more, nor do we have to check the travel code," said one of those in the park, Yang, who gave only one name.

"So we are free now." Also at the lake was Zhong, a

22-year-old college student, who said he had stayed home for two or three weeks after getting infected.

"Now I can go out and it's good timing for the New Year's Day holiday," he said. "I want to go around in Beijing, have a look and feel the festive mood."

Monday was a public holiday but traffic in the capital has built up again in the last few days as people flock to outdoor sites, although business is still slow in some smaller, confined locations, such as restaurants.

The owner of a Beijing seafood restaurant said patrons had not returned to full strength.

"I expect this situation to linger through the Lunar New Year holiday," said Chen, who gave only his surname. "I am counting on business to be more normal after the holiday."

In the central city of Wuhan, where the pandemic began three years ago, people were

not as anxious any more, a man surnamed Wu told Reuters.

"Work production, life and entertainment are all getting back to normal levels," said Wu, a tutor at a private training centre.

During the New Year's holiday period, 52.7 million domestic tourist trips were made, an increase of 0.44% over the same period a year earlier and up 42.8% over the corresponding period in 2019, according to government data posted on Monday.

China's biggest holiday, Lunar New Year, begins on Jan. 21 this year, when the railway network is expected to carry 5.5 million passengers, state broadcaster CCTV has said.

As expectations for holiday travel grow, authorities at Tibet's spectacular Potala Palace said it would open for visitors from January 3, after shutting last August due to a Covid-19 outbreak. — Reuters

Where was the Metaverse in 2022?

At year-end the metaverse may still seem distant to many, but its backers continue to bet high on its potential future

LOOKING FOR THE METAVERSE

The metaverse is theoretically the future of the internet, a 3D virtual world where people will be able to interact with each other as avatars

Metaverse market share, 2021
By applications associated with metaverse concepts

According to analysis by Fortune Business Insights



Meta Quest Pro VR headset, released by Meta Oct 2022

A COSTLY BET

Mark Zuckerberg rebranded Facebook to Meta in October 2021

\$36 billion

The amount Meta invested into its key metaverse division named **Reality Labs** since 2019, according to Business Insider

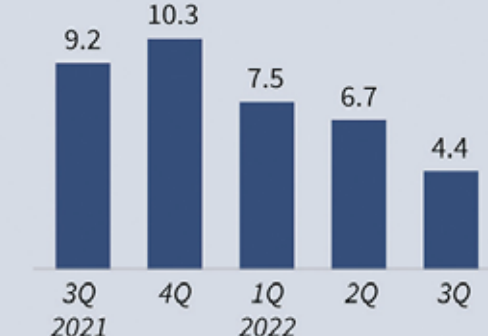
11,000

The number of workers **Zuckerberg laid off** in Nov 2022, in a restructuring couched as his ongoing strategy towards the metaverse future

25% drop

In Meta's share price after poor Q3 results in October 2022

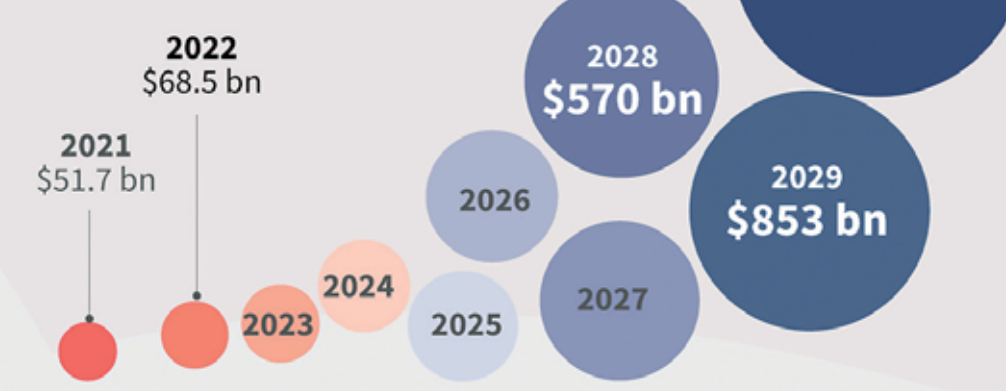
Meta net income
In billions of dollars



PROJECTED MARKET

According to analysis by Precedence research

Global metaverse market size
In billions of dollars



Sources: Meta/Tech News /Retail Wire /Fortune Business Insight/Precedence Research/Businessinsider.com

AFP

Etihad, Emirates ranked safest airlines in world

FRANKFURT: Etihad and Emirates airlines have topped a global aviation ranking, rated the safest in an analysis by the Hamburg-based air accident agency JACDEC.

Germany's flagship airline Lufthansa came 14th in the global safety ranking of the 25 largest companies, according to the report appearing in the Aero International aviation magazine. The report noted that 2022's international air traffic had been largely safe, after the lull due to the coronavirus pandemic.

However, analysts said that new uncertainties have arisen following Russia's war on Ukraine. In the rating, Russian airline Aeroflot was downgraded significantly, coming in 25th place, due to the illegal admission of Western-leased jets to the Russian register and the interrupted supply of aircraft spare parts in Russia because of sanctions.

Experts cited the crash of a China Eastern Airlines Boeing 737-800 on March 21 as the most serious accident of the past year. All 132 people on board died. JACDEC recorded 19 air accidents with fatalities worldwide, in which a total of 233 people died, 60 more deaths than in 2021, when there were also significantly fewer flights. — dpa

Final farewell for Pele, Brazil's football 'King'

SANTOS: Brazilians bid a final farewell this week to football giant Pele, starting on Monday with a 24-hour public wake at the stadium of his long-time team, Santos.

The oceanside home of the team nicknamed "Peixe" — "fish" in Portuguese — is expecting a huge influx of fans looking to honour the "King" of football, who died aged 82 on Thursday after a long battle with cancer.

Stadium doors will open at 10:00 am local time (1300 GMT). The coffin bearing the remains of



Edinho (R), son of late Brazilian football legend Pele, prays next to his coffin during his wake at the Urbano Caldeira stadium in Santos on Monday. — AFP

the only player to have won three World Cups will be displayed in the centre of the field.

Known as Vila Belmiro after the neighbourhood where it is located, the black-and-white stadium has a capacity of 16,000 people.

In the stands, three giant flags could be seen on Sunday, one with an image of Pele displaying the famous number 10 on his jersey.

Another bore the message "Long live the king"; the third said simply, "Pele 82 years."

Entry to the stadium will be allowed until 10:00 am Tuesday, officials said. After that, a procession will be held through the streets of Santos, a port city about 75 kilometres (47 miles) from the state capital Sao Paulo.

The parade will pass the house of Pele's mother, 100-year-old Celeste Arantes, who is unaware that her world-famous son has died.

"She doesn't know," Pele's sister Maria Lucia do Nascimento told ESPN on Friday. "She is not conscious." — AFP

Education trends that cannot be ignored in 2023



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

The world of education is seeing changes at an unprecedented pace and not being aware of them will only make teachers, students and others involved in education, including parents, play a catch up game. Some changes may be temporary and not stand the test of time, but most are part of an ongoing debate in which students are equal stakeholders in their education and their voices need to be heard. Here are the important trends to look out for in 2023. The growth of hybrid and flexible learning: Following the pandemic lockdowns, there is no turning back to traditional classroom teaching, where teachers give information and students absorb it. The focus in a classroom has shifted from

teaching to learning. Research is showing that students would like to have material to read outside class, with classroom time being used more effectively for discussions and practice. Incorporating soft skills: Although teamwork and critical thinking have always been part of a classroom experience, there is now a conscious application of these skills in a way that makes students aware of how they are using them. Indeed, a top recruitment company, suggests soft skills include communication, adaptability, creativity and time management. Students need to know that they are actually being given, and are using these skills in their classrooms. Technology-driven teaching:

EDUCATION IS MOVING TOWARD MORE RESPONSIBLE LEARNING WHOSE ENDGAME IS NOT SIMPLY A GOOD JOB

Research has shown that gaming is one of the most effective ways of conveying new concepts and ideas. Growing up with visual stimuli, young learners are digital natives and learning needs to use these innate skills to convey information, ideas as well as their application. Moving away from 4-year university programmes: Internationally, only 6.5 per cent of the population has a university degree, according to the Huffington Post. Even in developed countries

like the United States of America, only 34 per cent have a college or a university degree. This means that secondary school education must embrace other options which are becoming popular among students, including entrepreneurship and technical education. Socially responsible education: With the huge challenges of climate change, education is moving toward more responsible learning whose endgame is not simply a good job. Social responsibility, empathy and sustainability are important concepts which will be focused on in the coming years. Online learning: In many ways, education has become democratised through technology. MOOCs [Massive open online

courses] are often freely available to those with access to the internet. These courses help to re-skill, catch up on education or pursue hobbies. They are a real game-changer, as expert and academic knowledge is no longer behind expensive books and paid scholarship. Education is an ever growing, changing and dynamic field. Very often, it reflects the concerns and thoughts of society. By not recognising changes in the skills and interests of learners, education is in danger of being outdated. This does not mean that all trends and fashions need to be implemented, but understanding key trends in education will ensure that students, young or old, will benefit from a system that is thoughtful and proactive.

War-themed video game fuels wave of misinformation

ANUJ CHOPRA, VALENTINA-PAULA CABESCU AND UZAIR RIZVI

Troops battle through burning streets. Missiles take down fighter jets. Drones pulverize tanks. The dramatic visuals have the trappings of real-life combat, but they are clips from video games fuelling misinformation. Footage from the war-themed Arma 3 video game, often marked “live” or “breaking news” to make it appear genuine, has been used repeatedly in recent months in fake videos about the Russian offensive in Ukraine. The frequency and ease with which gaming footage is mistaken as real, even by some media broadcasters, and shared as authentic news on social media highlight what researchers call its serious potential to spread misinformation. “The fact that it keeps happening is a reminder of how easy it is to fool people,” Claire Wardle, co-director of the Information Futures Lab at Brown University, said. “As video game visuals get more sophisticated, CGI (computer-generated imagery) can, at a quick glance, look real. People need to know how to verify imagery, including looking at metadata so that these mistakes don’t get made, especially by newsrooms.” Arma 3, whose Czech-based developers promise “true combat game play in a massive military sandbox,” allows players to create various battlefield scenarios using aircraft, tanks and a host of weapons. Players often upload hours of gaming footage on platforms such as YouTube and researchers blame its easy availability for its misuse. In the comments under one Arma 3 video titled “Ukraine’s counteroffensive!” — which simulated a missile strike on a column of tanks — a user, who apparently took it as real, wrote: “We must ask Ukraine after this war to train Nato forces how to fight.” “While it’s flattering that Arma 3 simulates modern war conflicts in such a realistic way, we are certainly not pleased that it can be mistaken for real-life combat footage and used as war propaganda,” a representative of Bohemia Interactive, the game’s creator, said in a statement. “We’ve been trying to fight against such content by flagging these videos to platform providers, but it’s very ineffective. With every video taken down, ten more are uploaded each day.” In recent years, Arma 3 videos have been used in false depictions of other conflicts, including Syria, Afghanistan and Palestine, with the clips often debunked by global fact checkers. — AFP

Russia’s war could make it India’s world



Roger Cohen

The writer is a journalist, author for NYT

Seated in the domed, red sandstone government building unveiled by the British Raj less than two decades before India threw off imperial rule, S Jaishankar, the Indian foreign minister, needs no reminder of how the tides of history sweep away antiquated systems to usher in the new. Such, he believes, is today’s transformative moment. A “world order which is still very, very deeply Western,” as he put it in an interview, is being hurried out of existence by the impact of the war in Ukraine, to be replaced by a world of “multialignment” where countries will choose their own “particular policies and preferences and interests.” Certainly, that is what India has done since the war in Ukraine began on February 24. It has rejected American and European pressure at the United Nations to condemn the Russian invasion, turned Moscow into its largest oil supplier and dismissed the perceived hypocrisy of the West. Far from apologetic, its tone has been unabashed and its self-interest broadly naked. “I would still like to see a more rules-based world,” Jaishankar said. “But when people start pressing you in the name of a rules-based order to give up, to compromise on what are very deep interests, at that stage, I’m afraid it’s important to contest that and, if necessary, to call it out.” In other words, with its almost 1.4 billion inhabitants, soon to overtake

INDIA IS IN NO MOOD TO CUT TIES WITH PUTIN’S RUSSIA, WHICH SUPPORTED THE COUNTRY WITH WEAPONS OVER DECADES OF NONALIGNMENT, WHILE THE UNITED STATES COSSETED PAKISTAN

China as the world’s most populous country, India has a need for cheap Russian oil to sustain its 7 per cent annual growth and lift millions out of poverty. That need is non negotiable. India gobbles up all the Russian oil it requires, even some extra for export. For Jaishankar, time is up on the mindset that “Europe’s problems are the world’s problems, but the world’s problems are not Europe’s,” as he put it in June. The Ukraine war, which has provoked moral outrage in the West over Russian atrocities, has caused a different anger elsewhere, one focused on a skewed and outdated global distribution of power. As Western sanctions against Russia have driven up energy, food and fertiliser costs, causing acute economic difficulties in poorer countries,

resentment of the United States and Europe has stirred in Asia and Africa. Grinding trench warfare on European soil seems the distant affair of others. Its economic cost feels immediate and palpable. “Since February, Europe has imported six times the fossil fuel energy from Russia that India has,” Jaishankar said. “So if a \$60,000-per-capita society feels it needs to look after itself, and I accept that as legitimate, they should not expect a \$2,000-per-capita society to take a hit.” Here comes Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s India, pursuing its own interests with a new assertiveness, throwing off any sense of inferiority and rejecting unalloyed alignment with the West. But which India will strut the 21st-century global stage, and how will its influence be felt? The Ukraine war, compounding the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, has fuelled the country’s ascent. Together they have pushed corporations to make global supply chains less risky by diversifying towards an open India and away from China’s surveillance state. They have accentuated global economic turbulence from which India is relatively insulated by its huge domestic market. Those factors have contributed to buoyant projections that India, now No 5, will be the world’s third-largest economy by 2030, behind only the United States and China. On a recent visit to India, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that the United States wanted to “diversify away from countries that present geopolitical and security risks to our supply chain,” singling out India as among “trusted trading partners.” Nonetheless, India is in no mood to cut ties with Putin’s Russia, which supported the country with weapons over decades of nonalignment, while the United States cosseted India’s neighbour, Pakistan. Even in a country starkly fractured over Modi’s policies, this approach has had nearly universal backing. “For many years, the United States did not stand by us, but Moscow has,” Amitabh Kant, who is responsible for India’s presidency of the Group of 20 that began this month, said in an interview. New Delhi has enough rivals, he said: “Try, on top of China and Pakistan, putting Russia against you!” — New York Times



A production line at a tea manufacturer near Chennai. – NYT

Create your colourful future

With the new year upon us, what an apt time for introspection on the year gone by, a pertinent time to ponder on our valuable mistakes and a great time to gain insight upon reflection of events, moments and times 2022 brought us. Now is the perfect time to celebrate our wins too.

Out with the old and in with the new, as they say.

Like with anything new-fangled, let's grant ourselves the curiosity for new discoveries, creative imagination and enhanced perspectives which can overtime with consistent daily effort, break down old paradigms allowing the intake and learning of new phenomena.

Let's gather all the experiences, positive and negative from 2022 and see if there are any similarities between them.

Dissect your behaviours for patterns whereby procrastination possibly prevailed due to your perfectionistic tendencies.

Did these likely stall your progression to a fruitful outcome? If so, time to rethink and rework your action plan, steps and strategies.

What do you envision to accomplish over the next 12 months?

What is that thing you have been yearning to do but have been putting off?

With a whole year upon us, establish monthly and quarterly tasks and goals.

Let's set ourselves up for success from the onset and implement small daily steps to allow the incremental flow and momentum of learning and growth.

Let's get out of our heads more



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NEW
DISCOVERIES,
CREATIVE
IMAGINATION
AND ENHANCED
PERSPECTIVES
CAN BREAK
DOWN OLD
PARADIGMS

and tune into our hearts whereby the connection to our authentic self will be tethered and consequently the wisdom of our intuition will prevail; the guiding light we were born to follow.

It's especially prevalent in these times, with the information age in full swing and countless influences from so many varying platforms on the rise, we need to disconnect from external stimuli more in order to connect with our truth more, regardless of its representation.

The more we introspect in order to allow our flaws and insecurities to surface and the more we work on understanding our wounds, our triggers and the root causes of our challenges, the more we can work on attaining our goals.

When we make peace with the past, the present is so much lighter and in turn the future considerably brighter.

I invite you to create a space to sit quietly everyday.

Take ten long deep, slow breaths and allow your creative mind to wander imagining a year ahead filled with opportunity and growth – professionally, physically and emotionally.

Visualise embracing the challenges you will undoubtedly face and know that it's OK if you make mistakes, view them as valuable lessons, get back up and try again.

Let's make 2023 a year of growth, contemplation, adaptation and progression.

Goal setting is a powerful process for thinking about your ideal future and for motivating yourself to turn this vision into reality.

The year ahead is a beautiful blank canvas, here's to creating your colourful future.

BURY BAD LUCK



Devotees lie down and pray inside coffins to get rid of bad luck and to reborn again for a fresh start in the New Year at a temple in Nonthaburi, in the outskirts of Bangkok, Thailand, on Monday. – Reuters

The looming financial contagion

The fact that the world did not experience a systemic financial crisis in 2022 is a minor miracle, given the surge in inflation and interest rates, not to mention a massive increase in geopolitical risk.

But with public and private debt having risen to record levels during the now-bygone era of ultra-low interest rates, and recession risks high, the global financial system faces a huge stress test.

A crisis in an advanced economy – for example, Japan or Italy – would be difficult to contain.

True, tighter regulation has reduced risks to the core banking sectors, but that has only led to risks shifting elsewhere in the financial system.

Rising interest rates, for example, have put huge pressure on private-equity firms that borrowed heavily to buy up property.

Now, with housing and commercial real estate on the cusp of a sharp, sustained drop, some of those firms will most likely go bust.

In that case, the core banks that provided much of the funding for private equity real-estate purchases could be on the hook.

That has not happened yet, partly because lightly regulated firms are under less pressure to mark their books to market.

But suppose interest rates remain stubbornly high even during a recession (a distinct possibility as we exit the ultra-low-rate era).

In that case, widespread payment delinquencies could make it hard to maintain appearances.

The United Kingdom's recent financial misfortunes demonstrate the kind of unknowns that could pop up as global interest rates increase.



Kenneth Rogoff,

Professor of Economics and Public Policy at Harvard University

JAPAN, WHERE THE CENTRAL BANK HAS KEPT INTEREST RATES AT ZERO OR NEGATIVE FOR DECADES, MIGHT BE THE WORLD'S MOST ACUTELY VULNERABLE COUNTRY

Although former Prime Minister Liz Truss took all the blame for the near-meltdown of her country's bond markets and pension system, the main culprit turned out to be pension-fund managers who essentially bet that long-term interest rates would not rise too fast.

Japan, where the central bank has kept interest rates at zero or negative for decades, might be the world's most acutely vulnerable country.

In addition to ultra-low rates, the Bank of Japan has also engaged in yield curve control, capping five-year and ten-year bonds at around zero.

Given the increase in real interest rates around the world, the yen's sharp depreciation, and high inflationary pressures, Japan

may finally exit its near-zero era.

Higher interest rates would immediately put pressure on the Japanese government, as the country's debt amounts to 260 per cent of GDP.

If one were to integrate the BOJ's balance sheet, roughly half the government debt bought by the private sector is effectively in short-maturity bonds.

A 2 per cent interest-rate increase would be manageable in a high-growth environment, but Japan's growth prospects will most likely decline as long-term real interest rates continue to rise.

Japan's enormous government debt almost certainly constrains policymakers' options for managing long-term growth.

Still, given the government's taxation powers and the possibility

of inflating away the debt, the problem should be manageable.

The real question is whether there are hidden vulnerabilities in the financial sector that could be unearthed if inflation continues creeping up and Japan's real interest rates increase to US levels.

That has been the norm through most of the past three decades, even though Japan's inflation expectations are currently much lower than in the US.

The good news is that after nearly three decades of ultra-low interest rates, Japanese expectations for near-zero inflation are well anchored, albeit likely to change if today's inflationary pressures prove long-lasting.

The bad news is that the persistence of these conditions

could easily lure some investors into believing that rates will never go up, or at least not by much.

This means that bets on interest rates remaining relatively low might become rampant in Japan, as they previously had in the UK.

In this scenario, further monetary tightening could blow things up, creating instability and adding to the government's budget problems.

Italy is another example of latent risk. In many ways, ultra-low interest rates have been the glue holding the eurozone together.

Open-ended guarantees for Italian debt, in line with former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi's 2012 promise to do "whatever it takes," were cheap when Germany could borrow at zero or negative rates.

But this year's rapid interest-rate hikes have changed that calculus. Today, Germany's economy looks more like it did in the early 2000s, when some called it "the sick man of Europe."

And while Europe is comparatively new to ultra-low rates, one has to be concerned that a sustained wave of monetary tightening could, as with Japan, reveal enormous pockets of vulnerability.

If there is a global recession without a financial crisis, there is a decent chance that the coming economic downturn will be milder than expected.

In an environment of negative growth, high inflation, and rising real interest rates, that would be a very fortunate outcome.

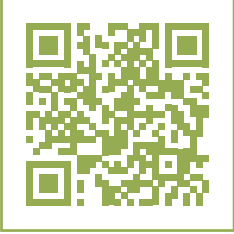
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Customers buy lucky bags containing items valued more than the cost, traditionally sold for the New Year's Day sales, at a department store in the Ikebukuro district of Tokyo on Sunday. – AFP

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Al Nasr rejoice comeback HM Cup win

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 2

Al Nasr players and coaching staff expressed their delight after staging a brilliant comeback in the HM Cup hockey final in Muscat on Sunday night.

“We are really delighted to make a comeback like that in the final. We were against a strong side also that enjoyed good start in the match,” Al Nasr head coach Mohammed al Battrani told Oman Observer.

Al Battrani said the team needed a trophy this season after Al Nasr missed out in the semifinal of the Oman Hockey

League against Seeb.

“We lost a close match against Seeb in the Oman Hockey League semifinal although we had a good OHL. We didn’t wanted to repeat such mistakes in the HM Cup final.”

Ahli Sidab won the OHA League in October after beating Seeb 4-1 in the final. Ahli Sidab thrashed Sohar 6-0 and Seeb edged Al Nasr 2-1 in the semifinals.

Seeb edged Salalah 6-5 in penalty shoot-out to finish third after the play-off match on December 25.

The experienced local coach had reinvigorated the Al Nasr team after they were behind two goals after the first quarter of the



Al Nasr coach Mohammed al Battrani

match at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

“I told the boys to stay calm and wait for the opportunities. We were still to reach our rhythm in the first quarter. The players did commendably well to score the first goal in the second quarter and also stopping the Ahli Sidab players from extending their lead.”

NO LOOKING BACK

Al Nasr did not look back after Osama al Khamis netted the equaliser in the start of the third quarter. The Salalah side then went on to score another three goals to clinch their ninth title in HM Cup.

“After the equaliser, our players in supreme form and I was

confident of winning the match,” Al Battrani added.

Star of the match for Al Nasr, Ravinder Valmiki from India, said it was a matter of time in the game that they scored the goals after conceding two.

“We played a great game of hockey against a quality and difficult team. Though the score is 5-2 it doesn’t indicate the one-sided contest. Our players and our execution were brilliant today. I’m happy to play a part in the victory,” the Indian Olympian said.

Valmiki inspired the Al Nasr comeback by controlling the game in the middle and giving crucial assists for their goals.

Ahli Sidab head coach Aiman

bin Abdullah al Katheri rued their lack of success from penalty corners after finding first goal from the first penalty corner of the match.

“We couldn’t strike from several penalty corners we earned barring the first one we converted to a goal. Al Nasr played well after the first quarter. We were not able to keep our tempo after leading by two goals. We were trying for another goal, but left too many gaps in the defence,” Al Katheri said.

The twelve-time champions also missed some close opportunities by narrow margins as Al Nasr prevailed 5-2 to emerge champions of 52nd His Majesty’s Cup hockey championship.



AL ATTIAH SURVIVES ROCKY ROUTE TO WIN DAKAR STAGE

AL ULA, SAUDI ARABIA: Defending champion Nasser al Attiyah (Toyota) used all his experience of the rocky conditions to win a tough 430km second stage from Sea Camp to Al Ula in the 45th Dakar Rally on Monday.

As many of his rivals were held up by a series of punctures, including Sebastien Loeb (Prodrive) who lost almost an hour and a half, the Qatari Al Attiyah ploughed to a provisional 14-second win over Erik Van Loon (Overdrive).

Carlos Sainz (Audi) was third man home, 5 minutes 5 seconds back, which was enough to give the Spaniard the lead in the provisional general classification, 2min 12sec ahead of Al Attiyah.

Mathieu Serradori (Century) is running third, 24min 55sec behind Sainz.

"It was absolutely the time to

attack and drive a good stage," said Al Attiyah.

"It was not an easy day. There were a lot of rocks and the navigation wasn't easy. We had one flat tyre, one puncture at the beginning, but after that we tried to be really careful in the stony places. In the sand we pushed and I'm quite happy."

Loeb's hopes of competing for a first ever Dakar title hang in the balance after a stage he described as a "car wreck".

"The whole special was hell," said a stony-faced Loeb as he stepped out of his car which was missing its bonnet, torn off during an impact.

"At the driving level, (it was) completely uninteresting, driving in rocks in slow motion, trying to cross without puncturing and, well, we had three punctures."

"We did everything to drive

slowly but there was nothing we could do, it was not at all suitable for a car like ours."

The nine-time world rally champion, who finished second last year, is now down in 31st in the overall standings 1hr 21min off the lead.

'MAKING JOKES'

Meanwhile, American rider Mason Klein took the overall lead in the motorcycling category after winning Monday's stage.

"Most of the day I was just following the other guys and then at the last part they were making jokes about me leading out or not leading out and letting them all do the work," said Klein.

"So, I said, fine, I'll take my turn and I just left them and it was good."

His compatriot Ricky Brabec had led overnight but could post

only the 15th fastest time and was 8min 19sec slower than KTM rider Klein.

In spite of picking up a penalty, Klein timed 1min 9sec faster than Germany's Sebastien Buhler on the stage with another American Skyler Howes finishing third 1min 13sec adrift.

The 21-year-old Californian benefitted from some tactical slowing down from Australian rider Daniel Sanders who was comfortably leading the stage before opting to ease off in the last kilometres to avoid having to open the way on Tuesday.

"I was pushing a lot at the start to make up a lot of time and that was working, but then I knew we still had 200km to go, so I backed off a little bit and sat back for tomorrow and sit back in the pack," said the GasGas rider.

— AFP

Pakistan strike back after Conway century

KARACHI: Off-spinner Agha Salman and pacer Naseem Shah helped Pakistan derail New Zealand to 309-6 on Monday after opener Devon Conway scored a brilliant hundred on the first day of the second Test in Karachi.

Salman grabbed 3-55 and Naseem took 2-44 to trigger a New Zealand middle order slump which saw the tourists lose five wickets for 45 runs during the final session, slumping from 234-1 to 279-6.

At close, Tom Blundell and Ish Sodhi were batting on 30 and 11 respectively as they try to revive New Zealand's innings.

"We did win those first two sessions, but the way Pakistan bounced back in that last session certainly brought them back in the game," said Conway.

"Personally, it's been a good ride so far. It's just nice to get an opportunity to play and contribute for the team," he added.

Conway, who scored 122, put on 134 for the opening wicket with Tom Latham (71) after New Zealand won the toss on a National Stadium pitch that had traces of grass but did not initially support bowlers.

He steadied the innings with another 100-run stand for the second wicket with Kane Williamson who made 36, but Pakistan pulled back after the visitors were 226-1 at tea.

Salman had Conway caught behind by Sarfaraz Ahmed soon after, to make it 2-234 before six runs later Naseem dismissed Williamson in the same manner.

Conway struck 16 boundaries and a six in his 257-minute stay at the crease.

Salman then struck twice, beating Daryl Mitchell's defence for three and had Henry Nicholls caught behind with a turning delivery for 26.

"Whenever I get to bowl I want to contribute," said Salman, who completed 100 wickets.

"This pitch is different from the one used in the first Test and once it dried it took more turn."

Abrar Ahmed took his only wicket by trapping Michael Bracewell for nought.

The two-match series is tied at 0-0 after the first Test -- also in Karachi -- ended in a tame draw.

In the morning, Pakistan's three-pronged pace attack looked helpless until Naseem struck in the sixth over after lunch, trapping Latham leg-before with a sharp incoming delivery.

Latham, who scored 113 in the first match, hit nine boundaries in his 100-ball knock, his 24th Test half-century.

Conway was lucky to survive a sharp chance when Saud Shakeel failed to hold on to a miscued drive off Hasan Ali on 89.

— AFP



Muscat CT beat IAS, AER stun Zawawi Powertech

MUSCAT: Muscat CT beat IAS CT by 48 runs and AER Bin Ali stunned Zawawi Powertech claiming victory by 22 runs in the Premier Division League Season 2022-23 powered by Muscat Pharmacy at the weekend.

On Friday, IAS CT put Muscat CT to bat first. Muscat CT lost their first wicket in the first over of the match.

Shoaib Khan (49 off 64 balls) and Ashish Odedra stitched a 87-run partnership to set up a decent total. Ayaan Khan's half century along with Suraj Kumar's ball-to-ball 40 powered Muscat CT to reach 238 in 50 overs.

Rana Naeem and Waseem Akhtar were the strikers with the ball for IAS CT picking 2 wickets each.

In reply, IAS struggled to get going with no pair of their batsmen being able to carry their innings.

Muhammed Aqeel (33 off 46) and Usman Haider's (46 off 65) innings kept them lurking in the game but was not enough to take them over the line. IAS CT bundled down to 190 with Ayaan Khan picking 2 wickets and 6 of Muscat CT bowlers picking a wicket each.

ARAFAT TAKES FIVE WICKETS

On Saturday, Zawawi Powertech



Mohsin Qureshi, Aamir Kaleem and Arafat Islam of AER Bin Ali.

put AER Bin Ali to bat first. AER got off to a stable start notching 28 runs for the first wicket partnership. Zawawi Powertech



Ayaan Khan of Muscat CT.

came fiery at the AER batters not allowing any of the following to settle. AER bundled down for just 106 courtesy of a blazing 4

wickets spell from Yashas GL and 2 wickets each bagged by Suhil K and Nishad KS.

In reply, AER Bin Ali looked aggressive in their approach to nullify the Powertech batters. Powertech lost half

their side in the powerplay for just 44 runs after disciplined bowling from Mohsin Qureshi and Arafat Islam. Powertech kept losing wickets with just Kalaiaarasan (17 not out off 11 balls) left stranded as the last man as they wrapped up for just 84.

Arafat Islam picked up 5 wickets while Mohsin Qureshi and Aamir Kaleem bagged 2

wickets each. AER Bin Ali in the process registered their first victory defeating unbeaten Zawawi Powertech.

BRIEF SCORES

Muscat CT 238-5 in 50 overs (Ashish Odedra 56 (103b) 3x4, 1x6, Ayaan Khan 50 (57b) 3x4; Rana Naeem 2-34, Waseem Akhtar 2-46) beat IAS CT 190 all out in 45.1 overs (Usman Haider 46 (65b) 3x4, 3x6; Ayaan Khan 2-35) by 48 runs.

AER Bin Ali 106 all out in 34.2 overs (Usama Aqeel 20 (27b) 3x4; Yashas GL 4-23, Suhil K 2-7, Nishad KS 2-12) beat Zawawi Powertech 84 all out in 18 overs (Kalaiaarasan N 17 n.o. (11b) 2x4, 1x6; Arafat Islam 5-31, Mohsin Qureshi 2-21, Aamir Kaleem 2-24) by 22 runs.

De Minaur hands second defeat to Nadal

SYDNEY: World number two Rafael Nadal slumped to a second-straight defeat at the United Cup on Monday in a setback to his Australian Open preparations, but Stefanos Tsitsipas and Iga Swiatek were both on song.

There was also more misery for former world number two Alexander Zverev, who, like Nadal, suffered a second loss to start his season, this time at the hands of Taylor Fritz.

Spanish 22-time Grand Slam winner Nadal surprisingly crashed in his season-opening match on Saturday to 14th-ranked Cameron Norrie. And he again succumbed after winning the first set, going down 3-6, 6-1, 7-5 to Australia's 24th-ranked Alex De Minaur in Sydney, including losing six games in a row in the second set.

"Honestly, I couldn't be happier that I managed to get my first win over Rafa on this court, it's no secret this is my favourite court in the world," said De Minaur.

"Rafa is a hell of a competitor and what he has been able to do for this sport is truly astounding so I'm just honoured. It's a dream come true."

It went with serve to 2-2 in the



first set, but Nadal played some loose shots and a double fault handed De Minaur a break point, then he sent a forehand long to go 2-3 behind.

But the Australian couldn't sustain the pressure and Nadal broke straight back.

After a slow start, the Spaniard found his groove and in a devastating burst won the next three games to take the set.

De Minaur appeared deflated and was broken again on his first serve of the second set, but he flicked a switch to reel off six games

in a row to leave Nadal stunned.

They exchanged breaks in the third set before a string of unforced errors from Nadal allowed De Minaur to break again for 6-5 and serve out for the win.

The mixed-team tournament features 18 countries playing in

Sydney, Brisbane and Perth.

The winners of the two groups in each city advance to a city final on Wednesday, with whoever comes through that making the final four.

Neither Spain nor Australia can progress from Group D in Sydney, with Norrie's Britain already the confirmed winner.

They will play the United States in the city final after Fritz and Madison Keys put their country through against Germany.

RUSTY

World number nine Fritz beat Zverev 6-1, 6-4 in just 64 minutes.

It followed the German's loss to 81st-ranked Czech Jiri Lehecka on Saturday in his first competitive match since tearing three right ankle ligaments during his French Open semifinal against Nadal in June.

"It was tough to judge my level because I feel he's coming back from injury, he's a bit rusty, he was giving me a lot of free points," said Fritz, who had a breakthrough year in 2022 with titles at Indian Wells, Tokyo and Eastbourne.

"But I'm really happy with it."

Keys swept past Jule Niemeier 6-2, 6-3.

World number one Swiatek gave Poland a 1-0 lead against Switzerland in a winner-takes-all tie that will decide Group B in Brisbane, beating Belinda Bencic 6-3, 7-6 (7/3).

"I'm a perfectionist, but I'm super happy with my performance today," said Swiatek.

"On this fast surface it was really, really hard so I'm really happy that I could close it."

Italy need a win against eliminated Norway in Group E to advance at Brazil's expense with Martina Trevisan delivering them an early lead by dispatching Malene Helgo 7-5, 3-6, 6-4.

In Perth, Belgium need to defeat Greece at least 4-1 to qualify from Group A and Alison Van Uytvanck held off an inspired Despina Papamichail 7-5, 2-6, 6-3 to give them a 1-0 lead.

But world number four Tsitsipas continued his good early form with a 6-3, 6-2 win over David Goffin to level the tie. "Playing David is never easy," Tsitsipas said. "I was relaxed and hung in there point after point." — AFP

QMMF unveils revised Qatar Rally for February

LUSAIL, QATAR: The Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) will host round two of the 2023 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (Merc) for the second successive season on February 16 to 18.

Officials at the QMMF have laid on a slightly revised three-day format that offers 13 timed special stages and 209.69km competitive kilometres in a route of 618.52km.

The Sultanate of Oman will arrange the opening rally in the six-event series on January 26-28 and the Qatar event will then be followed by further rounds in Kuwait (March 16-18), Jordan (May 18-20), Lebanon (September 1-3) and Cyprus (September 22-24).

Scrutineering facilities and the media centre will be based at the LCSC Karting Academy for the first time. After technical checks on Wednesday and Thursday (February 15 and 16), the event will get underway with the traditional pre-event press conference and ceremonial start.

The competitive action fires into life with a new floodlit 3.27km super special stage at the LCSC Karting Academy from 20.00hrs on Thursday evening. The demanding Qatar deserts will then play host to two days of competitive action. Two loops of three specials are planned for Friday (February 17) with competitors tackling the challenging Al Khor special and revised gravel tests at Ras Laffan and Al Thakira in the north of the country. Two passes through a new stage at Waab Al Mashrab and similar stages to last year at Al Waab and Umm Birka are on the agenda for Saturday (February 18) before the post-event press conference, prize giving and ceremonial finish take centre stage from 18.30hrs onwards.

The rally will be held under the chairmanship of QMMF President Abdulrahman al Mannai, senior committee member Abdulrazaq al Kuwari and the QMMF's Executive Director Amro al Hamad. Portugal's



Nasser Saleh al Attiyah is the defending champion.

Generous concessions on offer to international and GCC entrants

New floodlit super special stage at LCSC Karting Academy

Pedro Almeida will work as the Clerk of the Course alongside his deputy, Rashed al Sulaiti.

"After the success of the Qatar International Rally in 2022, that attracted several exciting names from the world of rallying, we are particularly excited about hosting the 2023 event," said QMMF Executive Director Amro al Hamad. The QMMF has also announced a series of generous concessions for international and GCC competitors keen to tackle the Qatar event. International competitors (cars and T4 entries) will be given a \$6,000 shipping allowance, with GCC entrants receiving \$3,000, subject to vehicles passing scrutineering and administrative checks.

Entry fees will also be returned and competitor entering before the first cut off date will be awarded a bonus of 1,000 QAR. The QMMF will arrange economy class flight tickets for both driver and co-driver, once entry fees are paid, and supply one twin room with breakfast for five nights.

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Manufacturing, future industries laboratory takes off in Oman

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 2

The manufacturing industries and future industries laboratory was launched yesterday under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion. The laboratory is a result of a collaboration between the ministry, the Industrial Innovation Academy, and the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. Under-Secretary for Commerce and Industry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, shared the following in the opening ceremony: “We hope that the laboratory will emerge with a set of initiatives that will find solutions to the challenges facing the industrial sector, in addition to enhancing the means and enablers that will serve to provide a more lucrative environment for investment growth in the sector.” The laboratory will focus on four main axes: industries of the future, project and investment opportunities, Oman’s 2040 industrial strategy, and governance. “To keep pace with the development of future industries,

emphasis will be placed on the tools of the fourth industrial revolution in the manufacturing sector, enabling their use in production lines, energy, storage, marketing, human resources, health and safety systems and others, in addition to a number of initiatives in green industrial zones, robots and automation, and the Internet of Things,” added Masan. Additionally, the lab will review Oman’s 2040 Industrial strategy with the intention of evaluating and revising it in light of recent developments. “The lab will address Industrial Strategy 2040, which focuses on sectors dependent on domestic resources, capital-intensive sectors, knowledge-based sectors and research and development,” shared Masan, Moreover, the laboratory will also focus on outputs of the Manufacturing Industry Solution Clinics, which were conducted in December of last year. According to Dr Ayman bin Abdullah al Fudhail, Acting Chief Executive Officer of the Industrial Innovation Academy, more than 15 initiatives in the industrial sector have resulted from the clinics, covering finance, investment, national product support, basic services, and employment.



OIA affiliates report success in LNG, mining, circular economy



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 2

Hamad bin Mohammed al Numani, CEO of Oman LNG, has said that Oman LNG will soon sign more binding term-sheet agreements with international companies, similar to the three contracts it recently inked with Japanese companies to deliver 2.35 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of Omani liquefied natural gas annually. This was stated in an exclusive interview for the new issue of the quarterly newsletter Enjaz and Eejaz, which is issued by Oman Investment Authority (OIA). Al Numani added that the company’s success and reputation as a trusted source and supplier of LNG over the years has been the bedrock for its success. He noted that the company became one of the leading LNG companies in

concluding very competitive deals in the global market by promptly seizing business opportunities diversions, swaps or spot cargo; thanks to its shareholders’ trust, as well as its values of credibility and transparency. The new issue of Enjaz and Eejaz also highlighted the ‘Mazoon Mining’ project, which is considered one of the most promising mineral investment projects that will revive the copper industry in Oman. With an estimated cost of \$300 million, the project targets the development of five mines with considerable copper reserves amounting to 22.9 million tonnes, and a production capacity of approximately 1.5 million tonnes annually. Exploration work has so far revealed promising reserves of copper ore in the area surrounding these mines, particularly in Block

No. (12A2), known for its good mineral potential. The project, located in the Wilayat of Yanqul in Al Dhahirah Governorate, seeks to position Oman among the leading global copper-producing countries, help to establish copper manufacturing projects, while also helping to boost the economic landscape in the wilayat, create job opportunities, and support SMEs development. The issue also touched on the Centre for Sustainability and Circular Economy, established by Oman Environmental Services Holding Company — be’ah which is a first of its kind in Oman. The latest issue of the newsletter highlights the services offered by this centre including R&D, transfer and marketing of technology, training and consulting services. The centre launched and worked on a number of key

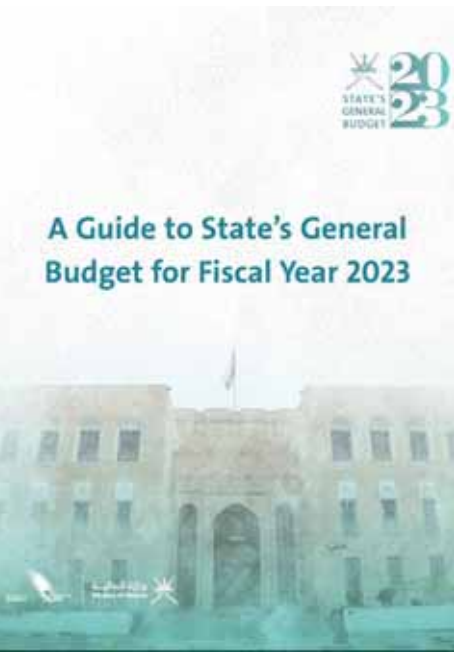
projects, notably the Eco-Innovate Oman Accelerator programme, be’ah’s Academy that offers specialised courses in collaboration with the American Centre for Sustainability and Excellence, the Environmental Excellence Programme to develop the skills of fresh graduates and a study project to investigate the impact of greenhouse gas emissions from the waste management sector in Oman. Moreover, the quarterly newsletter gives many updates on the successes made by OIA’s Future Generation Portfolio through its IDO Investments Company. Its Nebras Programme provided solutions to companies operating in the oil and gas sector, helping them to reduce carbon emissions. Additionally, Carzaty landed a merger deal with Kavak, a leading used-car platform in Latin America.

National programmes to help deliver results in priority areas

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 2

A string of national programme launched by the Omani government as part of the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan will contribute to achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, the Ministry of Finance has affirmed. The programmes provide “sustainable solutions” for achieving results in priority areas, such as strengthening the fiscal and economic matrix, supporting employment generation, building competitiveness, and accelerating the digital transformation, it noted in the 2023 General Budget Statement. Perhaps the most significant among the list of strategic initiatives is the National

Programme for Fiscal Sustainability and Development Financial Sector. Implemented by the Ministry of Finance, the programme aims to develop the financial sector through the introduction of initiatives and projects to promote the role of banking sector and develop financing solutions. Additionally, the programme aims to enhance the role of the capital market in finance and investment so as to achieve integration between financial, monetary, and economic policies. Equally important is the National Programme for Economic Diversification (Tanwea’a). Supervised by the Ministry of Economy, it addresses the economic challenges facing various diversification-oriented sectors.



It also seeks to identify solutions that help to accelerate the realisation of objectives outlined by the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan, and in accordance with Oman Vision 2040. Similarly, the Government Digital Transformation Programme, implemented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, aims at improving government entities’ efficiency and discovering innovative solutions that are efficient, transparent and creative. The Government Digital Transformation Programme seeks to improve the work environment through the simplification of business models and developing channels and tools to optimise the benefit of rapid technology changes.

Further, the National Programme for Investment and Exports Development (Nazdaher), implemented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, aims to consolidate government efforts to attract private investments, so as to be one of the drivers supporting the national economy. It focuses on promoting and enabling the role of private sector in leading the economic development through creating an attractive investment environment. To help support employment generation, the National Employment Programme (Tashgheel) addresses the needs of job-seekers, and endeavours to identify sustainable employment solutions, as well as create job opportunities for the nationals.

OQGN launches new corporate identity



MUSCAT: OQ Gas Networks (OQGN) launched its new corporate identity. Many countries around the world seek to increasingly utilise conventional natural gas in their power and utilities service production such as factories and electricity power plants due to its role as an enabler of the energy transition that could generate benefits for the wellbeing of people.

The new visual identity brings together the vision and mission of OQ, the global integrated energy group. In line with the integrated framework of all business lines under OQ Group, OQ Gas Networks is determined to contribute to the Sultanate of Oman's zero-carbon target by 2050.

Hence, the new OQGN brand identity comes to create synergy towards this aspiration. This is particularly reflected in the new identity design which is inspired by the mother brand focusing more on energy and integration; not to mention the emphasis on efficiency and environmental sustainability.

Mansoor bin Ali al Abdali, Managing Director (MD) of OQGN said: "The launch of OQGN's new brand

aims to support the vision of OQ as one of the biggest integrated groups operating in the energy sector in the Sultanate of Oman. The new brand embodies the values of the group and underlines its commitment to delivering gas reliably and sustainably now and in the future."

He added: "The launch of the new brand is a very important milestone as we usher in a new chapter of growth. At OQGN we are proud to be a key enabler of sustained industrial growth and economic progress in Oman.

Our new brand has been designed to symbolise the broader vision for the operations of OQGN going forward. This milestone also underlines the high added value of gas as well as our valued position as the exclusive gas transporter in Oman now and in future."

OQGN has a gas network that extends over 4,000 km. The company transported more than 37 billion cubic metres of gas in 2021 to gas consumers and gas suppliers at high rate of efficiency. OQGN has also obtained the ISO 55001:2014 certificate, which is an internationally recognised standard of asset management.

Bank Muscat wins Insights Middle East Call Centre Award

MUSCAT: In recognition of its customer-centric vision, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has been announced as the regional winner for the Best Call Centre (Banking) at the prestigious Middle East Call Centre/CX Awards 2022, which was recently held in Dubai.

Instituted by Insights, the leading call centre based professional services organisation in the region, the awards symbolise unmatched validation and peer-judging processes that enable winners to build and strengthen world-class call centre teams and showcase continuous, ongoing improvement.

Talal bin Abdulhameed al Zadjali, Deputy General Manager – Operations, Bank Muscat, said: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank Insights for this prestigious award, which endorses the bank's customer-centric strategy and recognises our efforts to continuously improve and set new benchmarks.

As a vital link between our valued customers and the bank, the bank's Contact Centre continues to provide various services around the clock, seven days a week, with minimal waiting period. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all the Contact Centre employees for their dedication and efforts to enhance the implementation of the bank's customer-centric vision and the overall customer experience."

He added that the bank would strive to attract qualified and talented Omani cadre to the Contact Centre and continuously upgrade it with the technologies.



Bank Muscat operates the largest Contact Centre in the banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman with over 160 team members and enjoying 99 per cent Omanisation and a male to female ratio of 65:35. Featuring the best-in-class technology, the Contact Centre handles over 5.4 million interactions and 1.3 million social media queries annually through its Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system as well as customer service champions who answer inbound queries via phone calls and WhatsApp chats.

It is indeed a matter of great pride that the vast majority of incoming telephone calls are responded to within as little as 20 seconds. To enhance the customer experience, language options provided to customers include Arabic, English and Hindi.

Phone banking services offered include fund transfers to own account, third party accounts

within Bank Muscat and outside Bank Muscat as well as utility bill payments such as water, electricity, telephone, Internet, mobile top-ups, school fees and credit card payments. Other services include requests for cheque book and application forms; real time deposit and exchange rates for select currencies using exchange rate calculator and branch locator to identify the nearest branch, in addition to special services.

To use 24/7 phone banking, customers need to call on 24795555 and follow the audio instructions in the language of their choice. They can also contact customer service through WhatsApp by first saving the bank's contact centre number (24795555) in the contacts list on their smartphone and then initiating a chat session once the number automatically appears within WhatsApp as the verified Bank Muscat account. WhatsApp Customer service

executives are available on all days from 8 am to 10.30 pm, while automated WhatsApp chat is available 24/7 to help answer different queries that customers may have. The service can also be used by customers to share feedback and suggestions.

Phone banking services are very important, especially during holidays or non-banking hours to report card loss and other urgent matters. In case of lost or stolen cards, customers have the option of blocking the card themselves.

As part of the constant vigil against fraud, a dedicated team continuously monitors online and PoS transactions, especially at high risk vendors. The bank's products and services have evolved over the years in line with the specific requirements of its customers. In 2016, the bank was the first in Oman to launch Twitter-based customer service through @bankmuscatcare.

Alizz Islamic Bank Shariah Supervisory Board congratulates bank on its achievements

MUSCAT: Shaikh Dr Essam al Enezi, Chairman of the Shariah Supervisory Board (SSB) at Alizz Islamic Bank, thanked the employees of the Bank's Internal Shariah Audit & Compliance Department for their efforts and roles in ensuring the bank's adherence to the controls and standards of Islamic Shariah in all banking transactions.

Islamic Shariah is the pillar on which banking products & services are based on in Islamic banks, and the guidance of Shariah has created honest and



transparent transactions that are compatible with the needs of the society and customers. Islamic Banking is witnessing an increasing demand due to its compatibility with the Shariah

regulatory requirements that give customers peace of mind and reassurance.

The fourth and final meeting of the Shariah Supervisory Board this year, was chaired

by Shaikh Dr Essam al Enezi, Chairman of the Board, in the presence of the members of the Board: Shaikh Dr Ahmed Subhi al Ayadi and Shaikh Dr Ibrahim bin Nasser al Sawafi, and the General Manager of the Bank, Ali bin Saif al Mani.

During the meeting, the General Manager Ali al Mani presented a visual presentation in which he explained the local economic performance, the bank's performance during the current year, and the expected growth and challenges in the upcoming period.

Bank Nizwa opens new branch in Mawaleh

MUSCAT: Expanding its footprint, Bank Nizwa, the leading Islamic Bank in Oman, has inaugurated its 18th fully functional branch in Mawaleh. Strategically located, the new branch constitutes the Bank's latest step towards redefining the banking experience for people in the Sultanate of Oman by offering Shariah-compliant products and services within the convenience of their communities.

Commenting on the recent branch expansion, Arif al Zaabi, Assistant General Manager of Retail Banking at Bank Nizwa, said, "We are delighted to announce the opening of a new branch in Muscat. Al Mawaleh is a rapidly growing and strategically critical market. This move supports the Bank's strategy to extend its reach and provide exceptional consumer banking experiences throughout Oman. Bank Nizwa is planning further branch expansion across Oman in view of the vast potential of Islamic finance."



MoSD awards NBO for empowering disabled persons

MUSCAT: In recognition of its commitment towards empowering communities, National Bank of Oman (NBO) was recently awarded by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) for supporting people with disabilities across Oman.

The accolade was awarded during a ceremony organised by MoSD on the occasion of the United Nations-sanctioned International Day of Persons with Disabilities, which aims to promote the rights and well-being

of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society.

The event was held under the auspices of Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development, while it was sponsored by NBO. NBO aims to support and empower all members of the communities in which it operates, which is in line with its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme.

The bank's CSR activities include efforts to support and promote a society that is inclusive of people



with disabilities and that aims to further increase their participation in public life.

Last year, NBO was awarded by MoSD for supporting people with disabilities in Oman as well. Through its active CSR programme, NBO continues to fulfil its commitment to make a positive impact on society. Its CSR activities, which are carried out throughout the year, include a variety of educational and youth-led programmes, donations and sponsorships, all reflecting the

bank's core values and aimed at supporting those in need in particular. Earlier this year, for example, NBO undertook the full refurbishment of the children's playroom at the Oman Cancer Association's (OCA) Dar Al Hanan.

Meanwhile, the bank also utilised its annual Holy Month of Ramadhan community outreach programme, to share the spirit of giving across Oman by distributing food hampers to families in need and people with disabilities.



Oman's 2023 Budget gives major boost to PPP projects

Private-led investments:
Development of Invest Easy, National Port Community System, Liwa fishery harbour initiatives to make headway this year

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 2

Oman's Ministry of Finance has unveiled a sizable portfolio of projects and initiatives for implementation under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) programme during 2023. Proposals listed in the 2023 State Budget for development via the PPP route span the Education, Health, Transport & Logistics, Communications & IT, Fisheries, and Infrastructure sectors.

"The Ministry of Finance, in coordination with various government units, seeks to engage the private sector in the implementation of PPP projects in order to encourage the private sector to invest in infrastructure projects and public services," the Ministry noted in its 2023 State Budget statement.

Notable is an initiative to procure



the development of 42 schools for the Ministry of Education to help cater to growing demand for educational infrastructure in various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

The successful developer will secure a concession to undertake the design, finance, construction and maintenance of the package of

42 schools under the PPP model. In the healthcare services sector, the Ministry has outlined plans for the procurement of a Hemodialysis Services Project supported by the private sector.

This project aims at establishing and developing a number of dialysis centres in order to benefit a larger number of patients, in

addition to reducing the costs borne by the Ministry of Health. Separately, the Ministry has sought a qualified company to operate and manage the Al Taafi Suhar Centre, which has been set up to provide advanced levels of treatment and rehabilitative care to recovering drug addicts.

In addition to financing and

NOTABLE IS AN INITIATIVE TO PROCURE THE DEVELOPMENT OF 42 SCHOOLS FOR THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION TO HELP CATER TO GROWING DEMAND FOR EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE IN VARIOUS GOVERNORATES OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN.

provisioning the facility, the successful bidder will also be required to expand the centre at the appropriate time.

Also set to make headway in 2023 is Oman's first PPP-based road dedicated to heavy vehicles and trucks operating between Thamrait and Salalah City in Dhofar Governorate.

The selected developer will secure a concession to 'Design, Finance, Construct, Operate and Maintain' the 67-km carriageway, while recouping its investment via the installation of a first-ever toll system along the route.

In cooperation with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the government plans to tap the

private sector in the development and operation of a National Ports Community System in Oman.

Based on the 'single window' concept, the Port Community System (PCS) will optimise, manage and automate port and logistics processes via the establishment of a standardised platform that connects all transport and logistics chains.

The private sector will also play a key role in the development and operation of a fisheries seaport and food-centric industrial complex at Liwa in North Al Batinah.

To be procured in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, the PPP-based venture will seek to upgrade Liwa's existing infrastructure to attract investments in a full-fledged fisheries and food processing hub.

Other PPP opportunities lined up this year include proposals for the construction of a new head office for the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; development and operation of its Invest Easy platform; and construction of new centres for the Oman Women's Association in Muscat and Seeb.

OCCI, INMECC explore cooperation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 2

The Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI, Faisal al Rawas, met with Davis Kallukaran, Founder Director of the Indo-Gulf Middle-East Chamber of Commerce (INMECC) and the Oman Chapter Secretary, Chander Khanna, in the presence of OCCI board member Abdul Latheef at the chamber's headquarters on Monday.

During the meeting, INMECC representatives discussed the synergistic benefits of both chambers working together for the development of trade and services between the Sultanate of Oman and India.

Al Rawas emphasised on skill-set development of the Omani youth by inviting INMECC to facilitate the setting up of universities of higher education in Oman. "As announced by the chairman of INMECC, Sharafudeen, and endorsed by the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Government of India, V Muralidharan in last week's meeting held in Cochin, INMECC is taking forward the project of 'Sick Industrial Units Revival'.

This is also being initiated in Oman. The units have become sick because of weaknesses in application



of technology, mismanagement of funds, lack of availability of raw materials and lack of marketing capabilities or access to markets etc. If we take the thousands of units that are sick, we can see that the strength of many units in certain areas above mentioned could be serious weaknesses in certain other units.

INMECC in association with OCCI can bridge this gap by mentoring and hand holding the entrepreneurs to bring about synergy which is very much required," said Kallukaran.

INMECC is establishing Chapters across India and abroad. Chapters

already operate in Oman, UAE, Saudi and Kuwait, as well as the Indian states of Maharashtra and Kerala. The Oman Chapter is headed by Suresh Virmani, former CEO of Bahwan Engineering, supported by Mohiyuddin Mohammed Ali as Vice Chairman and Chander Khanna as secretary. Other members on the Board are Aftab Patel, Warith al Kharousi, and Ahmed Rayees

The meeting was concluded with the note to speed up the signing of the MOU between the chambers and meet again to work out the formalities of pursuing the objectives jointly.

Oman crude oil production reaches 355.47 million barrels

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 2

The Sultanate of Oman's production of crude oil and condensate oil increased by 10 per cent until the end of November 2022, to reach 355.47 million barrels, compared to the same period in 2021, which amounted to about 323.17 million barrels, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Crude oil production alone increased by 13.5 per cent, amounting to 283.53 million barrels, while oil condensate production decreased by 2 per cent until the end of last November compared to the same period in 2021.

According to the data, the average price of Omani crude oil increased by 52.7 per cent until the end of November 2022, to reach \$95.8 per barrel, compared to \$62.77 per barrel until the end of November 2021.

The Sultanate of Oman's total oil exports increased by 12.7 per cent until the end of November 2022 compared to the same period in 2021, to reach 293.94 million barrels compared to the same period in 2021, with the total exports amounted to 260.80 million barrels.

Data showed that oil exports to Japan recorded a growth of 215.9 per cent, to reach



10.69 million barrels until the end of last November, compared to the same period in 2021, which amounted to 3.38 million barrels. Oil exports to the Republic of Korea increased by 92.8 per cent, to reach 12.62 million barrels, compared to November of 2021, which amounted to 6.54 million barrels.

On the other hand, natural gas production (including imports) in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 2.3 per cent to reach 47,113,100 cubic metres.

Data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information indicated an increase in natural gas consumption in industrial areas by 12.5 per cent, and industrial projects by 7.5 per cent. Meanwhile gas consumption witnessed a decrease in each of the following: oil fields by 7 per cent and power plants by 1.8 per cent.

Anti-money laundering, terror-financing reports approved

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 2

In coordination with the National Counter-Terrorism Committee (NCTC), the National Committee for Combatting Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing recently approved a number of substantive risk-assessment reports on the crimes of money laundering, financing of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The approved reports are a culmination of effective

coordination between all relevant Anti-Money Laundering/ CFT entities and a clear realisation of the national strategies, aimed at improving the prevention and control systems in the Sultanate of Oman and in consistent with the developments at the local and regional levels.

The approved reports are meant to identify, assess and understand the risks resulted from the crimes of money laundering, financing of terrorism and financing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.



This is in addition to understanding the risks that might be faced by the legal entities and arrangements, and service offices in the Sultanate of Oman.

It is further to be noted that the two national committees aim to utilise the assessments in order to update and develop the national strategies and action plans for combating such crimes.

The outcome of these assessments would effectively contribute to the allocation of the available risk management resources, reinforcement of

the capabilities of national authorities, including the pre-emptive measures and operational procedures.

Besides, the outcome would also enhance the capabilities of the relevant authorities, expand the scope of their legal framework, capability and preparedness to keep pace with latest local, regional, and international developments related to combatting these crimes in compliance with the international requirements issued by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

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Omani innovation wins promising project award in Saudi hackathon

By Asma al Hinaei

MANAR al Jahwari won Saudi Arabian Innovation Hackathon award for her project Royal

Filament.

Al Jahwari is a marketing graduate who has made contributions in both the local and global levels. She used 3D printed filament made out of seaweed and other environmentally friendly materials. Al

Jahwari made it clear that the project's goal is to restrict the use of plastic filaments in 3D printing to protect the environment.

Al Jahwari mentioned that she registered for the Saudi Arabian Water Technologies Hackathon through LinkedIn. The Hackathon had three challenges that needed to be overcome and that it had been held virtually over two days (October 21 and 22).

One of these challenges was to control the excessive growth of algae in Jeddah's desalination facilities. She competed with 24 other projects in the final round, where her project was chosen along with three others as the most promising project. The short list was made out of 700 total projects.

She hopes to attract

numerous local and international investors, which will improve the marketing of their business.

She is also in talks with government agencies to make the business viable.

Manar said she faced few obstacles such as not finding the support to travel and visit specialised factories in order to get international certification and develop the innovation.

Manar urged Omani innovators to come up with new ideas and take advantage of the financial and technical support programmes. She also urges government and private agencies to provide more services and programmes that support youth in the field of innovation and entrepreneurship.

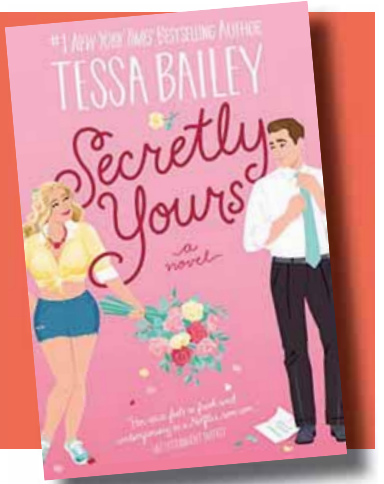


READ

SECRETLY YOURS

BY TESSA BAILEY

Orphaned at birth, seventeen-year-old Sahil has always blamed himself for his parents' death. He has little interest in life until he meets the enigmatic Anya in a chance encounter during the Shimla fest. Soon he falls head over heels in love with her, but Anya doesn't reciprocate his feelings.



LIFESTYLE

A supporter of Brazil's new President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva follows his inauguration on a screen at the Esplanada dos Ministerios in Brasilia, on January 1, 2023

— AFP



NEW YEAR

A woman in a Santa Claus costume celebrates New Year's Day taking the traditional first dip of the year in the frigid waters of the Atlantic ocean, at Carcavelos beach in Oeiras, Lisbon district, on January 1, 2023

— AFP





Five weeknight dishes: Resetting your routine

THIS WEEK has been a time to hibernate, braise and simmer, with wild weather across the country in addition to the usual interholiday lull. But next week brings the start of 2023 and, for most, a return to routine. It's a time for easy food — and recipes that help clear your kitchen and your head. If you stock-piled root vegetables, alliums, herbs, greens and the like for holiday cooking, the recipes below will help you face the future. Cheers!

1. Smoky Lentil Stew With Leeks and Potatoes

Rustic with deep flavour, this stew improves after a day in the fridge. Make the whole recipe, and eat it over several days — or freeze it for later. If you can't get small Spanish Pardina lentils or French lentilles du Puy, use any size green or brown lentil. (Carnivores may want to add chorizo or jamón.) The stew is rather brothy at first, but thickens upon sitting. Thin with a little water when reheating, as necessary. For optimum results, be sure to use fruity, zesty-tasting extra-virgin olive oil — it really makes a difference.

2. Chicken and Herb Salad With Nuoc Cham

Nuoc Cham, a Vietnamese sauce bright with lime juice and chile, is tossed into this simple, satisfying salad to give it a salty-sweet finish. Thinly sliced bell pepper and shaved cabbage provide crunch, while meat pulled from a store-bought rotisserie chicken — or any leftover chicken — soaks up the dressing. Serve this by itself, or alongside steamed rice or room-temperature cooked rice vermicelli.

3. Roasted Carrots With Shallots, Mozzarella and Spicy Bread Crumbs

In this colourful, crunchy-topped vegetable dish, roasted carrots and shallots are topped with puddles of gooey mozzarella, while herbs, olives and a big squirt of lemon at the end add just the right level of tang. Serve this as a light, meatless meal on its own, or as a vibrant side dish to a simple roasted chicken or fish.

4. Chile-Oil Fried Eggs With Greens and Yogurt

This recipe, adapted from a dish served at MeMe's Diner in Brooklyn, is a brunch power move. Eggs sit atop wilted greens on a bed of yogurt, all surrounded by seeded chile oil. The fresh yogurt cuts through the chile oil's heat, and the seed mix adds layers of flavour and crunch. If you're feeling lazy — it is brunch after all — skip the greens, or use everything spice mix and peanuts, for the seed mix. But don't

skimp on the chile oil: It's the best part. Scale it up to have extra on hand for future use, or use store-bought if you like. (You'll need about 1 cup for four servings.) Serve with toast, to sop up the extra oil.

5. Chepa Vepudu (Fish Fry)

As Indian cookbook author Archana Pidathala worked to translate and rewrite her grandmother's collection of recipes from Andhra, in southeastern India, one of the first dishes she mastered was chepa vepudu, a simple fish fry. In Kurnool, where Pidathala grew up, her family would eat the spicy, crisp fish dish when there was a fresh catch of murrel available, also called bull's-eye snakehead, a delicious freshwater fish. But almost any fish, cut perpendicular to the spine, into small steaks, will do nicely. Marinated quickly in a simple spice paste, and shallow-fried, the fish becomes golden and crisp all over, and takes on the flavours of caramelised ginger and garlic, browned coriander seeds and red chile. Be sure to use a nonstick pan, or a well-seasoned cast-iron pan, to keep the fish from sticking or the marinade from falling off.



LIFESTYLE

Ghana's vintage enthusiasts give new life to Western clothing waste



AS THE SUN set on a courtyard of shipping containers in Ghana's capital Accra, young men and women in Pink Floyd, Grateful Dead and tie-dye tees bartered over army surplus jackets and Adidas sneakers while a live deejay spun Afrobeat classics.

The Vintage Gala, as 23-year old founders Prince Quist and James Edem Doe Dartey dubbed it, brought together a movement of young vintage enthusiasts pushing back against the global fast fashion industry by encouraging their peers to shop secondhand.

"If you wear clothes that were made back in the day...you're helping the environment by not using the raw materials and other things needed to make new ones," Quist said, seated in front of the booth for his and Dartey's online shop, TT Vintage Store.

"The idea is just to inspire everybody to thrift vintage, because secondhand goods aren't second class stuff," Dartey added. "Shopping vintage makes recycling even better."



Ghana receives around 15 million items of used clothing each week from Western countries and China, offloaded in bulk, often at negligible prices and questionable quality. Around 40% of this ultimately ends up in massive urban landfills, according to the US based Or Foundation.

Much of it passes through Accra's Kantamanto, one of the largest garment markets on the continent, where bales of used clothes are sold based on the expected quality of the garments wrapped up inside.

Hours before sunrise several times per week, vintage enthusiasts like Quist and Dartey comb through Kantamanto's rivers of imported clothes, searching for gems they can resell on Instagram pages with thousands of followers in Ghana and abroad.

They believe buying secondhand not only helps to reduce fashion's environmental impact, but also allows them and their customers to express unique styles apart from current trends.

Their message is simple: buy secondhand, make a difference.

"Remove the whole notion that you only wear vintage when you are poor, or you only wear thrifted stuff when you don't have money," said creative Myra Davis outside the Vintage Gala event.

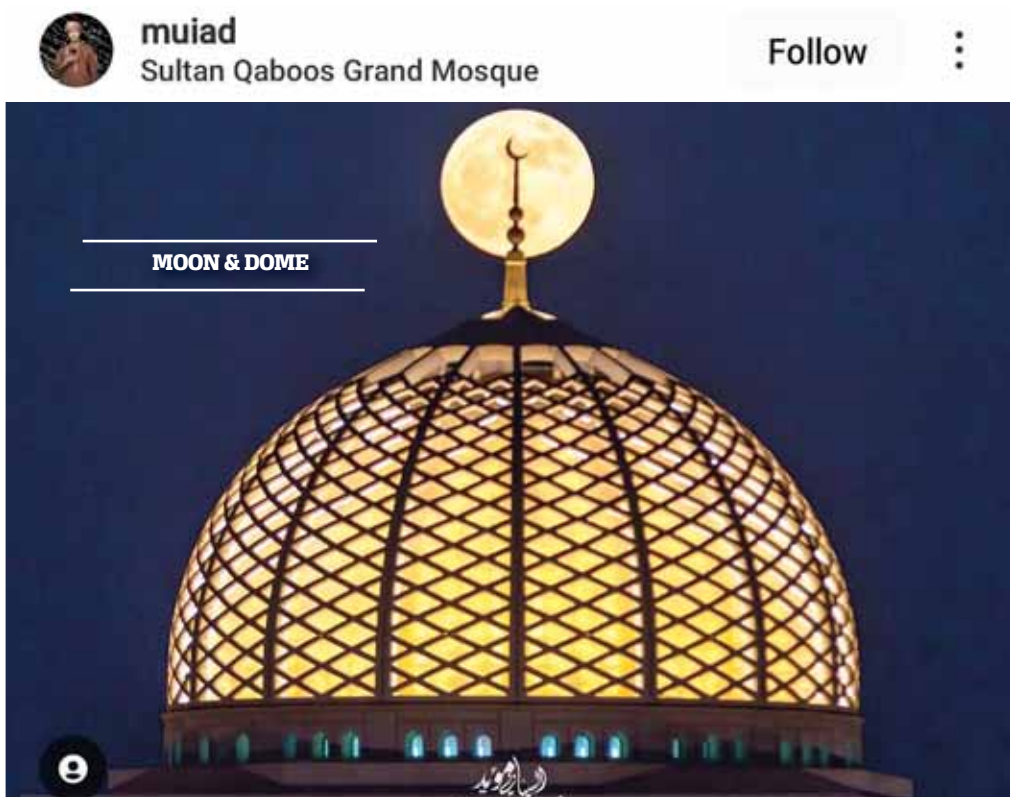
"It's been here for years," she said. "Why go and produce more when there's more than enough available to you?"

— Reuters



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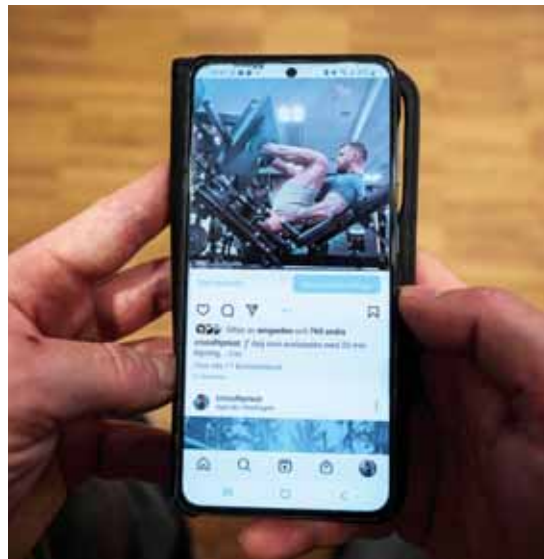


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AROUND THE WORLD

VIKEN KANTARCI

Sweden's 'crossfit priest' heals body and soul on Insta



UNDER THE INSTAGRAM handle 'crossfitpriest', Swedish hospital chaplain Oskar Arngarden doles out fitness and spiritual advice to more than 30,000 followers, helping to heal body, mind and soul. "God is in every aspect of my life," the 38-year-old says.

"When I'm working out it's also in some way a relationship interaction, a prayer with God."

Pulling out his cellphone at the gym across from the Uppsala University Hospital — where he is a Swedish Lutheran Church priest — the muscular father-of-two shows videos on his Instagram account of him lifting weights and exercising.

"In the Bible, it says that your body is your temple. And part of that is to think: 'How should I treat my temple?'"

While the negative effects of social media are well documented, Arngarden says social media can also be a good place to talk about "faith and health, and... our existential, mental health."

His account also features posts with spiritual reflections and healthy life habits.

The young priest launched his first Instagram account in 2019.

He became such a sensation that he quickly found himself overwhelmed.

"It got a little bit out of hand... In a couple of months I had 160,000 followers, and I'm a pretty shy guy so for me it was not that comfortable".

A lot of the comments were about his toned physique, numerous tattoos and resemblance to Australian actor Chris Hemsworth.

At the same time, he was suffering from depression. He ended up closing his account.

In 2020 he returned to Instagram, with a clearer idea of the message he wanted to deliver — especially to his subscribers in Sweden, one of the most secular countries in the world.

"We are held back by a history where the church was in the centre, and people came to the church," he says. "Now we need to find ways for the church to come to meet people."

"And where are the people? They are on social media."

To him, there is "something spiritual in social media", and the way it allows users to "interact with the whole world."

Modern technology offers a unique way for him to reach out, he says, and to show how his faith and exercise routines are inextricably linked.

"My faith is always with me in everything I do," he says.

Some of his followers contact him directly through the social media app, and it is "the more deep conversations" which interest him the most.

Some tell him about their own life experiences, or their spirituality. "I want that interaction with other people, to hear their histories and stories," he says. "It's a blessing to me just to listen to that."

SPECIES

In 'Wildcat', Amazon fauna helps heal emotional wounds of war



Harry Turner, a former British soldier who deployed to Afghanistan at the age of 18, was struggling with PTSD and depression when he decided to try something completely new in the Peruvian Amazon.

Far from home and civilisation, Turner found the joy of taking care of an ocelot kitten who would later be re-introduced to the wild through conservation group Hoja Nueva started by his girlfriend Samantha Zwicker.

Their triumphs and travails are at the heart of "Wildcat", a documentary filmed deep in the rainforest that premieres on Amazon's Prime Video on Friday.

The film begins on a tender note with Turner falling for the playful ocelot Khan, but then turns dark when Khan is killed in an accident, leaving Turner in despair and Zwicker worried for him.

Then they get a call from a friend that an ocelot kitten was found by loggers and little Keanu helps Turner out of his grief.

Turner said people have expressed their gratitude for his raw

depiction of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

"They're very grateful and thankful that I have been able to be vulnerable on screen and show this side of depression that not a lot of films actually manage to make look real," Turner told Reuters. "I think the only way we managed to do that was just to be completely honest."

The documentary came about after Zwicker shot videos documenting Khan's upbringing, hoping it would help other conservationists return cats to the wild.

Directors Trevor Frost and Melissa Lesh came on board to document the lives of Turner, Zwicker and their animals after receiving Keanu.

"I never knew it was going to be so personal," Zwicker said. "I thought it was going to be a lot more about the cats and nature and kind of weave in some of these greater issues of wildlife trafficking and illegal logging."

Keanu needed 18 months to be reared alone by Turner before being released into the jungle, posing a unique situation for the filmmakers.

"It was just Harry that saw Keanu because they wanted to make sure that no other humans were around him so he was as afraid of humans as possible," Frost said, adding that "it was something that we really embraced and I think it really lent itself to a stronger film."

With proceeds from the reported \$20 million Amazon Studios paid for the documentary, Zwicker is building up her conservation programme Hoja Nueva, while Turner has set up his own charity, Emerald Arch.

He is buying Amazonian land in Ecuador, conducting scientific research and helping animals in need. And he will create a retreat geared towards military veterans with PTSD and depression.

"It only took me about two weeks to realise that my life had purpose," Turner said.

"I know that it can be a fresh start for other people who are struggling and I hope that can be the case, kind of combining mental health and conservation together because at the end of the day, we need this world to be healthy."

— Reuters

MUSIC

Queen guitarist May, soccer Lionesses named in king's New Year honours



BRITAIN RECOGNISED Queen guitarist Brian May, several English "Lionesses" who won the European women's soccer championship and diplomats involved in the response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in King Charles' first New Year's honours list.

Four members of the England women's soccer team received honours, with captain Leah Williamson awarded an OBE, while the tournament's golden boot winner Beth Mead, defender Lucy Bronze and all-time top scorer Ellen White received MBEs.

The team's coach, Dutch national Sarina Wiegman, received an honorary CBE — a type of award given to foreign nationals.

May, a founder member of rock band Queen, was knighted at the end of a year in which he opened Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee concert atop the Victoria Monument — 20 years after he performed on top of Buckingham Palace at the Golden Jubilee.

Queen Elizabeth died in September, making the New Year's honours the first to be awarded by King Charles since he came to the throne. The list is drawn up by independent committees, before it is approved by the prime minister and the monarch.

Melinda Simmons and Deborah Bronnert, Britain's ambassadors to Kyiv and Moscow respectively, both received damehoods for their services to foreign policy, with other officials who worked on Britain's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine also honoured.

The chair of the COP26 climate conference, Alok Sharma, was awarded a knighthood, as were former civil servants Mark Sedwill and Tom Scholar, who were ousted from high-profile roles during the tenures of former Prime Ministers Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, respectively.

Denise Lewis, an Olympic champion who won gold in the heptathlon the Sydney 2000 games, was made a dame, while fashion designer Mary Quant and artist Grayson Perry were also honoured.

NatWest Chief Executive Alison Rose, the first female CEO of a major British Bank, was awarded a damehood, as was Anita Frew, the first female chair of aerospace firm Rolls Royce.

The New Year's honours have been awarded since Queen Victoria's reign in the 19th century and aim to recognise not just well-known figures but people who have contributed to national life through often unsung work over many years.

OBE is an Officer of the Order of the British Empire, the MBE a Member of the Order of the British Empire and the CBE a Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

— Reuters



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TUESDAY | JANUARY 3 | 2023

The Met Opera Found an Audience for ‘Fedora.’ For Now



The mood was festive, the audience large and enthusiastic, for the gala premiere on New Year's Eve of a rare new production of Umberto Giordano's lovably preposterous potboiler "Fedora" at the Metropolitan Opera.

Soprano Sonya Yoncheva and tenor Piotr Beczala, playing aristocrats locked in a series of betrayals and counter-betrayals, passionately loved and raged; conductor Marco Armiliato and the Met's orchestra brought restrained silkiness out of the pit; David McVicar's staging was bustling and handsome. A good time was had by all.

But I couldn't quiet a tiny voice of dread in me. Not about the celebratory scene on Saturday evening, but about what it will be like when the Met tries to get its money's worth out of the new production and revives it, with far less marketing and press coverage and quite possibly a less starry cast. Who will be in the audience for that "Fedora" in a season or two or three?

The question has extra urgency after the coal that arrived in the Met's stocking the day after Christmas, when the company announced that weak ticket sales and recalcitrant donors as the pandemic drags on would force it to raid its endowment to the tune of \$30 million — a full tenth of the fund's value — and to cut 10 per cent of its planned performances next season.

As a silver lining, the Met said at the same time that it would immediately expand its presentations of contemporary operas, which have been outselling some of the classics.

But in truth, what has been selling at the house is what gets promotional resources and media exposure: new productions, be they of brand-new pieces or 125-year-old ones like "Fedora." Without that kind of publicity, attendance was particularly dire this fall for revivals of masterpieces that are hardly obscure but not quite "Aida," like Mozart's "Idomeneo," Britten's "Peter Grimes" and Verdi's "Don Carlo." This could very well be the fate of "Fedora," too, when it's brought back.

There is a real audience for the Met, as sold-out runs of "Fire Shut Up in My Bones" and "The Hours" have proved. Just not so much for a pillar of opera-going: hearing repertory pieces as they evolve, year in and year out, with different casts. It is, sad to say, an ever-smaller group of people who care to see "La Traviata" subtly but unmistakably transform with each new Violetta — or "Fedora" with each new Fedora.

That is why the 10 per cent trim in performances for next season is a portent of what's to come. The Met's long-term future may well consist of seasons with significantly fewer performances of significantly fewer titles, and a greater proportion of new stagings to returning productions.

That model, which would edge the Met closer to an annual event like the Salzburg Festival from its repertory-house tradition, may yield some strong artistic results. But the transition to it will involve a tumultuous rethinking of the company's costs, and therefore its labour contracts, as well as fewer dismally selling revivals like this season's "Idomeneo," "Peter Grimes" and "Don Carlo" — all of which were excellent and all of which are integral to the Met's responsibility to its art form.

Even if this "Fedora" is never revived, we will at least have had a sensitive, spirited run of a work that last came to the Met in the 1996-97 season, when it was a vehicle for the great diva Mirella Freni's full-production farewell to the company.

"Fedora" is about as opera as opera gets. The title character (Yoncheva) is a Russian princess in the late 19th century who swears vengeance after her fiancé is shot to death. The plot, of course, thickens. It turns out that the killer, Count Loris Ipanov (Beczala), did not commit the crime for political reasons, as everyone assumed. (The dark spectre here, as in Dostoevsky's "Demons" and the Coen brothers' "The Big Lebowski," is nihilists.) No, Fedora's man was making it with Loris' wife, setting off a jealous gunfight; once that is revealed, enmity between princess and count turns to lust.

This being a tear-jerker, their brief

idyll is smashed when her prematurely sent letter of accusation inadvertently results in the death of Loris' brother and mother, leading to his ferocious condemnation of Fedora and her overhasty suicide by the poison she keeps in a cross around her neck. (Don't you?)

The play on which this dead-serious farrago is based was written by Victorien Sardou, the reigning French master of theatrical sensation, who was also the source for Puccini's "Tosca" around the same time. Giordano, Puccini and other Italian composers who came of age in the 1880s and 1890s have become known to posterity under the catchall "verismo," a term which came to suggest a style of sumptuous orchestral complexity and moment-by-moment emotional responsiveness, with arias and other numbers that emerge and recede organically rather than formally — at least compared with Italian opera as it had been before — but with a melodic lushness that set them apart from Wagner.

The gawkiest sibling to its better-known predecessor, Giordano's "Andrea Chénier," "Fedora" is not a perfect piece. The roles other than Fedora and Loris are thoroughly unrewarding. The high spirits with which Giordano opens the second and third acts, for all-too-obvious contrast with the intense drama to come, drag on too long. — **NYT**