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ARSENAL STRETCH LEAD, NEWCASTLE GO SECOND



P15

IS A GLOBAL RECESSION REALLY AROUND THE CORNER?



P20

ARDHA CAMEL RACES CONNECT PAST WITH PRESENT



TOKYO

HM CONDOLES PRESIDENT OF USA

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Joe Biden of the United States of America on victims of the blizzard which hit several US states. In the cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sympathies to President Biden, families of the victims and the people of the USA, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

MUMBAI

INDIA INSPECTS DRUG FACTORIES

India's pharmaceuticals regulator has begun inspecting some drug factories across the country, the health ministry said on Tuesday, as it tries to ensure high standards after an Indian company's cough and cold syrups were linked to deaths in Gambia. India is known as the "pharmacy of the world" and its pharmaceuticals exports have more than doubled over the past decade to \$24.5 billion in the past fiscal year. SEE P7

HM receives message from Japanese PM



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a written message from Fumio Kishida, Prime Minister of Japan.

The message deals with the advanced relations between the two countries and matters of common interest. It was handed over to His Majesty the Sultan by Nishimura Yasutoshi, Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, when his Majesty gave him an audience at Al Barakah Palace on Tuesday.

The minister conveyed greetings and best wishes of the Japanese Prime Minister to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people.

On his turn, His Majesty asked the Minister to convey his sincere sentiments to the Prime Minister and the people of Japan. During the audience, areas of joint cooperation in various fields were reviewed.

It was attended by Salim bin Nasser al Afi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, Jota Yamamoto, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman and members of the delegation accompanying the Japanese Minister.

— ONA, SEE ALSO P2

PARIS

WEBB PROMISES NEW AGE OF THE STARS

The James webb Space Telescope lit up 2022 with dazzling images of the early universe after the Big Bang, heralding a new era of astronomy and untold revelations about the cosmos in years to come. The most powerful observatory sent into space succeeded the Hubble telescope, which is still operating, and began transmitting its first cosmic images in July. SEE P8

51 people rescued from floods

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

More than 51 people stranded in floods were rescued after moderate to heavy rains lashed Muscat, Suhar, Saham and Shinas on Tuesday.

Muscat was the hardest hit with many roads waterlogged and surprise downpour damaging both private and commercial properties.

Many employees reported late to office or forced to work from home as traffic lights went off and ROP officials directed traffic from morning to evening in many parts of Muscat.

Schools suspended evening classes as many classrooms were inundated with rainwater.

Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority and Royal Oman Police helped to tow away many



vehicles stuck in rains due to the low pressure affecting the Sultanate of Oman from Monday to Wednesday.

The Bausher- Al Amerat road was closed to traffic, while traffic signals below Al Khuwair and the Qurum bridges did not function

for hours in the morning, leading to traffic chaos at the junction near the Muscat Grand Mall.

A number of citizens and residents shared images and videos of flood water near their apartments in places such as Wadi Kabir, Darsait, Qurum and

Muttrah Souq.

According to the National Multi-Hazard Early Warning Centre, upper air troughs are likely to continue until Thursday.

Abdullah al Khadhouri of Oman Meteorology said most of the northern governorates, including the capital, will get rains on Tuesday.

The current weather situation will start gradually weakening by Wednesday with continuing chances of scattered rain until Thursday.

Expected impacts will include 10-60 mm rainfall and fresh downdraft winds with speeds of 15 to 35 kt (30-70km/h). Sea will be moderate to rough with maximum wave height will be between 2 metres to 3m metres along the coasts of Musandam Governorate and the coastal areas of the Sea of Oman. TURN TO P2

Oman signs agreement to sell LNG to Japan

MUSCAT: Oman LNG signed three agreements with Japanese firms for the production and delivery of LNG starting from 2025. The total amount of LNG to be delivered is 2.35 million metric tonnes per annum (MTPA).

The new agreements will see Oman LNG supplying LNG based on contracts varying from 5 to 10 years. The amount of LNG to be delivered is as follows: 0.8 MTPA to ITOCHU Corporation, 0.8 MTPA to JERA Co., Inc. and 0.75 MTPA to Mitsui and Co. Ltd.

The agreements were signed by Hamad al Numani, CEO of Oman LNG, Tetsuya Yamada of ITOCHU, Hitoshi Nishizawa of JERA and Motoyasu Nozaki of Mitsui, in Muscat on Tuesday.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Afi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Nishimura Yasutoshi, Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry were present during the signing ceremony.

Al Numani pointed out that this move complements Oman LNG's efforts to further grow, reach international markets and explore new opportunities. See P13

INSIDE



BLIZZARD LEAVES NEARLY 50 DEAD ACROSS US

P6



TAIWAN EXTENDS MANDATORY MILITARY SERVICE

P7

Dressing 'revolution' seeks artificial skin for burn victims

CHENOVE: Far from the humble sticking plaster, medical firms and researchers are seeking to create the "ultimate dressing" -- artificial skin they hope will revolutionise the treatment of severe burns.

For the last 18 months, researchers from the French firm Urgo have been working towards achieving this Holy Grail of wound treatment, which would save serious burn victims from

the painful and repeated skin grafts they currently endure. The 100-million-euro (\$106,000-million) "Genesis" project hopes to have a product ready by 2030.

Guirec Le Lous, the president of Urgo's medical arm, said that it is a "crazy" project.

"Are we capable of designing artificial skin in a laboratory? No one in the world has succeeded," he said. Inside Urgo's laboratory in



Chenove, near the eastern French city of Dijon, living cells are being chilled before they can be cultivated.

"You have to be able to recreate all the functions of skin," including protecting against external threats and regulating the temperature, Le Lous said.

It must also be relatively easy to make, because artificial skin must be "available for all and at the right price," he said, without revealing the exact technology or type of cells Urgo is using.

Urgo is far from alone in pushing the boundaries of what dressings can do.

Researchers at the University of South Australia have developed a new kind of dressing that knows when to release nanoparticles of silver, which can break down antibiotic-resistant bacteria. — AFP



His Majesty receives written message from Japanese PM



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received a written message from Fumio Kishida, Prime Minister of Japan. The message deals with the advanced relations between the two countries and matters of common interest. – ONA

Rains expected till tomorrow



FROM PAGE 1

The Wilayat of Muttrah recorded the highest amount of rain, amounting to 154 mm, followed by Muscat with 113 mm and Al Seeb 77 mm, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

While the Wilayat of Barka in South Al Batinah Governorate has recorded 49 mm of rainfall, 28 mm in the Wilayat of Al Musannah located in same governorate, 26 mm in the

Wilayat of Bukha in Musandam Governorate and 25 in each of the Wilayat of Nakhal in South Al Batinah Governorate and the Wilayat of Bausher in Muscat Governorate.

The Wilayat of Dibba in Musandam Governorate has received 23 mm of rainfall, 22 mm in each of the Wilayats of Khasab and Wadi Al Maawil and 16 mm in the Wilayat of Liwa in North Al Batinah Governorate.

A wall of a labour camp in the Wilayat of Al Seeb collapsed and

injured workers.

“Part of the wall of our labour camp went down when the workers were asleep. They woke up in a panic and some slipped in the mud and got hurt. Many of them lost their belongings including money,” the supervisor of a construction labour camp, said.

Many citizens reported damages to their houses due to heavy rains throughout the night and early hours of the morning on Tuesday.

Al Nahdhah and Khoula hospitals had to cancel outpatient clinic appointments due to the heavy rains.

Maj Fahad bin Said al Kalbani, In-charge of the tasks of the Director General of Traffic, said that the ROP is operating regular patrols to monitor traffic flow and ensure road safety. The ROP is coordinating with the authorities concerned to facilitate the passage of vehicles after the closure of Bausher-Al Amerat hill road and organise

Motorists booked for crossing wadis

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) stood guard to people stranded in the rains as vehicles got stuck in the flash floods on Tuesday when the incessant rains threw life out of gear.

The officials were seen towing vehicles from the smudge and controlling the traffic wherever signals went off during the rains and the flash floods.

Meanwhile, the authorities have warned that those daring the flash floods would invite punitive actions including fines and retention of vehicles depending upon the nature of offence as several officials were seen standing near the flash floods trying to book the offenders.

“Driving across an overflowing wadi will invite legal action if found to be violating the instructions issued by the ROP

and the CDAA regarding the same,” a CDAA spokesperson told the Observer, adding that the CDAA is closely following up with the Oman Meteorology authorities and are well prepared to act accordingly.

The torrential rains paused people’s lives as heavy downpour and water clogs slowed down vehicular movements across various governorates including North and South Al Batinah, Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta, Dhofar, and some parts of Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi.

“While precautions are taken to minimise the impact of rains and flash floods and security forces and equipment are already in action in those places highly prone to the adverse weather phenomenon. They people were requested to take caution and not to risk their life and others’ by crossing the overflowing valleys, due to the rainfall of varying intensity in many parts of the country,” he added.

traffic in flooded roundabouts.

EXERCISE CAUTION

The Directorate General of Traffic called members of the public to exercise more caution and follow-up news about the weather. It urged drivers not to risk crossing wadis and reminded all to stick to traffic regulations.

The operations centre of Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA), Governorate of Muscat, received 30 reports of people getting stranded as a result of the rains. No injuries or deaths were reported.

Rains are likely to continue to fall in northern governorates of Oman, with varying degrees of intensity. CAA stations registered 72 mm at Port Sultan Qaboos, 39 mm in Muscat city and 27 mm at Muscat International Airport.



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Ash'shura chairman holds talks with Russian Duma official

MUSCAT: Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, on Tuesday received at the Majlis's headquarters, Vladimir Vitch, Chairman of the Industry and Trade Committee of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, and coordinator of the Parliamentary Group on Relations with the Legislative Councils of the Gulf Cooperation Council states.

The visit took place on the framework of the official visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

During the meeting, the Chairman praised the joint bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and the extent of their development in recent years in various fields that serve the interests of the two countries.

During the meeting, they also discussed increasing the existing cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the



Russian Federation at various levels, and ways to enhance it for the benefit of the two friendly people.

For his part, the Chairman of the Industry and Trade Committee of the Russian State Duma expressed his aspiration for more cooperation, especially at the level of the legislative assemblies of the two countries, through the exchange of experiences in the academic, economic and tourism fields that would strengthen Omani-Russian relations.

The two sides also agreed on opinions and visions in international forums and meetings to serve the two friendly countries.

On the other hand, the delegation also visited the council hall for the regular sessions and many other of the council's facilities. — ONA

Local liquidity Increases by RO 45 million

MUSCAT: The total foreign assets of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) decreased by 12.8 per cent, reaching RO 6,221 million by the end of October 2022 compared to RO 7,137.4 million by the end of August 2021, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The total local liquidity rose by 0.2 per cent to stand at RO 20,024 million compared to RO 19,979.4 million during the corresponding period in 2021.

Narrow Money Supply (M1) declined by 1 per cent to reach RO 5,583.6 million compared to RO 5,640.9 million during the same period in 2021.

The private sector deposits with commercial banks and Islamic windows showed a rise by 0.2 per cent by the end of October 2022, reaching RO 17,137.4 million compared to RO 17,104.6 million during the corresponding period in 2021.



Total loans and financing in commercial banks went up by 4.1 per cent to RO 28,913.9 million by October 2022 compared to RO 27,766.5 million during the same period in 2021.

The effective exchange rate index of the Omani Rial increased by 12.1 per cent to 118.2 points compared to 105.4 points during the corresponding period in 2021.

The total currency issued by the end of October 2022 dropped by 5.7 per cent to stand at RO 1,614.6 million compared to RO 1,712.4 million by the end of October 2021. — ONA

ROP discusses norms for electric scooters

VINOD NAIR
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The Royal Oman Police's (ROP) traffic department on Tuesday discussed the use of electric scooters in the Sultanate of Oman.

Brigadier General Engineer Mohammed bin Awad al Rawas, Director General of Traffic, met with representatives of various government agencies and discussed the popularity of using electric scooters on main roads, residential and other public places.

The meeting studied regulations for the use of scooters in some countries in the region and some European countries, aimed at coming up with proposals to regulate and ensure their safe use.

It may be noted that in the GCC cities, including Oman, e-scooters are being increasingly used by a section of the expatriate and citizens as they are easy to use, store, and purchase, and have comparatively fewer regulatory requirements.

An electric scooter is a plug-in electric vehicle powered by electric power or a combination of batteries.

Apart from being privately owned, in several cities across the world, e-scooters are also

available for rent as part of the local government's smart mobility initiatives to restrict the use of fossil-powered vehicles on short distances.

Earlier speaking to the Observer, a Filipino expatriate, said that he uses the e-scooter to move from his home to his workplace at a leading mall in the city.

According to sources in the ROP, e-scooters are not allowed on roads at all times, but they can be used on pavements and sidewalks without causing inconvenience or risks to pedestrians.

In Oman, e-scooters are available online in the price range of RO 150 and RO 250.



Workshop on healthy nutrition held



SOHAR: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth organised on Tuesday a training workshop on healthy nutrition in the community, which targeted 50 participants from various educational institutions in North Al Batinah Governorate,

The workshop was organised with the support of Occidental Oman, in the lecture hall of the Directorate General of Culture, Sports and Youth in the governorate. The workshop dealt with healthy nutrition that include families, school and society. It was presented by Ameera bint Hamoud al Nasiriyah, Senior Clinical Nutritionist at the Royal Hospital.

The themes of the workshop related to anatomy of the human body, defining its needs for growth and vital functions, the impact of organ failure on pathological and therapeutic conditions, and linking their roles to nutrients, in addition to a practical application of for calculating energy and nutrients for different stages. — ONA

BHA's workshop for sorting qualifiers conclude

MUSCAT: The Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design (BHA) on Tuesday completed the technical workshop it organised for the 30 teams that qualified to contest the next stage of the award, after the first sorting.

The concluding ceremony was held at Sayyidah Fatma bint Ali Mosque in the Wilayat of Al Seeb.

The technical workshop was aimed at providing the qualifiers with key skills to improve their chances of passing the second sorting.

In the second sorting, only 10 projects will qualify to the final round, where the top 3 projects will be declared winners of the BHA.



January 3, 2023 is the date set for the announcement of the top 10 projects shortlisted from the 30 projects that qualified after the first sorting.

The qualifiers will present their projects before the jury

in the Wilayat of Sur later in January 2023.

After the knockouts, the top 3 projects will be announced as winners of the Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design. — ONA

Banking conference addresses tech challenges

MUSCAT: The Technical Security in the Banking and Financial Sector Conference began here on Tuesday under the auspices of Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman (CBO).

The event was organised by Element Technology Company in partnership with Microsoft and the CBO.

The conference came to provide technical solutions to the modern technical challenges facing the security of the financial and banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman and the world.

It began with a review of the latest technical security solutions developed by Onsor Technology for institutions operating in the financial and banking sectors.

In partnership with Microsoft, Onsor was able to develop a technical security solution known as "Secured-Core PCs" in the TURS device designed



and manufactured by Onsor Technology, which is the first secure tablet developed for industries whose owners deal with intellectual property, sensitive security information, or customers' personal data, including personally identifiable information (PII).

In addition, the customised technical solutions provided by Onsor to companies and sectors of all kinds that will enhance data

security and provide a smarter and easier user experience were reviewed.

The event included specialised workshops, presented by specialists from Onsor Technology Company, Microsoft and the CBO to talk more about these technologies and their importance in developing and enhancing the security of the financial and banking sectors.

— ONA

CRUISE SHIP ANCHORS AT SALALAH PORT



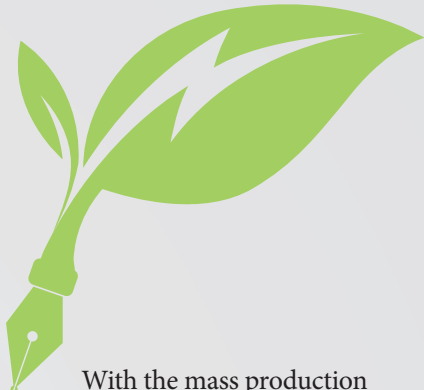
MUSCAT: Salalah Port on Tuesday received cruise ship 'Artania' with 1,394 passengers on board, of them 927 are tourists from various nationalities. The tourist programme of 'Artania' included tours to major archaeological, tourism and historic landmarks in the Governorate of Dhofar, besides visiting beaches and traditional markets in Salalah. Moreover, the number of cruise ships arriving in Oman is increasing annually due to the country's prominent location overlooking the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and Sea of Oman. — ONA



TOWARDS A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN FOLLOWS ITS GREEN ENERGY GOALS IN LETTER AND SPIRIT

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH,
[@patkaushal](#)



THE government and its energy arms have shown sincerity towards achieving the goals by signing letters of cooperation and memoranda of understanding.

Its true spirit for green energy reflects in its decision to incentivise the green energy industry through tax waivers and in-country value generation to ensure the sustainability of ongoing and future projects.

If things go as per current plans, the Sultanate of Oman will be able to produce around 30 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy in the coming years.

The whole world is going after reducing dependence on fossil fuel and traditional forms of energy to cut carbon emissions and their adverse impact on the environment.

With technological advancements in the energy sector, renewable energy options would be cheaper with access to a larger audience, which in turn would support the cause of the environment.

With the mass production of green energy, also called clean energy, there are chances that nature will have some relief from industrial pollution and more and more people will have access to green energy globally.

The Sultanate of Oman has shown seriousness towards international norms for clean energy.

It is in agreement with countries like the UK, France, South Korea, the US, the Netherlands and many others to ensure the adoption of the best practices in the green energy sector.

The country's energy arms, like Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Oman LNG, and OQ, have dedicated green energy departments to take the lead while striking a balance between traditional, modern and green energy sources. The government is looking at the brighter side of incentivising the green energy sector. Besides promising safety to the environment, it could boost market competitiveness through the decrease in energy use in the production of goods and services.

RENEWABLE ENERGY OPTIONS WOULD BE
CHEAPER WITH ACCESS TO A LARGER AUDIENCE
WHICH IN TURN WOULD SUPPORT THE CAUSE
OF THE ENVIRONMENT



SEZAD’s second environmental forum to be held in January

DUQM: The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) is organising the Second Environmental Forum titled, “Together for reducing our carbon footprint in Duqm”, to be held on January 9, 2023.

A number of lecturers and specialists from government and private entities, concerned with climate change and carbon emissions reduction, will be participating, in addition to companies operating in the zone.

The Forum aims at finding innovative mechanisms to solve potential environmental challenges resulting from various construction and industrial works in SEZAD.

The forum will shed light on the necessity for combining efforts to raise awareness of preserving the environment, reducing environmental



impacts, and supporting and developing foundations of joint cooperation between various organisations and companies operating in the Zone in aspects related to climate affairs.

It will also highlight plans to reduce carbon emissions and adaptability to climate changes, in an effort to achieve net-zero carbon emissions in Duqm.

The Forum comes within the framework of efforts exerted

by the SEZAD, represented by the Environmental Awareness Team of the Environmental Sustainability Department, in its commitment to protect and preserve the environment.

— ONA

First phase of project to set up gene bank concludes

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority has finalised the first phase of establishing of a gene bank to preserve genetic origins of wild animals through freezing (cryopreservation).

The project seeks to conserve the genetic material of endangered wild animals, to save them from extinction and ensure their sustainability. The process involves providing backup genetic material to help restore the genetic origins in case the loss of animal breeds as a result of diseases or natural disasters.

The specimens will also be available to students, researchers and people interested in wild animals’ genetic resources.

Gene banks serve as a unique source of genetic diversity that informs livestock rearing programmes. Gene banks provide storage facilities for genetic materials of all types. They constitute a set of genetic resources for living organisms like blood samples, eggs, tissue and cells.

Cryopreservation is an ideal method of conservation for wild animal species that avoids their extinction.

The project stems from cooperation between the Environment Authority (Fungal and living organisms reserve in Al Wusta Governorate), Mawarid Centre (Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation) and the Royal Court Affairs (centre for wild animal rearing). — ONA



Technical meetup calls for FinTech awareness

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 28

An international technical meet-up attended by national and international experts from the IT sector threw light on importance of financial technologies (FinTech) and real time projects calling the new businesses, including the startups to have an understanding for the ecosystem of the technology.

The participants in the event were drawn from 20 different organisations, including some national and International universities.

The IT Department of College of Computing and Information Sciences, affiliated to University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibri



(UTAS-Ibri) in association with the ACM Student Chapter conducted the event an online mode, as an interactive session on the real ecosystem of software firms.

The event witnessed large participation of 373 students, teachers, and industrial experts mainly those, which have

are looking for a turning point, motivation and technical awareness.

‘FinTech and Startup’ technical meet-up is going to motivate us and hoping to inspire us for the successful career in financial technologies and startups.”

The sessions provided technical insights on financial technologies (Fintech) to provide motivation on ‘IT startups and entrepreneurship; to build partnerships with industrial experts and alumni of UTAS’ and also to associate with international professional body ACM — Association of Computing Machinery.”

The ultimate motivation of this event is Oman Vision 2040, said the event organisers.

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)
37/2022	Electromechanical Services at SHAFA Camp	First and Above - specialized in HVAC system	5 th January 2023	6 th February 2023	85/- RO
38/2022	Electromechanical Services at SHAFA Camp	First and Above - specialized in HVAC system	5 th January 2023	6 th February 2023	95/- 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:
 - A. Financial (bill 1&2 separated file from bill3)
 - B. 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.

Govt treasury bills worth RO 26m issued

MUSCAT: A tender of Government Treasury Bills, issue number 168, worth RO 26 million was issued this week.

The results of the said issue are as follows:The total value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 26 million, for a maturity period of 182 days, from December 28, 2022 until June 28, 2023.

The average accepted price reached RO 97.589 for every RO 100, and the minimum accepted price arrived at RO 97.550 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 4.83517 per cent and 4.95464 per cent, respectively.

The interest rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 5.00 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 5.50 per cent.

The Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance, and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

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

Sultan Qaboos University

ANNOUNCEMENT OF EXTENSION OF BIDDING

The Investment & Revenue Department at Sultan Qaboos University would like to announce the extension of bidding as follows:

S/N	Type of Business	Location	The Last Date for Submission the Quotations	Tender #
1	Rent and Operat Coffee Shop	Female Complex No. (2)	19/1/2023	SQU.IRD. 18/22
2	Rent and Operat Coffee Shop	Female Complex No. (3)	19/1/2023	SQU.IRD. 19/22
3	Rent and Operate a Sweet Corn and Ice Cream Kiosk	Female Complex No. (3)	19/1/2023	SQU.IRD. 20/22
4	Rent and Operate a Sweet Corn and Ice Cream Kiosk	Female Complex No. (5)	19/1/2023	SQU.IRD. 21/22
5	Rental and Operate a Mobile Cafe Site	Administration Building Extension	19/1/2023	SQU.IRD. 22/22
6	Construction & Rental & Operation Outlet for Stationery, Office Supplies, Copying and Printing Services	Independent Learning Center	19/1/2023	SQU.IRD. 23/22
7	Electric Scooter Service	Various locations at Sultan Qaboos University	19/1/2023	SQU.IRD. 24/22
8	Rent and Operat Coffee Shop	Family and Community Health Clinic	19/1/2023	SQU.IRD. 25/22

- The priority will be for the Small and Medium Establishments (SME), which fulfils the quality requirements.
- The last date for submission of the quotations: 19/1/2023. The quotations should be submitted in a sealed envelope addressed to the Director of The Investment & Revenue Department, located on the first floor of the commercial building at Sultan Qaboos University and deposited in the Tender Box kept in the Department, before 10:00 a.m.
- The exterior of the envelope should be marked with the name and number of the Tender being presented and should bear no identification or mark of the Tenderer.
- The Tenderer should submit (enclose) with his tender a Bank Guarantee Document for sum of 1% of the total Duration of contract rental value quoted by the Tenderer and valid for 90 (ninety) days from the date specified for submission of Tender. Tenders submitted after the deadline or without a Bank Guarantee will be excluded.
- The Tenderer should prepare the Site in accordance with the health requirements of Muscat Municipality and the requirements of civil defense in cooperation with the concerned authorities.
- Sultan Qaboos University reserves the right to reject any quotation not fulfilling the requirements and does not bid itself to accept the highest rent or any other quotations.

Investment & Revenue Department
PO BOX 50, P.C. 123, ALKHOD, SULTANATE OF OMAN
Tel: 24142691 - 24142682 - 24142685 - 24142684
E- mail: investment@squ.edu.om





Blizzard leaves nearly 50 people dead across US

BUFFALO: Temperatures were expected to moderate across the eastern and midwest United States on Tuesday, after days of freezing weather from “the blizzard of the century” left at least 49 dead and caused Christmas travel chaos.

Blizzard conditions persisted in parts of the northeastern US, the stubborn remnants of a sprawl of extreme weather that gripped the country over several days, causing widespread power outages, travel delays and deaths in nine states, according to official figures.

In New York state, authorities described ferocious conditions, particularly in Buffalo, with hours-long whiteouts, bodies being discovered in vehicles and under snow banks, and emergency personnel going “car to car” searching for survivors.

The perfect storm of fierce snow squalls, howling wind and sub-zero temperatures forced the cancellation of more than 15,000 US flights in recent days, including nearly 4,000 on Monday, according to tracking site Flightaware.com.

Buffalo -- a city in Erie County that is no stranger to foul winter weather -- is the epicentre of the crisis, buried under staggering amounts of snow.

“Certainly it is the blizzard of the century,” New York Governor Kathy Hochul told reporters, adding it was “way too early to say this is at its completion.”

Hochul said some western New York towns got walloped with “30



Pedestrians walk along a snow-covered street in Buffalo, New York, on Tuesday. – AFP

to 40 inches (0.75 to one metre) of snow overnight.”

Later on Monday, Hochul spoke with President Joe Biden, who offered “the full force of the federal government” to support New York state, and said he and First Lady Jill Biden were praying

for those who lost loved ones in the storm, according to a White House statement. Biden also approved an emergency declaration for the state, the White House said.

The National Weather Service forecast up to 14 more inches of snow on Monday, in addition to

the several feet that had already left the city buried, with officials struggling to get emergency services back online.

“Temperatures are expected to moderate across the Midwest and the East over the next few days ahead of this system,” the NWS

said in its latest advisory early on Tuesday, but warned that “locally hazardous travel conditions” would persist.

Erie County executive Mark Poloncarz tweeted on Monday afternoon that the blizzard-related death toll had climbed to 27 across

the county, including 14 people who were found outside and three who were discovered in a car.

Speaking at a press conference earlier in the day, Poloncarz said Erie’s death toll would likely surpass that of Buffalo’s infamous blizzard of 1977, when nearly 30 people died.

With more snow forecast and most of Buffalo “impassable,” he joined Hochul in warning residents to bunker down and stay in place.

RESCUED HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE

National Guard members and other teams have rescued hundreds of people from snow-covered cars and homes without electricity, but authorities have said more people remain trapped.

Erie County Sheriff John Garcia called the storm “the worst” he has ever seen, with periods of zero visibility and authorities unable to respond to emergency calls.

“It was gut-wrenching when you’re getting calls where families are with their kids and they’re saying they’re freezing,” he told CNN. Hochul, a native of Buffalo, said she was stunned by what she saw during a reconnaissance tour of the city.

“It is (like) going to a war zone, and the vehicles along the sides of the roads are shocking,” Hochul said, describing eight-foot (2.4-metre) drifts against homes as well as snowplows and rescue vehicles “buried” in snow. — AFP

Israel parliament passes laws ahead of Netanyahu return

JERUSALEM: Israel’s parliament on Tuesday passed controversial legislation paving the way for the return of veteran hawk Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister.

Following his November 1 election win, Netanyahu secured a mandate to form a government backed by ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties and an extreme-right bloc.

Netanyahu will present what analysts have said will be the most right-wing government in Israel’s history to parliament on Thursday.

On Tuesday, lawmakers passed legislation that now allows anyone convicted of offences but not given a custodial sentence to serve as a minister.

Before the law was passed, there had been uncertainty over whether Aryeh Deri, a key ally

from the ultra-Orthodox Shas party, would be able to serve as he had previously pled guilty to tax offences.

A second law passed allows for two ministers to serve in the same office.

The measure is aimed at the defence ministry, where Bezalel Smotrich, leader of the extreme-right formation Religious Zionism, is to be the minister with control over civil affairs in the occupied West Bank.

The Knesset also voted to expand the powers of the national security minister, a portfolio set to be handed to Itamar Ben Gvir, another extreme-right figure. The morning session also saw Netanyahu ally Yariv Levin resign as interim speaker of the Knesset, ahead of his expected appointment to a ministry. — AFP

Serbia troops on high alert over latest Kosovo tensions

BELGRADE: Serbian armed forces were on “the highest level” of alert, Defence Minister Milos Vucevic said on Monday, highlighting the Balkan country’s increasingly strained relations with neighbouring Kosovo over recent shootings and blockades.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, but Belgrade has refused to recognise it and encouraged Kosovo’s 120,000 ethnic Serbs to defy Pristina’s authority -- especially in the north where ethnic Serbs make up the majority.

The Serbian army has been put on a heightened state of alert over tensions with Kosovo multiple times in recent years -- the last time in November after claiming that several drones entered Serbian airspace from Kosovo.

On December 10, Serbs in



northern Kosovo set up barricades to protest against the arrest of an ex-policeman suspected of being involved in attacks against ethnic Albanian police officers.

The blockades have coincided with a rise in reported shootings, the latest on Sunday, according

to Nato-led peacekeeping force KFOR.

“Serbia’s president... ordered the Serbian army to be on the highest level of combat readiness, that is to the level of the use of armed force,” Defence Minister Milos Vucevic said in a statement.

He added that President Aleksandar Vucic also ordered the special armed forces to be beefed up from the existing 1,500 to 5,000.

Serbia’s interior ministry also announced that “all units (will) immediately come under the command of the chief of general staff”.

These orders from Vucic come after army chief General Milan Mojsilovic was dispatched to the border with Kosovo on Sunday.

“The situation there is complicated and complex,” Mojsilovic said on Sunday.

Northern Kosovo has been especially on edge since November when hundreds of ethnic Serb workers in the Kosovo police as well as the judicial branch, such as judges and prosecutors, walked off the job. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

NEW DELHI

India to probe death of Russian lawmaker

Indian police are investigating the sudden deaths of a wealthy Russian politician who reportedly criticised the Ukraine war and his travelling companion at a luxury hotel, authorities said on Tuesday.

The body of Pavel Antov, 65, was found on Saturday in a pool of blood outside his lodgings in eastern Odisha state, where he was on holiday with three other Russian nationals.

His death came two days after another member of the



travel party, Vladimir Bidenov, was found unconscious after suffering an apparent heart attack at the same hotel and could not be revived.

TEHRAN

Raisi vows ‘no mercy’ for ‘hostile’ protest movement

President Ebrahim Raisi said on Tuesday Iran would show “no mercy” towards “hostile” opponents of the Islamic republic, gripped by more than 100 days of protests sparked by Mahsa Amini’s death.

The “riots”, as Tehran generally refers to them, were triggered by the September 16 death in custody of Iranian-Kurdish Amini, 22, after her arrest for an alleged breach of the strict dress code for women.

Addressing a crowd



in Tehran, Raisi accused “hypocrites, monarchists and all anti-revolutionary currents”.

BAGHDAD

Iraq PM summons central banker as currency slides

Iraq’s premier summoned the central bank governor on Tuesday amid worries sparked by a currency drop against the dollar, with lawmakers calling for an extraordinary session of parliament.

One US dollar traded at 1,580 Iraqi dinars on the street on Tuesday, against the central bank rate of 1,470 dinars, state news agency INA reported.

The drop, which began about two weeks ago, has sparked alarm in the media in the oil-



rich country, and on Tuesday Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al Sudani met the central bank governor to discuss the issue.



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In brief

■ MINSK



BELARUS SENTENCES FORMER OLYMPIAN TO 12 YEARS IN PRISON

A court sentenced in absentia former Olympic swimmer Aliaksandra Herasimenia and political activist Alexander Opeykin to 12 years in prison for calling for sanctions and actions aimed at harming the national security of Belarus.

“They were found guilty of public calls to commit actions aimed at causing harm to the national security of Belarus, including the use of restrictive measures (sanctions) against Belarus, individuals and legal entities of the republic,” the state news BelTA agency reported on Monday. According to the U.S. embassy in Belarus, there are more than 1,300 political prisoners in Belarus.

■ SEOUL



YOON SLAMS VOWS TO CREATE DRONE UNIT

South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol said on Tuesday he would advance the creation of a military unit specialising in drones, criticising the military response to a border intrusion by North Korean drones.

Five North Korean drones crossed into South Korea on Monday, prompting Seoul to scramble fighter jets and attack helicopters, and try to shoot them down, in the first such intrusion since 2017.

The incident rekindled questions about South Korea's air defences at a time when it is trying to rein in the North's evolving nuclear and missile threats.

■ SEOUL



S KOREA'S EX-PRESIDENT GETS SPECIAL PARDON

Former South Korean president Lee Myung Bak (pictured) is receiving a special pardon, more than two years after being sentenced to 17 years in prison for corruption. The 81-year-old conservative politician and former mayor of Seoul is the most prominent beneficiary of the decree, which the government announced on Tuesday for a total of 1,373 convicts. The recipients also includes other politicians as well as former officials.

He hoped the decree would serve to “unify national power,” President Yoon Suk Yeol said at a Cabinet meeting, according to TV channels. In South Korea, amnesties or mass pardons are often granted at the end of the year or on certain holidays and anniversaries.



A woman and man ride on a sled on a frozen river in Beijing on Wednesday. – AFP

China to lift Covid curbs on Jan 8

BEIJING: Chinese people, cut off from the rest of the world for three years by stringent Covid-19 curbs, flocked to travel sites on Tuesday ahead of borders reopening next month, even as rising infections strained the health system and roiled the economy.

Zero-Covid measures in place since early 2020 - from shuttered borders to frequent lockdowns - last month fuelled the Chinese mainland's biggest show of public discontent since President Xi Jinping took power in 2012.

His subsequent abrupt U-turn on the curbs, which have battered the \$17-trillion economy, the world's second-largest, means the virus is now spreading largely unchecked across the country of 1.4 billion people.

Official statistics, however, showed only one Covid death in the seven days to Monday, fuelling doubts among health experts and residents about the government's data. The numbers are inconsistent with the experience of much less populous countries after they reopened.

Doctors say hospitals are overwhelmed with five-to-six-times more patients than usual,

most of them elderly. International health experts estimate millions of daily infections and predict at least one million Covid deaths in China next year.

Nevertheless, Chinese authorities are determined to dismantle the last vestiges of their zero-Covid policies.

In a major step towards freer travel - cheered by global stock markets on Tuesday - China will stop requiring inbound travellers to go into quarantine from Jan. 8, the National Health Commission (NHC) said on Monday.

“It finally feels as if China has turned the corner,” AmCham China Chairman Colm Rafferty said of the imminent lifting of the quarantine rule.

There are no official restrictions on Chinese people going abroad but the new rule will make it much easier for them to return home.

Travel platform Ctrip's data showed that within half an hour of the news, searches for popular cross-border destinations had increased 10-fold. Macau, Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand and South Korea were the most sought-after, Ctrip said.

Data from Trip.com showed

outbound flights bookings were up 254 per cent early on Tuesday from the day before.

China's National Immigration Administration said on Tuesday that it would resume processing passport applications of Chinese nationals seeking to travel abroad and approving visits of mainland residents to Hong Kong.

China will also resume the implementation of a policy allowing visa-free transit of up to 144 hours for travellers. The extension or renewal of foreigners' visas will also be restored, the immigration administration added.

China's classification of Covid will also be downgraded to the less strict Category B from the current top-level Category A from Jan. 8, the health authority said, meaning authorities will no longer be compelled to quarantine patients and close contacts and impose lockdowns.

But for all the excitement of a gradual return to a pre-Covid way of life, there was mounting pressure on the healthcare system, with doctors saying many hospitals are overwhelmed while funeral parlours report a surge in

demand for their services.

Nurses and doctors have been asked to work while sick and retired medical workers in rural communities were being rehired to help, state media reported. Some cities have been struggling to secure supplies of anti-fever drugs.

“Some places are facing great pressure at hospital emergency wards and intensive care units,” NHC official Jiao Yahui told reporters.

While the Chinese economy is expected to see a sharp rebound later next year, it is in for a rough ride in the coming weeks and months as workers increasingly fall ill.

Many shops in Shanghai, Beijing and elsewhere have closed in recent days with staff unable to come to work, while some factories have already sent many of their workers on leave for the late January Lunar New Year holidays.

Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said his country would require a negative Covid test for travellers from mainland China. The government would also limit airlines increasing flights to China, he said. — **Reuters**

India inspects drug factories as Gambia controversy lingers

MUMBAI: India's pharmaceuticals regulator has begun inspecting some drug factories across the country, the health ministry said on Tuesday, as it tries to ensure high standards after an Indian company's cough and cold syrups were linked to deaths in Gambia. India is known as the “pharmacy of the world” and its pharmaceuticals exports have more than doubled over the past decade to \$24.5 billion in the past fiscal year.

The deaths of at least 70 children in Gambia has dented the industry's image, though India says the drugs made by New Delhi-based Maiden Pharmaceuticals Ltd were not at fault.

“Joint inspections are being conducted all over the country as per standard operating procedures,” the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said in a statement. “This will ensure high standards of quality compliance with respect to drugs manufactured in the country.” The ministry said it was inspecting “drug manufacturing units” that were at risk of making non-standard, adulterated, or spurious drugs but did not name any company.

Some health experts say India's drug regulations are lax, especially at the level of states where thousands of factories operate.

The government in October suspended all of Maiden's production, based in the state of Haryana, for violation of manufacturing standards.

But India's main drugs officer told the World Health Organization this month that tests of samples from the same batches of syrups that Maiden sent to Gambia were compliant with government specifications. Maiden too said its drugs were fine. The WHO said labs contracted by it in Ghana and Switzerland found excess levels of ethyleneglycol and diethyleneglycol contaminants in the Maiden syrups. — **Reuters**

Taiwan extends mandatory military service

TAIPEI: Taiwan on Tuesday announced an extension in mandatory military service from four months to one year, citing the threat from an increasingly hostile China.

Beijing considers self-ruled, democratic Taiwan a part of its territory, to be taken one day, by force if necessary, and the island lives under the constant fear of a Chinese invasion.

China's sabre-rattling has intensified in recent years under President Xi Jinping, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further deepened worries in Taiwan that Beijing might move similarly to annex the island.

China's “intimidation and threats against Taiwan are getting more obvious”, President Tsai Ing-wen told a press conference after a high-level government



Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen speaks at a news conference on new measures to reinforce the island's civil defence amid the rising China military threat in Taipei on Tuesday. – **Reuters**

meeting on national security. “No one wants war... but my fellow countrymen, peace will not fall from the sky.”

The extended requirement will apply to men born after January 1, 2005, Tsai added. Mandatory service used to be deeply unpopular in Taiwan, and its previous government had reduced it from one year to four months with the aim of creating a mainly volunteer force.

Tsai described the extension as “an extremely difficult decision... to ensure the democratic way of life for our future generations.”

“We can only avoid a war by preparing for a war and we can only stop a war by being capable of fighting a war.”

The prospect of a Chinese invasion has increasingly worried Western nations and many of

China's neighbours.

President Xi has made clear that what he calls the “reunification” of Taiwan cannot be passed on to future generations.

The island needs to go further than just extending mandatory service, said J. Michael Cole, a Taipei-based analyst.

“Given the threat level and the example of Russia in Ukraine, I hope the Taiwanese public realises that such measures are needed,” he said.

The military service announcement on Tuesday came two days after Chinese military exercises near Taiwan, which were held in response to what Beijing described as “provocations” and “collusion” between Washington and Taipei. — **AFP**

Message for the youth as lessons from Fifa World Cup



Massrat Shaikh

The writer is an educational psychologist

Qatar successfully delivered a spectacular Fifa 2022 with beautiful memories and some great lessons. For Qatar it was a huge undertaking, but it was delivered with such grace, diligence, bravery, and courage that it has left us all with a calling — the calling for discipline, respect, hard work, and for commitment.

There are lessons for us all to learn, especially for our youth in the region.

This event has imprinted the following lessons on us, some of which are:

Hard work: Nothing comes easy in life. For Qatar to make Fifa a possibility and for Messi to win the World Cup, there is only one lesson here, and that is hard work. Whatever you want to achieve will only come if you are ready to work

for it. Our dreams and aspirations will take form with consistent effort, and nothing will ever replace hard work.

Failure: Success is always built on failure. Messi has missed more shots than he has scored, missed penalties, and lost finals before winning. So do not be discouraged from failing. As it is rightly said, failure is the mother of success. Failure allows us to learn and try again. Any person who has been discussed as a GOAT in their field has known failure as a lifelong friend. So, make friends with your failures and learn from your setbacks.

Respect: Stick to your core values, principles, and your beliefs. Our confidence and individuality come from who we are. We cannot be someone else to prove our worth

RESPECT OTHERS' VIEWS, TAKE FEEDBACK AND ADVICE THAT IS COMING YOUR WAY BUT DO NOT LET NEGATIVITY AND CRITICISM AFFECT YOUR COMMITMENT TO DO YOUR BEST

or our capabilities. Take pride in what you have, value it, and respect it; if you do, others will too.

Commitment: Reaching your goals is always challenging. Do not get derailed and scared of bullies and negativity. There is always criticism at every turn. However, respect others' views, take feedback and advice that is coming your way but do not let negativity and criticism affect your commitment to do your best.

Teamwork: The one thing to learn from sports is to work in teams. It is the team that makes the game victorious, not one person. So, find your team, work with others, appreciate those who help you and take the opportunity of playing beside another person, as success comes with joint effort. Include others and do not divide. Division only brings loss, while inclusion will always bring opportunity and success.

Passion: The passion for winning the trophy is something that every player has. Their passion is their driver. Find passion in your work or work for your passion but ensure to include it in your equation. Being passionate about your work will increase your productivity and help you celebrate your achievements.

Time Management: A event is

accomplished, and a game is won only when delivered in time. Be conscious of how you spend your time. Indulge yourself, but only after your work is done after you have successfully gained each day.

Planning: Games are won on the field with continuous training, planning and discipline. Players take time to strategise, to understand their opponents and their strengths. Similarly, each of us should have a plan for our career, studies, work, and life in general.

A lesson for parents and educators— we need to focus a lot on teaching discipline, dedication, and respect to our young people. That is the solution to several of the issues we see in our education today, and maybe those are the exact solutions we need for our wider community.

Webb telescope promises new age of the stars

PIERRE CELERIER AND LUCIE AUBOURG

The James Webb Space Telescope lit up 2022 with dazzling images of the early universe after the Big Bang, heralding a new era of astronomy and untold revelations about the cosmos in years to come.

The most powerful observatory sent into space succeeded the Hubble telescope, which is still operating, and began transmitting its first cosmic images in July.

“It essentially behaves better than expected in almost every area,” said Massimo Stiavelli, head of the Webb mission office at the Space Telescope Science Institute, in Baltimore.

Already scientists say the Webb telescope, now orbiting the sun at a million miles (1.6 million kilometres) from Earth, should last 20 years, twice its guaranteed lifetime.

“The instruments are more efficient, the optics are sharper and more stable. We have more fuel and we use less fuel,” said Stiavelli.

Stability is vital for image clarity.

“Our requirement was similar to that of Hubble, in terms of pointing accuracy. And we ended up being seven times better,” the mission office chief added.

Public appetite for the discoveries has been fed by the colouring of the telescope’s images.

Light from the most distant galaxies has been stretched from the visible spectrum, viewable by the naked eye, to infrared -- which Webb is equipped to observe with unprecedented resolution.

This enables the telescope to detect the faintest glimmers from the distant universe at an unprecedented resolution, to see through the veil of dust that masks the emergence of stars in a nebula and to analyse the atmosphere of exoplanets, which orbit stars outside our solar system.

“The first year (of observation) is a way to test out the tool for the small rocky planets in the habitable zone that could potentially be like Earth,” said Lisa Kaltenegger, associate professor in Astronomy at Cornell University.

“And the tests are beautiful. They’re spectacular.”

Webb blasted off aboard an Ariane 5 rocket at the end of 2021, crowning a 30-year project at the US space agency Nasa.

It took 10,000 people and \$10 billion to put the 6.2-tonne observatory into space.

En route to final orbit, Webb deployed a five-layer sunshield the size of a tennis court followed by a 6.5-metre primary mirror made up of 18 hexagonal, gold-coated segments or petals.

— AFP

New year and new aspirations for human societies



Badr al Abri

A writer is the author of *The Jurisprudence of Extremism*

The Gregorian calendar is no longer a Christian calendar nor does it have a Christian or Western legacy. The Gregorian calendar of today brings humanity as a whole together regardless of the differences in languages, religions and orientations.

The world will soon bid adieu to a year with all its goods and bads, positives and negatives and is welcoming a new year with renewed hopes and aspirations, the year 2023 while we are still at the onset of the third decade of the new millennium.

It is a new millennium, however the human conflict still arises every now and then in various forms the latest of which is the Ukrainian war that affected the whole world while concerns of a new world war are looming on the backdrop of the East-West struggle and a wide expansion in armament, augmenting economic conflict and the spread of biological war.

All these factors are gloomy indicators of the coming reality particularly if the world is led by the politicians who are obsessed with creating a leadership out of the people’s blood, and priests who are living in an inherited metaphysics of the inevitability of destruction for the saviour to come and the beginning of eternity, and philosophers who justify the politicians’ deeds, artists, intellectuals and opportunists who run after short-lived personal benefits pertaining to egos, identities or ethnicities.

Human societies will, by no means, be emancipated from the bond of conflict that was synonymous with humanity from ancient time which is why wars, famines, destruction and displacement are taking place.

Some of these conflicts have turned into doctrines and fanaticism that are advocated by some people and contests that are glorified by poets. Such examples ever re-emerge in various forms and shapes.

In order for the human societies to liberate themselves from such conflicts, they should be freed from the interests of the politicians, the

fantasies of the priests and their populist rhetoric that on the one hand justify the evils of the politician and realise the metaphysical illusions, on the other. Illusions are made by humans under the pretext of emancipation and to refuel conflicts. Humanity needs to be freed from the opportunists who consider nothing other than their personal interests.

It can only happen if and when we emerge out of the politicians’ box, the social and religious identities to the openness of pure human principles.

HUMAN SOCIETIES WILL, BY NO MEANS, BE EMANCIPATED FROM THE BOND OF CONFLICT THAT WAS SYNONYMOUS WITH HUMANITY FROM ANCIENT TIME WHICH IS WHY WARS, FAMINES, DESTRUCTION AND DISPLACEMENT ARE TAKING PLACE

Only then will we be able to achieve a universal human order that knows no distinction among people, only when we look to wider human space that is designed to confront conflicts that murder people and disintegrate human society.

After the first and second world wars, the human mind spawned a universal order that generated human rights, which in turn created stability, the benefits of which we are still enjoying.

On the contrary, the authoritarian state exercised superiority over the citizens as humans. The more the rights of citizenship were correlated with humans, the more they were

freed from the tyranny of the authoritarian state.

However, the international charters of human rights are retreating due to political manipulation and personal interest.

Notwithstanding, human rights charters were the basis of the transition from pure humanity to the procedural state, the pragmatism of some procedural states caused them to control the bounties and interests of other nations in the name of human rights.

The crisis of veto whereby five states out of 193 states possess an unfair authority over the rest of the states should be resolved. The veto is an embodiment of negative pragmatism. The use of force should be resorted to only to realise justice.

Hence, states should waive off the use of force in international relations. The use of force should be resorted to achieve the interests of all countries rather than the narrow and negative interests of certain countries. That should be known to the philosophical and the religious mind so as not to copy negative human experiences.

Human societies have aspirations to realise their dignity and surpass destructive wars and conflicts.

They aspire to end tyranny, pragmatism, narrow interests, discrimination, human trafficking, biological warfare, armament, poverty, ignorance. This can be realised by cultural minds that are aware of itself as an identity that is independent of any personal interests or any forms of pragmatism.

With the new year 2023 around the corner, we hope to overtake the repercussions of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the ongoing events in the Middle East in general and the Arab particularly in Palestine, Syria, Yemen.

I hope that we overcome sectoral rhetoric to the united human rhetoric that achieves human dignity.

Realistically, we can endure living in the past no more. We can no longer bear negative identities which harmed the whole human society.

A happy welcome to 2023

As we are close to saying farewell to 2022, there is undoubtedly a lot to reminisce about. Whether this has been a year of unexpected challenges or you're ready for a clean slate in 2023, take a moment to reflect and reimagine the goals regardless of where you are geographically and what role you play!

When we look back, we cannot forget the havoc wreaked on our lives and our plans in the past. Although the global pandemic has come much on a controlled level, it is still lingering with its different variants.

Before the pandemic, no one could have foreseen the physical, emotional, and economic toll that this terrible virus unleashed upon the world!

The sharp pick-up in inflation has added a new element of uncertainty. Early in 2022, inflation surged in the US and some European economies, triggering an almost synchronised tightening of monetary policies in most countries in the world.

This was aggravated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine towards the end of February, which sent energy, food, and fertiliser prices soaring and spawned widespread supply disruptions. Ukraine, inflation, economic uncertainty, climate change, and the persistent threat posed by Covid and its offshoots will dominate 2023 along with, if the past is anything to go by, one or two new problems that we can currently hardly imagine.

While these are all universal problems that affect all the people on the earth, optimism is what leads us to life!

With over eight billion people on the planet earth, the months, weeks, and days that we all have are exactly the same but the experience each one of us has is entirely different.

For millions, it may have been an exciting or fantastic year while for millions of others it might have been



Samuel Kutty
@samkutttyp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

FOR MILLIONS, IT MAY HAVE BEEN AN EXCITING OR FANTASTIC YEAR WHILE FOR MILLIONS OF OTHERS IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A BIZARRE YEAR. SOME OF US MAY HAVE BECOME MORE CONFIDENT AS THE DAYS PASSED, BUT MANY OF US HAVE NOT DUE TO VARIOUS CHALLENGES WITH VARIED VELOCITIES

a bizarre year. Some of us may have become more confident as the days passed, but many of us have not due to various challenges with varied velocities.

Yes, it's important to look back into the past year to see what went right, celebrate that, and bring it into the next year in a better way for a better life. Reminiscing 2022 also means analysing what went wrong, re-work on that and try and redefine, rectify those mistakes in a way that we can craft and shape a better 2023.

Nobody else is responsible for what we do in our life. The future to come is ours, what is about to come from today on is ours and we are the architect of our lives, our success, our happiness, our relationships, or our career. At the same time, we cannot satisfy all nor can we be in the good books of all.

For me, the year has taught me my own strengths and my self-proclaimed corner which proved my presence to be much beyond what I thought. I was full of anxiety when I retired from my job last July. Of course, retiring from work is a major life change that can bring stress as well as benefits!

"The more resilient you are, the better you're able to cope with challenges like retirement", I have learned. As we grow older, life can seem to change at an ever-quickening rate. Kids leave home, you lose friends and loved ones, physical and health challenges mount, and retirement looms. It's normal to respond to these changes with an array of mixed, often conflicting emotions.

This year thus made me realise that my battles are my own and I may trust all or feel to be trusted but it is not always true. I learned and trained myself with a combination of tears and laughter coming together!

So without malice to anyone, I wish all the very best to all of you for the New Year 2023, and may all your dreams come true with new blessings and sparkles of happiness. HAPPY NEW YEAR 2023 in advance!

DIVE OF FAITH



A person dives from a springboard in front of beach-goers during a hot summer day at Sea Point swimming pool in Cape Town, South Africa, on Thursday. – Reuters

Voters tackle Trumpian tactics

ANUJ CHOPRA

From the United States to Brazil and Israel, a barrage of election-related misinformation hammered voters around the world in 2022, but many pushed back against the conspiracy-laden Trumpian tactic of sowing distrust in the democratic process.

A tsunami of falsehoods flooded Twitter, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube -- from "deep fake" videos to doctored photos seeking to manipulate voters -- with pro-democracy activists accusing the platforms of doing too little to combat the menace.

Candidates around the world borrowed from Donald Trump's playbook in peddling unfounded allegations of election fraud, but in countries such as the United States and Brazil many voters appeared to reject the narrative.

Defying widespread predictions of a Republican "red wave" in the November midterms, several of Trump's hand-picked candidates lost in close-fought races, with observers saying their continued refusal to accept the 2020 election result may have put off voters.

Republican leaders and supporters "seem to be coming to terms with the way that embracing conspiracy theories has led to poor candidate selection, inefficient voter mobilisation, voter cynicism, and a host of other ills," Mike Caulfield, a

CANDIDATES AROUND THE WORLD BORROWED FROM DONALD TRUMP'S PLAYBOOK IN PEDDLING UNFOUNDED ALLEGATIONS OF ELECTION FRAUD, BUT IN COUNTRIES SUCH AS THE UNITED STATES AND BRAZIL MANY VOTERS APPEARED TO REJECT THE NARRATIVE.

research scientist at the Center for an Informed Public at the University of Washington, said.

"Many will try to wean their supporters off election fraud conspiracy theories... It's going to be a very tough problem to solve."

Likewise, the Brazilian election, which led to a tense runoff in late October after an inconclusive first round, was awash in disinformation as far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro echoed Trump's election fraud claims without evidence.

His leftist rival Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva ultimately won the runoff and polls showed the public's confidence in the voting process remained strong.

But analysts caution that many voters still believe Bolsonaro's claim, and the country's fight against disinformation remains far from over.

Candidates in Israel's November polls also increasingly followed Trump's playbook, with Benjamin Netanyahu's party, Likud, starting a "stop the steal" campaign as soon as the election was announced.

"Likud was pushing (the) conspiracy that the elections are rigged, that the central election committee of Israel is controlled by (the) deep state," said Achiya Schatz, head of disinformation watchdog group FakeReporter.

Netanyahu went on to win, and

the veteran right-winger's claims of a corrupt vote faded away as he stood poised to reclaim power after 14 months in opposition.

Trump was also a major presence in Hungarian politics, with the former US president personally endorsing far-right Prime Minister Viktor Orban ahead of April elections that were rife with disinformation.

Orban's party Fidesz "took maximum advantage of its media dominance... to spread factually incorrect or otherwise misleading allegations and narratives about its political opponents," according to a study from Hungarian think tank Political Capital.

Just ahead of the vote Orban, who has nurtured close

relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, alleged that his rivals "made a pact with the Ukrainians" to offer them weapons and support in the event of an opposition victory.

He offered no evidence and Fidesz roared back to power with a parliamentary majority.

Across the world, misinformation and disinformation typically spike around elections, eroding public trust in democratic institutions and sometimes unleashing chaos as nefarious state or non-state actors try to manipulate the results.

In presidential polls in the Philippines in May, the volume of election-related disinformation

spiked to "unprecedented" levels, said Rachel Khan, from the fact-checking alliance Tsek.ph.

An increase in fact-checking operations compared with previous elections could not tame the disinformation -- primarily focused on the two frontrunners, Ferdinand Marcos, who went on to win by a landslide, and Leni Robredo.

In Kenya, presidential rivals William Ruto and Raila Odinga are both alleged to have hired so-called digital "warriors" tasked with spreading election-related disinformation.

While Kenya's supreme court upheld Ruto's victory, many Odinga supporters believe the election was rigged.

And as Nigeria gears up for elections early next year, similar tactics are visible online -- deep fakes and photoshopped images to smear political opponents.

In the United States, meanwhile, analysts warn disinformation about election integrity could flare again as the 2024 presidential race picks up steam -- with Trump vying to reclaim the White House.

"Disinformation is a powerful tool," Pamela Smith, president of the non-partisan non-profit Verified Voting, said. "And those who only approve of elections that go their way will keep using it."

— AFP



A mural of former U.S. President Donald Trump on a building in Fulton County, Pennsylvania, US. – Reuters

sport

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Oman to meet Syria in second friendly ahead of Gulf Cup

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, DEC 27

Oman first national team continues the training during the external camp at the Officers Club stadium in Dubai, in preparation for the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup, which will be held in Basra from January 6 to 19.

The training session was led by head coach Croatian Branko Ivankovic.

Ivankovic in addition focused on intensive training for goalkeepers, and activating the midfield role in terms of sending crosses towards the goal, to prepare the players before the opening match of the Gulf Cup against the Iraqi national team.

Oman had defeated Syria 2-1 in the first friendly in Dubai.

At the end of the training camp,



the team will play a final friendly test against the Syrian team on December 30, before travelling to Basra on January 2, 2023.

The Dubai camp includes 29 players namely, Ahmed bin Faraj al Rawahi, Mohammed bin Saleh al Musallami, Juma

bin Marhoon al Habsi, Salah bin Said al Yahyae (Seeb), Harib bin Jameel al Saadi, Fayez bin Issa al Rushaidi, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Khamisi, Amjad bin Abdullah al Harthy, Essam bin Abdullah al Subhi and Khalid bin Nasser al Buraiki, Mahmoud bin Mabrouk

al Mushaifri (Al Suwaiq), Ibrahim bin Saleh al Mukhaini, Ahmed bin Khalifa al Kaabi, Ali bin Moosa al Hinai, Al Munthir bin Rabi' al Alawi, Ahmed bin Ali al Matroushi (Al Nahdha), Moataz bin Saleh Abd Rabbo, Yazid bin Salem al Maashani, Awad bin Mohammed al Shehri and Abdullah bin Salem al Mishrafi (Dhofar), Musab bin Hamad al Maamari and Ahmed bin Juma al Adawi (Al Rustaq), Fahmy bin Saeed Bait Durbin (Al Nasr), Waleed bin Salem al Musallami (Bahla), Jameel bin Salim al Yahmadi (Qatar's Al Markhiya), and Zaher bin Suleiman al Aghbari (Bahrain's Al Khalidiya), Omar bin Mohammed al Malki (Bahrain's Al Riffa), Hatim bin Sultan al Rawshdi (Jordan Al Faisaly), and Arshad bin Saeed al Alawi (Kuwaiti).

Saudi's Al Hilal post second win over Al Bashayer



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 27

Oman 's Al Bashayer suffered their second successive defeat against Saudi's Al Hilal club 86-54 on Monday night in Riyadh city for the second round matches of the West Asia Super League (WASL) for basketball in Group A. The triumph meant, Saudi's representative topped the group with full mark after their opening victory against Kuwait's Kazma club 96-92 in the previous week.

Al Bashayer were very close to a win in the opener against Shabab Al Ahli but the UAE club ended the game in a 71-69 win at the main indoor hall of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. In the same group, UAE's Shabab Al Ahli managed to grab their second straight win against Kuwait's Kazma 91-86 after a tight match. The upcoming match between Saudi's Al Hilal and UAE's Shabab Al Ahli will decide the group toppers.

Against Al Bashayer, hosts Al Hilal dominated the match from the beginning as they finished the first quarter at 22-14. In the following set, Klient Shiman and Mohammed al Suwalim pressed hard to end the quarter at 42-32 with a difference of 10 points. The gap extended in the forthcoming quarter after Al



Bashayer players' lack of focus to 23 points before Saudi's club ended the match with 32 points gap at 86-54.

Al Bashayer will conclude their campaign in WASL on Tuesday as they will meet Kuwait's Kazma in the latter's home in Kuwait city.

It is the first participation for Omani clubs in WASL event which is considered as a new dynamic competition for clubs in the West Asia and Gulf regions.

The sub-zone group phases will be played in home and away format and will qualify six teams from each sub-zone to the WASL Final 8, where they will be joined by the domestic league champions of South Asia and Central Asia. The qualifiers will conclude in May 2023 and then the six qualified teams will join the finals of WASL which is ranked as one of the top competitions of clubs under FIBA.

HM Cup hockey final postponed

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 27

The final of the 52nd His Majesty's Cup hockey championship scheduled to be held on Tuesday night at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat was postponed due to the rainy weather conditions until further notice.

"The His Majesty's Hockey Cup 2022 has been postponed until further notice due to the climatic conditions," the Oman Hockey Association announced on its official twitter handle.

Twelve-time champions Ahli Sidab and eight-time winners Al Nasr will clash in the title showdown.

Al Seeb edged Salalah 6-5

in penalty shoot-out to finish third after the play-off match on Sunday.

After the final round, Al Nasr topped with 13 points, followed by Ahli Sidab in second place with 11 points and qualified for the final. Al Seeb came in third place with 7 points. Salalah were fourth with 6 points and Bausher finished in fifth place with 5 points. Nizwa came sixth with no points.

Defending champions Sohar failed to get through to the final round from Group A with other three - Al Nasr, Al Seeb and Bausher advancing to next stage.

From Group B, Ahli Sidab, Nizwa and Salalah made it to the final round as Saham were eliminated.



OOC APPROVES DISPUTES AND SPORTS ARBITRATION COMMITTEE

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) held the fourth meeting for this year on Monday, headed by Khalid bin Muhammad al Zubair, OOC Chairman and in the presence of the members.

The new OOC formation for Disputes and Sports Arbitration Committee, as well as Oman Sports for a Sustainable Environment Committee, were approved during the meeting.

The OOC plan and budget for the next year 2023 was also reviewed and approved, which also included the budget for

international participations, and then reviewed the financial statement until the end of last November 2022.

The Board reviewed the draft regulations and controls that will be implemented during the coming period. The project of the Technical Office for Sports Studies and Development was approved. This project aims to create a technical umbrella that brings together a number of experts with expertise and knowledge, specialised academics and the like, and to be a participatory work team that provides technical support



as well as to advice to the Board of Directors, the sub-committees and the interested sports bodies in particular on technical and other advice related to the tasks that

will be assigned to the office. The attendees also reviewed the work regulations of sub-committees, and the controls for international participation. It was agreed to make

some amendments to them and to implement them directly. They also reviewed the implemented projects related to the phases for the next stage.

The attendees reviewed the amended draft of the regulations of Oman Athletes Committee, and after reviewing its provisions and the additions it contained, they were instructed to refer it to Oman Athletes Committee for review and coordination with specialists regarding the notes that were written and to be presented to the Executive Office for approval. Before the end of the meeting, there were several issues that the Board of Directors reviewed in the last items of the agenda prepared and took the necessary decisions regarding them.

Warrior Warner silences doubters with defiant double century

MELBOURNE: Short of runs and under pressure, David Warner entered the Boxing Day Test against South Africa warning the doubters not to underestimate the fight of a “housing commission boy” with back against the wall.

On Tuesday, on day two of his 100th Test, the veteran Australia opener retired on 200 in cramped-up exhaustion after tormenting the Proteas in a Melbourne Cricket Ground furnace, quashing all debate about his place in the side.

On the way to his third double-century in 254 balls, Warner posted his 25th hundred, and first in nearly three years, while becoming Australia's eighth player to notch 8,000 runs in Tests.

The 36-year-old left-hander also joined England's Joe Root in a two-man club of players to score a double in their 100th Test.

Though watchful in the nineties, Warner sealed his first hundred on Tuesday with typical aggression, pulling South Africa spearhead Kagiso Rabada to the fine leg fence to draw the crowd to their feet.

Five years on from a century against India in his 100th ODI, Warner ripped off his helmet and made his trademark leap into the steaming Melbourne air.

He has rarely held back after reaching a ton but there was added gusto in his celebrations as he blew kisses off his bat to



family and fans around the ground.

Hours later, struggling in 37 degrees Celsius (99F) heat, Warner hit four off Lungi Ngidi to reach his second hundred.

After slumping to his knees and pumping his arms in the air, he got to his feet for another leap but the effort left him leaning on his bat on

shaky legs.

DARKEST CHAPTER

It had hitherto been a forgettable home summer with the bat, clouded by off-field drama over his permanent leadership ban four years after the Newlands ball-tampering scandal.

Facing South Africa for

the first Test series since ‘Sandpaper-gate’, Warner managed only three runs in the Brisbane opener, raising questions about his future in test whites.

All that was swept aside as he battled through cramps and a bruised hand from an Anrich Nortje ball to savour one of his finest days in cricket.

Not unlike his career, it was an innings of endurance and daring with one moment of poor judgement. Trying to poach a run from an overthrow before lunch he ran out batting partner Marnus Labuschagne for 14.

But that was soon forgotten as he racked up 16 fours and smashed spinner Keshav Maharaj for two sixes before limping off with Australia 329 for three.

Australia were 386 for three at stumps, with a big lead of 197 runs in reply to South Africa's first-innings 189.

The son of working class parents raised in government housing in Sydney, Warner now wants for little as a global star, barring another chance to win the Ashes in England next year.

Team mate Steve Smith, who scored 85 in a 239-run partnership with Warner on day two, said the opener might have more to give to Australian cricket.

“He's obviously doing pretty well,” Smith told reporters.

“Fingers crossed he can keep playing well and he can play for as long as he likes.”

Warner's wife and staunchest defender Candice wept happy tears in the crowd but was hardly surprised by his return to form.

“You'd think by now writing David off is probably the wrong thing to do,” she said. “He thrives on that.” — **Reuters**



New Zealand's Devon Conway (R) and Tom Latham walk back to the pavilion after second day. — **AFP**

New Zealand foil Pakistan after Salman's hundred in first Test

KARACHI: New Zealand openers Devon Conway and Tom Latham blunted Pakistan bowlers to guide their side to a solid 165 without loss at close on the second day of the first Test in Karachi on Tuesday.

Conway became the fastest New Zealand batter to complete 1,000 runs in his 11th Test when he reached 82 at close and was ably supported by Latham who was unbeaten on 78.

The tourists are now 273 runs behind Pakistan's first innings total of 438 which was spiced up by a brilliant maiden hundred from middle-order batter Agha Salman.

Conway, the South African born left-hander who migrated to New Zealand to boost his career, was lucky to survive a caught behind dismissal on 57 off spinner Nauman Ali.

Pakistan did not challenge home umpire Aleem Dar's not out decision but television replays showed the batter had edged the ball.

Before Conway, John Reid had reached 1,000 career runs in 12 Tests in 1985.

Conway has so far struck 12 boundaries while Latham has eight hits to the rope.

The highlight of Pakistan's batting was 103 by Salman, who anchored the innings after skipper Babar Azam fell in the first over of the day without adding to his overnight score of 161.

Fast bowler Tim Southee forced an edge off Azam's bat to wicketkeeper Tom Blundell to give a kickstart to New Zealand.

Azam struck 16 boundaries and a six in his 365-minute knock.

Pakistan also lost Nauman (seven) and Mohammad Wasim (two) in the first session, which produced just 60 runs.

Salman added 54 runs for the seventh wicket before New Zealand took two wickets in the space of three runs.

Pacer Neil Wagner had Nauman caught off a short-pitched delivery before Wasim was caught behind off spinner Ish Sodhi.

Salman then cut loose, hitting two successive boundaries off Sodhi to complete three figures. His previous best of 62 was against Sri Lanka at Galle in July.

Southee, who finished with 3-69, finally ended the innings by trapping Salman leg before, completing 350 wickets in his 89th Test.

He is the third New Zealand bowler behind Richard Hadlee (431 in 86 Tests) and Daniel Vettori (362 in 113) to take 350 or more wickets in Tests.

Salman hit 17 boundaries during his 155-ball knock.

Ajaz Patel, Michael Bracewell and Sodhi took two wickets apiece.

The two-match Test series is New Zealand's first in Pakistan since 2002. — **AFP**

RSTS FCC thump Safara, Ahli Bank win

MUSCAT: RSTS FCC thumped Safara International by 88 runs in the D Division and Ahli Bank beat OCT Al Amerat B in the G Division of the Oman Cricket League Season 2022-23.

In the match between RSTS FCC and Safara International, RSTS FCC won the toss and elected to bat first. RSTS FCC got off to a shaky start with their first wicket falling in the second over of the match.

Josephin Joseph and Shahid Afridi took the responsibility and steadily built a partnership of 78 runs. Death over finesse from Rueben Kumar scoring 47 of 24 balls with 4 boundaries and a maximum and Shahid Afridi's chance-less 73 off 53 balls took



(L-R) Anzil N, Shahid Afridi, Rueben Kumar and Omidu M of RSTS FCC.

RSTS FCC to 190 runs in 20 overs.

In response, Safara International could not capitalise with only three of their batsmen reaching double

digits falling to brilliant bowling spells from the young Omidu Medagoda picking 4 wickets, Anzil Nazumudeen picking 3 wickets and Rueben Kumar picking two wickets.

AHLI BANK PREVAIL

In the match between Ahli Bank and OCT Al Amerat B, Ahli Bank won the toss and elected to bat first. Ahli Bank's openers made the most of the call and thrashed OCT Al Amerat's bowling with the opening pair of Ittecheria K and Tawsif Tambe stitching a 144 run partnership. Mohammed Zain's flourishing touches in the death overs took them to a record highest score this year with 221 runs on the board.

Abdullah al Balushi picked 2 wickets in the innings for OCT Al Amerat B.

In reply, OCT Al Amerat B could just notch 137 runs losing 7 wickets, falling

short by 84 runs. Abdullah al Balushi kept fighting for his team scoring 55 of 53 balls with 8 boundaries. Ahli Bank registered their fourth win of the league in 6 games.

BRIEF SCORES

RSTS FCC 190-3 in 20 overs (Shahid Afridi 73 (53b, 9x4), Rueben Kumar 47 (24b, 4x4, 1x6); Wasim Raje 1-34) beat Safara International 102 all out in 15 overs (Amol Dhotre 30 (24b, 2x4, 1x6); Omidu Medagoda 4-16, Anzil Nazumudeen 3-5, Rueben Kumar 2-14) by 88 runs. Ahli Bank 221-4 in 20 overs (Ittecheria K 91 (50b, 14x4, 1x6), Tawsif Tambe 67 (45b, 10x4); Abdullah al Balushi 2-43) beat OCT Al Amerat B 137-7 in 20 overs (Abdullah al Balushi 55 (53b, 8x4); Narayan Jayaraman 2-35) by 84 runs.

ARSENAL



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

LEAD ON TOP,
NEWCASTLE GO SECOND

NEWCASTLE CLAIM SIXTH WIN ON THE SPIN

LONDON: Arsenal came from a goal down to beat West Ham United 3-1 and extend their Premier League lead to seven points as the top-flight season resumed on Monday.

Earlier in the Boxing Day programme, Newcastle United stormed into second place by outclassing Leicester City 3-0 away for their sixth successive Premier League win.

Harry Kane overcame his World Cup penalty pain by helping Tottenham Hotspur recover to draw 2-2 at Brentford while Liverpool got back up and running with a 3-1 victory at Aston Villa with teenager Stefan Bajcetic joining Mohamed Salah and Virgil van Dijk on the scoresheet.

Former Real Madrid and Spain coach Julen Lopetegui got off to a strong start in charge of Wolverhampton Wanderers after his side came from behind to sink Everton 2-1 with a last-gasp goal from Rayan Ait-Nouri and increase the pressure on Frank Lampard.

After a 44-day interruption caused by the

World Cup, the Premier League resumed with many players back from international duty and Arsenal continued exactly where they had left off.

Former manager Arsene Wenger watched from the stands at The Emirates Stadium as Arsenal, top at Christmas for the first time since the 2007-08 season, responded emphatically to an early penalty by West Ham's Said Benrahma.

Bukayo Saka equalised from close range in the 53rd minute and Gabriel Martinelli smashed home a shot six minutes later to put Arsenal in front.

Eddie Nketiah scored Arsenal's third to complete the victory and ensure they maintained their 100 per cent home record. They have 40 points from 15 games, seven clear of Newcastle who have played a game more. Arsenal are eight ahead of third-placed Manchester City, who have played 14.

"We showed a lot of composure and quality," said Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta.

English Premier
League results on
Monday:

- Aston Villa 1 (Watkins 59)
- Liverpool 3 (Salah 5, Van Dijk 37, Bajcetic 81)
- Brentford 2 (Janelt 15, Toney 54)
- Tottenham 2 (Kane 65, Hojbjerg 71)
- Crystal Palace 0
- Fulham 3 (De Cordova-Reid 31, Ream 71, Mitrovic 80)
- Everton 1 (Mina 7)
- Wolves 2 (Podence 22, Ait-Nouri 90+5)
- Leicester 0
- Newcastle 3 (Wood 3-pen, Almiron 7, Joelinton 32)
- Southampton 1 (Ward-Prowse 73)
- Brighton 3 (Lallana 14, Perraud 35-og, March 56)
- Arsenal 3 (Saka 53, Martinelli 58, Nketiah 69)
- West Ham 1 (Benrahma 27-pen)

LIVERPOOL BEAT VILLA

"We didn't start to play the game they wanted to play, we kept pushing, believing and deserved the win."

NEWCASTLE CONTINUE RUTHLESS STREAK

Joelinton, Miguel Almiron and Chris Wood were all on target as a ruthless Newcastle struck three times in the first half against Leicester to fuel their fans' dreams of qualifying for the Champions League, or perhaps more.

"The season is still young enough for all possibilities to exist for us," said Eddie Howe, who has transformed Newcastle since he took over last November after they were taken over by a consortium backed by investment from Saudi Arabia.

Fourth-placed Tottenham got off to a nightmare start at Brentford but yet again staged a comeback, Kane and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg scoring in the space of six minutes in the second half to cancel out earlier

strikes from Vitaly Janelt and Ivan Toney.

It was Kane's first match since missing a penalty in England's quarterfinal defeat to France in the World Cup and he showed he had overcome that setback by netting a thumping header.

Free-flowing Liverpool eased past Aston Villa to go sixth in the table.

Striker Salah tapped in the visitors' opener in the fifth minute after a sublime passing move from marauding wing-backs Trent Alexander-Arnold and Robertson.

Defender van Dijk bagged Liverpool's second in the 37th minute with a superb left-footed shot after being set up by Salah. Ollie Watkins replied for Villa but 18-year-old Spanish midfielder Bajcetic squeezed in Liverpool's third.

Fulham eased to a 3-0 win at Crystal Palace, who had two players sent off, while Brighton & Hove Albion earned a comfortable 3-1 win at Southampton who sank to the bottom. — Reuters



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Oman, Japan ink pacts on green energy, methanation

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and Japan, represented by its Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, signed on December 27, 2022 a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the field of hydrogen, fuel ammonia and carbon recycling that includes methanation.

The two sides also signed the third extension of the MoU signed between the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and Japan Organization for Metals and Energy Security in the field of crude energy, natural gas and clean energy. The MoUs were signed by Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals and Yasutoshi Nishimura, Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry.

The first MoU aims to accelerate the Oman-Japan energy and resources cooperation and acknowledge the continued role and contribution of the Sultanate of Oman to Japan's energy security.

The MoU will support

efforts within multilateral fora to accelerate cooperation, exchange information and research results and hold workshops, trade missions, site visits and working groups in the field of hydrogen, fuel ammonia and carbon recycling that includes methanation.

Moreover, the term of the third extension of the MoU is from January 9, 2023 and for a period of three years, thus enhancing collaboration in dealing with commercial and technical issues pertaining to clean energy.

This MoU was first signed on January 9, 2014 in confirmation of the two sides' mutual intention and desire to promote and develop cooperation in the field of crude oil, natural gas and clean energy development on the basis of reciprocal benefits.

Al Aufi expressed his hope that those MoUs will contribute in the exchange of expertise and striking new partnerships in the field of hydrogen, fuel ammonia and carbon recycling that includes Methanation between the two countries. — ONA



Oman LNG signs three binding term-sheet agreements with Japan

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 27

Oman LNG announced on Tuesday the signing of binding sheet agreements with three Japanese firms for the delivery of LNG, starting in 2025.

ITOCHU Corporation, JERA Co Inc and Mitsui & Co, Ltd have become the latest beneficiaries of Omani LNG covering a total of 2.35 million metric tonnes per annum (mtpa) of LNG.

The agreements build on the existing robust partnership between Oman and Japan, where Japan has been a critical market for Oman's LNG for the last 22 years. The new agreements will see Oman LNG supplying Japan with a total volume of 2.35 mtpa based on contracts varying from 5 to 10 years. Supply commitments are as follows: ITOCHU Corporation, 0.8 MTPA, JERA Co Inc 0.8 MTPA, and Mitsui & Co, 0.75 MTPA.

The pacts represent a significant milestone in the history of Oman LNG, complementing efforts to renew LNG supply contracts for beyond 2024 with a strong interest to leverage its partnership with Japan.

This ensures Oman LNG sustains its position in the global LNG market and contributes to global energy security, where it currently continues to play a significant role in delivering clean and reliable energy.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, commented on the signing ceremony, "These LNG agreements are a testimony to Oman's commitment to supply the world with energy. Our partnership with Japan goes far and beyond since inception



of Oman LNG. This milestone will not only unlock growth opportunities, but will also sustain and expand our LNG business beyond 2024. Oman will continue to be a reliable supplier of LNG, and a global preferred destination for sourcing clean energy."

The agreements were signed by Hamed al Numani CEO of Oman LNG, with Tetsuya Yamada from ITOCHU Corporation, Hitoshi Nishizawa from JERA Co Inc, and Motoyasu Nozaki from Mitsui & Co at the Royal Opera House Muscat. Also present were Eng Salim al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals of Oman, Yasutoshi Nishimura, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan, as well as high officials, senior delegates representing the Japanese firms and from the Oil and Gas sector from both Oman and Japan.

Abdulsalam al Murshidi, President of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), commented: "The strategic relations and close ties between the Sultanate of Oman and Japan have delivered years of successful collaborations

in diverse industries, especially in the LNG sector. We are delighted today to stand and witness a new phase of this relationship in the signing of this agreement which reflects the economic diplomacy adopted by the Sultanate of Oman to promote its international standing in the energy sector, and contributes to the objectives of national economic growth in line with the priorities of Vision Oman 2040."

The agreements are strengthened by the reputation of Oman LNG as a reliable and trusted LNG supplier around the globe, coupled with the effective management of business processes to produce clean energy delivered to customers around the world safely and reliably.

Furthermore, the LNG plant at Qalhat, in Sur, has the capacity to receive and process additional volumes, as it has initiated the Power Project and Debottlenecking Project with its enhanced capacity to 11.6 mtpa.

"The term-sheet agreements, signed today, are the first for Oman LNG for its next phase

beyond 2024. Signing with Japan reflects our strong relations with the Japanese government, and Oman LNG's position as a reliable supplier of LNG worldwide.

These agreements are a game changer for Oman and Oman LNG, leveraging the opportunities to continue working with trusted partners, while expanding our market access on the growing opportunities of global energy trade," said Talal al Aufi, Oman LNG Chairman.

Hamed al Numani CEO of Oman LNG, added: "These agreements complement our efforts to further grow and strengthen our market positions including new business opportunities. This will leverage well the enhanced production and our nationwide commitment towards diversifying the economy, while ensuring economic growth. We are proud to continue growing our global brand built on home-grown capabilities and capacities that are pivotal on the backdrop of energy supply and efficiency."

H2Oman green hydrogen project to target \$6.5 bn worth FDI

Decarbonisation: Oman venture to benefit from similarities with NEOM green hydrogen project in Saudi Arabia, backed by ACWA Power and Air Products

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 27

A major green hydrogen project planned for development in the south of the Sultanate of Oman is anticipated to draw in foreign direct investments to the tune of around \$6.5 billion, a key project official has revealed.

Eng Siddiq al Lawati (pictured), Project Lead, said the proposed H2Oman venture – one of half a dozen 'Legacy Initiatives' unveiled prior to the formal launch of Oman's National Hydrogen Strategy in October – will unleash significant environmental, financial and social benefits for the country.

Speaking at an energy forum held in Muscat recently, Siddiq – who is part of the Alternative Energy Unit at Omani energy group OQ – added that the project will also include a sizable In-Country Value (ICV) component.

H2Oman is backed by a consortium comprising leading



Saudi-based global energy and water services group ACWA Power, OQ Group of the Sultanate

of Oman, and US headquartered industrial gases giant Air Products.

Envisioned for development in Dhofar Governorate, the project will generate around 1.1 million tonnes of green ammonia per annum based on 3 GW of solar and wind-based renewables capacity, and 2 GW of electrolyser capacity. Battery storage will be an integral part of the project as well.

Significantly, H2Oman will also benefit from a similar-sized green hydrogen scheme planned by two of the key consortium partners at NEOM, a futuristic city under construction in the northwestern part of Saudi Arabia.

"What's unique about this (H2Oman) project is that the partners are developing a project of the same scale in NEOM in Saudi Arabia. And the benefit we get out of that is that the lessons learnt are transferred directly to H2Oman project, in the sense of project planning, execution, as well as the technical and design work," Siddiq said.

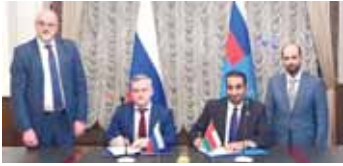
Additionally, H2Oman is projected to pull in around \$6.5 billion in foreign direct investments over the life of the project, the Project Lead noted, adding that the ICV component will be attractive as well.

"As it stands today, 29 per cent

of the total project capex would be actually procured and done locally, and 53 per cent of the opex over the project lifetime of 30 years will also be spent locally. This is per the current situation of the market. However, given the appetite we saw in the market and with a minimum investment, we would be able to scale this up to have another 9 per cent of capex to be spent locally in Oman as well," she stated.

Furthermore, as many as 15,000 jobs will be created during the construction phase, in addition to around 330 jobs when H2Oman is operational, the Project Lead added.

Oman, Russia sign MoU in air transport



BUSINESS REPORTER
MOSCOW, DEC 27

The Sultanate of Oman – represented by the Civil Aviation Authority – and Russia signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the field of air transport yesterday. The agreement, which was signed in Moscow, stipulates that the air carriers of the Sultanate of Oman and Russia will be allowed to operate regular flights of up to 14 flights per week between the two countries.

The MoU also allows joint operations by sharing common codes between airlines, in addition to a number of organisational and operational aspects in the fields of air transport and civil aviation between the two countries. The delegation, which was headed by the Civil Aviation Authority, was attended by the Omani Ambassador in Moscow, in addition to the representatives of both Oman Air and SalamAir.

Agreement signed to strengthen innovation, manufacturing sector in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 27

An agreement was signed yesterday between Madayn's Industrial Innovation Academy and Sohar University to strengthen the Sohar Production Company for Advanced Industries. The agreement was signed by Dr Ayman bin Abdullah al Fudaili, CEO of Industrial Innovation Academy and Dr Hamdan bin Suleiman al Fazari, President of Sohar University. The signing ceremony, held under the auspices of Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, was signed in the presence of both Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, for Commerce and Industry and retired Major General Hassan Ihsan al Nasib, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Sohar University, and Dr Hussein al Salmi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Industrial Innovation Academy.

The agreement comes to support the manufacturing sector and innovation in Oman. Through this agreement, advanced industries will be promoted, which is one of the economic



diversification initiatives to achieve Oman Vision 2040. This company is also considered as a second phase of the project, which came as a result of cooperation between the government represented by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Follow-up Unit for the Implementation of Oman Vision 2040 and Sohar University. The first phase was an experimental founding phase for the manufacture of moulds and the Centre for Advanced Research. During the first phase, the project was strengthened with many partnerships with

international institutions, most notably the international company DMG Morey, in order to supply the project with the machinery and equipment it needs. The company considers an important step towards advanced industries, which helps the academic level to provide qualitative academic and training programmes during the coming period. It will also contribute on the industrial level in supporting industries of all kinds, especially the manufacturing industries. The company will specialise in providing manufacturing services and specialised industrial

support in the field of research and development, reverse engineering, manufacturing of precision parts, manufacturing moulds, production tools and specialised spare parts for various industrial companies inside and outside the authority, in addition to developing Omani cadres. The company will also continue to generate knowledge and transfer advanced technology to localise it in the Sultanate of Oman. The establishment of the Sohar Production Company for Advanced Industries came through the success of Sohar University in cooperation with the

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in implementing two national projects for the manufacturing sector within the ninth five-year plan. These two projects are the centre for advanced manufacturing industries and the leading factory for moulds and production tools.

In the provision of spare parts, moulds and production tools for the industrial sector in addition to research and development and the development of Omani cadres.

Thus, the success of their achievement resulted in the establishment of the Sohar Production Company for Advanced Industries, which, according to the signed partnership agreement, will be upgraded to a higher level to open up to all industrial sectors to benefit from its technical capabilities and available equipment. Under this agreement, Sohar University will continue to embrace the company within its campus and provide the necessary support to continue its work, while the Industrial Innovation Academy will provide administrative and technical support to the company. Thus, the company will strengthen the industrial sector in the Sultanate of Oman, and will promote advanced manufacturing industries to broader horizons in line with Oman Vision 2040.

Asyad launches 'Data Lake' to promote data-driven competitiveness

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 27

Asyad Group launches Data Lake as its latest digital ecosystem project that falls within its strategy to equip Asyad with empirical insights on current and future operational, markets and customer trends. On this project, Asyad Group partnered with Rihal, an Omani data and migration services company, to develop its big-data management and analytics capabilities, support cloud-based applications and utilise Oman's new in-country cloud infrastructure, accelerating the deployment of cutting-edge technologies.

Big data analytics and forward-looking business intelligence are the key enablers of Asyad's group technological strategy aimed at achieving growth and global competitiveness. The solutions—developed in partnership with Rihal—will serve the present and forecast the future.

The proactive features will deliver an ideal customer experience, provide competitive services to acquire global customers and predict future market trends to support Asyad's strategy and growth.

The analytics of the amassed data from across the Group's operations and assets will serve as critical tool to optimise operational efficiencies, this include, for example, preventive maintenance that minimises breakdowns and downtime of ships and maritime assets, reduces fuel consumption and emissions from shipping.

This helps Asyad Group's



operational performance and quality improve, its profitability increase, and its business develop.

Eng Ghaith al Darmaki, Asyad Group's Chief Technology Officer said: "This endeavour is the first-of-its-kind undertaken by a government-owned entity in Oman. The purpose of this project is not to serve today's objectives only, but to also accurately depict the future of Asyad and the logistics sector. Through this project, we aim to use the extensive amounts of data and statistics amassed by our business units and process them in Data Lake's advanced digital ecosystem.

Data Lake will equip Asyad with the latest storage and processing tools as well as the relevant algorithm architecture capabilities to streamline operational processes, delivering on Asyad's

brand promise of quality and reliability.

Processing of advanced data which is the strongest currency in today's world economies will also bolster our forecasting abilities to better position ourselves for potential challenges, disruptions and opportunities in global logistics."

"Our RO 1.3 million partnership with Rihal, an Omani startup owned by ITHCA and other private entities, comes in line with our Group's strategy to increase our in-country-value contribution and support domestic research, development and innovation in digital technologies that serve Oman's logistics sector," added Al Darmaki. "This contract is a embodiment of our commitment to private sector engagement and to promoting the role of national

startups and SMEs in line with Asyad's approach to offer state-of-the-art solutions and technologies that help develop the logistics ecosystem in Oman."

Al Darmaki also emphasises that this milestone comes in line with Asyad's efforts to support local talents and boost their capabilities in one of the leading sectors in the future.

The CEO of Rihal, Eng Azzan bin Qais al Kindi, explained the impact of this project: "Partnering with Asyad Group, the leading Omani integrated logistics provider, is a monumental landmark in Rihal's journey in the technology business. It will enable us to expand our service reach and offer advanced technological solutions to the transport and logistics sectors.

It also presents a golden opportunity to exchange niche expertise with a global player to advance the competitiveness of the logistics sector and cast a wider net in regional and international markets through Asyad's client network."

Building on existing national capacities and investments, the Data Lake is a promising collaboration between Asyad Group and Rihal that will utilise Oman's investment in digital and cloud infrastructure and unlock new horizons for a technology drive led by the private sector in the Sultanate of Oman. These joint efforts will pave the way for enterprises in Oman to take their innovative smart products to global markets and optimise the use of big data in the world of transport and logistics.

Bank Muscat Oryx Fund delivers highest return to investors

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat Oryx Fund has once again been recognised as the best performing MENA equity fund by the reputed CityWire rankings. These ranking are based on the returns generated by the fund for its investors against 20 other funds focusing on MENA region during the 1-year period ended on October 31, 2022.

The Oryx fund has delivered 13.3% return for the one-year period ended October 31, 2022 as against a return of 0.1% by S&P GCC index during the same period. Delivering double digit returns is a remarkable achievement by Oryx Fund considering the challenging investment environment during 2022.

Consistency has been the hallmark of Bank Muscat Oryx fund in absolute as well as relative performance, across time periods, through its long track record spanning 28 years.

In addition to the attractive returns, the fund has also been consistently rewarding its investors with regular income distributions (through dividends) for past 28 years. In 2022, the fund has distributed dividend of 66 baisa per unit, thus maintaining its consistent and growing income distribution track record since 2016.

On the back of the robust track record, the fund has witnessed significant inflows over the years, making it the largest open-ended equity fund in Oman and one of the largest open-ended equity fund in the



GCC region.

Bank Muscat Oryx Fund has won several accolades for generating wealth for its investors and for significant outperformance compared to peers. Many times, it has been top rated by various renowned global fund reviewers such as Lipper, MENA Fund Manager and Emerging Market Finance.

Oryx Fund represents an attractive investment proposition for long-term investors. The fund's strategy to follow bottom-up approach, that is focused on selection of quality stocks, has been proven over various market cycles and time periods.

The fund management team's insights in GCC region, quality of research across industries and sectors and knowledge of investee companies' performance and future direction are the key factors that have enabled the fund to provide consistent and stable long-term returns to the investors.

The Oryx Fund is an open-ended fund regulated by the Capital Market Authority, Oman. The fund offers daily liquidity, providing flexibility to invest or redeem on any business day. Investors can subscribe to the fund with a minimum subscription amount as low as RO 50.

Bulb bailout exposes UK’s pseudo power market

Greg Jackson has done it again. A year after the boss of Octopus Energy added 580,000 customers to his UK energy group by scooping up bust Avro Energy, he’s gained three times that number by acquiring Bulb.

It’s great for Octopus, but it makes the “private” British power market look all the more odd. Bulb is the biggest of dozens of flaky British power suppliers

which opted not to hedge their future costs when energy prices were cheap. When gas prices soared last year, it imploded.

The UK government, which helped cause the problem by allowing ill-capitalised and poorly managed companies to compete for customers, stepped in to keep the lights on for Bulb’s 1.5 million customers.

The Office for Budget Responsibility expects the saga to cost taxpayers 6.5 billion pounds.

Of that, Britain’s fiscal watchdog has earmarked 4.5 billion pounds to smooth the way for the Octopus takeover.

That figure may prove too large, though. It’s the maximum loan the state will provide to buy all the power required by Bulb customers until the end of March, when Octopus will take on full responsibility for buying wholesale power.

Octopus itself thinks the loan could be more like 2.4 billion

pounds, as wholesale prices have recently fallen. If that’s correct, regular payments by Bulb customers will cover the cost.

Besides, while Octopus has until September 2024 to repay the loan, it must share any profits it makes from Bulb with the government until it does so. It’s also paying up to 200 million pounds for the customers.

That’s still a good deal for Octopus, which has already attracted investment from Al

Gore’s investment firm. It would have taken Jackson years to bump up his customer base by 50% to 4.5 million customers. And given that the UK government has already capped the price of electricity for households, the state could have just managed the business itself.

In a way, the Bulb rescue is a smaller version of Britain’s wider energy mess. The government’s Energy Price Guarantee, whereby the state picks up any difference between capped energy bills

and the true wholesale cost of supplying the power, could cost taxpayers 16 billion pounds in the first three months of 2023 alone.

With retail power prices fixed and the government on the hook for higher wholesale costs, Britain’s privatised power industry is operating in anything but a free market. The question is how long British voters will accept that an industry which is nationalised in all but name should remain in private hands. — Reuters

Is the inflation storm letting up?



PAUL KRUGMAN

The author, a New York Times opinion columnist, writes about macroeconomics, trade, health care, social policy and politics.

The average national price of regular gasoline this Christmas was almost 20 cents a gallon lower than it was a year earlier. Prices at the pump are still higher than they were during the pandemic slump, when economic shutdowns depressed world oil prices, but the affordability of fuel — as measured by the ratio of the average wage to gas prices — is most of the way back to pre-Covid levels.

Now, gas prices aren’t a good measure either of economic health or of successful economic policy — although if you listened to Republican ads during the midterms, you might have thought otherwise. But subsidising prices at the pump are only one of many indicators that the inflationary storm of 2021 to ’22 is letting up. Remember the supply-chain crisis, with shipping rates soaring to many times their normal level? It’s over.

More broadly, recent reports on the inflation measures the Federal Reserve traditionally uses to guide its interest rate policy have been really, really good. So is this going to be the winter of our diminishing discontent?

After the nasty shocks of the past two years, nobody wants to get too excited by positive news. Having greatly underestimated past inflation risks myself, I’m working hard on curbing my enthusiasm, and the Fed, which is worried about its credibility, is even more inclined to look for clouds in the silver lining.

And those clouds are there, as I’ll explain in a minute. It’s much too soon to declare all clear on the inflation front.

But there has been a big role reversal in the inflation debate. Last year optimists like me were trying to explain away the bad news. Now pessimists are trying to explain away the good news.

What’s really striking about the improvement in inflation

numbers is that so far, at least, it hasn’t followed the pessimists’ script. Disinflation, many commentators insisted, would require a sustained period of high unemployment — say, at least a 5% unemployment rate for five years.

And to be fair, this prediction could still be vindicated if recent progress against inflation turns out to be a false dawn. However, inflation has declined rapidly, even with unemployment still near record lows.

What explains falling inflation? It now looks as if much, although not all, of the big inflation surge reflected one-time events associated with the pandemic and its aftermath — which was what Team Transitory (including me) claimed all along, except that transitory effects were both bigger and longer lasting than any of us imagined.

First came those supply-chain issues. As consumers, fearing risks of infection, avoided in-person services — such as dining out — and purchased physical goods instead, the world faced a sudden shortage of shipping containers, port capacity and more.

Prices of many goods soared as the logistics of globalisation proved less robust and flexible than we realised.

Then came a surge in demand for housing, probably caused largely by the pandemic-driven rise in remote work. The result was a spike in rental rates.

Since official statistics use market rents to estimate the overall cost of shelter, and shelter, in turn, is a large part of measured inflation, this sent inflation higher even as supply-chain problems eased.

But new data from the Cleveland Fed confirms what private firms have been telling us for several months: Rapid rent increases for new tenants have stopped, and rents may well be falling.

Because most renters are on one-year leases, official measures of housing costs — and overall inflation numbers that fail to account for the lag — don’t yet reflect this slowdown. But housing has gone from a major driver of inflation to a stabilising force.

So why shouldn’t we be celebrating? You can pick over the entrails of the inflation numbers looking for bad omens, but I’m ever less convinced that anybody, myself included, understands inflation well enough to do this in a useful way.

— New York Times

Is a global recession really around the corner?



JEFFREY FRANKEL

The author, Professor of Capital Formation and Growth at Harvard University, previously served as a member of President Bill Clinton’s Council of Economic Advisers.

The world’s leading economists spent most of 2022 convincing themselves that, if the global economy was not already in a recession, it was about to fall into one. But with the year’s end, the global slump has been postponed to 2023.

Clearly, the reports that the United States was in recession during the first half of the year were premature, especially given how tight the US labour market is. And, despite the confidence with which many again proclaim the inevitability of a downturn, the chances of one in the coming year are well below 100%.

But, owing to the rapid interest-rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve and other major central banks, there is something like a 50% chance of a recession in 2023 and a 75% chance of it happening at some point during the next two years.

Europe, hit hard by soaring energy prices, is more likely to head into a recession, which conventional wisdom defines as two consecutive quarters of

GDP decline. China, however, seems to be in even worse shape. It has the same problems as Europe, plus a collapsing property sector and a surge in Covid-19 cases, owing to the Chinese government’s recent decision to reopen the economy without a sufficient vaccination push.

While China’s growth next year is expected to be far slower than the historic pace it has become accustomed to over the past four decades, it is unlikely that its GDP will contract for two quarters.

After all, even an eight-percentage-point decrease in Chinese GDP growth during the peak of the 2008 global financial crisis was not enough to cause its domestic output to shrink in absolute terms. This is yet another example of the flaws in defining recession by the rule of two consecutive quarters of negative GDP growth.

Moreover, many countries’ current economic woes are self-inflicted, owing to policy errors that have been as harmful as they were predictable. Between 2011 and 2021, for example, Europe needlessly deepened its dependence on Russian natural gas, leaving it exceedingly vulnerable when the Kremlin launched its war against Ukraine.

Likewise, China’s draconian zero-Covid policy came at a high economic cost, while the absence of a plan for how to ease pandemic restrictions meant that China’s containment strategy merely postponed Covid mortalities.

The US, for its part, has made numerous mistakes, including willingly relinquishing

its leadership of the liberal international order and ignoring the World Trade Organisation and the trade frameworks that its members had negotiated over many years. Former President Donald Trump’s tariffs were wrong, yet President Joe Biden has done little to reverse them. In fact, the “buy American” provisions in his otherwise-laudable Inflation Reduction Act flout WTO rules.

While the expected adverse effects of higher interest rates are not yet evident, there are signs that the “everything bubble” has finally burst. US stock prices peaked in January 2022 and have been trending downward since. Bonds, real estate, and emerging-market assets are all down for the year as well.

In July 2021, I argued that there was a 90% chance that the asset bubbles dominating financial markets would burst. Historically high valuations — relative to dividends, earnings, or incomes — were an obvious indicator, although real and even nominal interest rates were zero or negative this time last year. A low discount rate meant that virtually any asset-price level could be rationalised as the present discounted value of future income.

This year began with four kinds of assets more clearly screaming. “I am a bubble”: meme stocks like Gamestop, cryptocurrencies, NFTs, and special-purpose acquisition companies. Each was innovative, although not necessarily in a good way, and all collapsed by the end of the year. But should savvy investors see these declines as opportunities

and “buy the dip”?

Given that stock prices are not yet back to where they were three years ago, on the eve of the pandemic, it is reasonable to assume that they might fall further before they are in line with economic fundamentals.

The same might be said of cryptocurrencies, which have no fundamental value whatsoever. While next year will be rough for the world economy, the coming slump probably should not qualify as a recession, even considering that the two-consecutive-quarters criterion is too narrow.

Global growth in the postwar period has seldom fallen below zero for a single quarter, let alone two. By that measure, the severe oil-shock-induced downturns of 1974 and 1981 do not qualify as global recessions.

Even in times of apparent recession, positive growth among emerging and developing economies tends to outweigh advanced economies’ negative growth, the two notable exceptions being the 2008 global financial crisis and the 2020 Covid-19 crisis.

While the OECD and International Monetary Fund expect global growth to plunge to 2.2-2.7% in 2023, from 6.1% in 2021, that still leaves the world economy unlikely to shrink for consecutive quarters.

Even if we adopt less strict measures of defining a global recession, such as a decline of GDP growth below 2.5%, a 2023 global recession is hardly a foregone conclusion. Is it possible? Of course. But it is also entirely avoidable.

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Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in New York City. — Reuters

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER



MUSCAT: Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Sultan Al Muscat...

Sultan Al Muscat... Chairman of the Supreme Court...

Sultan Al Muscat... Chairman of the Supreme Court...

Sultan Al Muscat... Chairman of the Supreme Court...

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Revolution and in commemoration of the memory of the founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month.

While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. In these critical moments of uncertainty with social, physical and mental health, we should discipline ourselves.

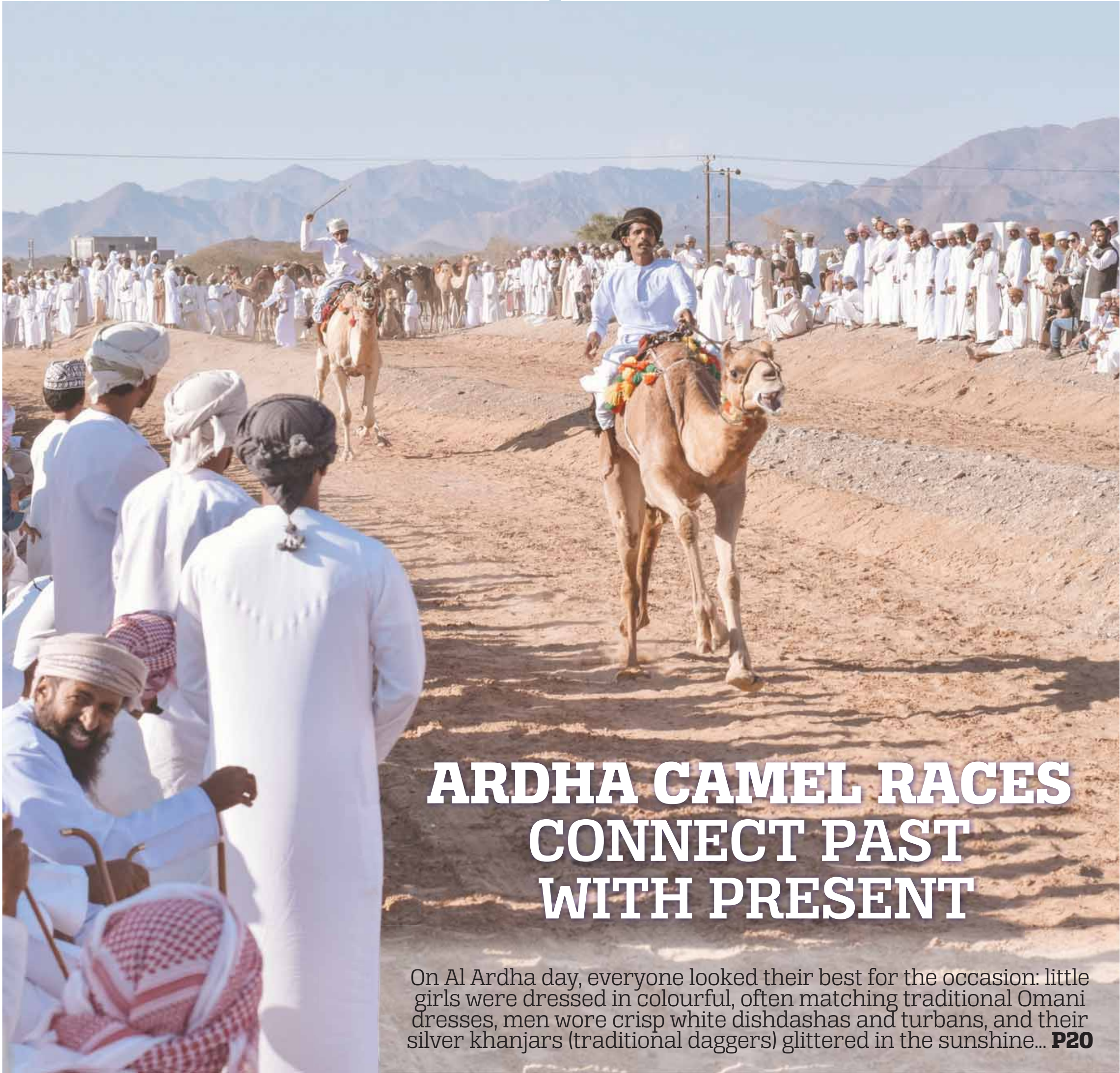
SOME PEOPLE ARE FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING MEASURES

and in some cases, it is necessary to follow the guidelines of other people as well. said Sultan Al Muscat, who urged his people to stay away from people at a time when the Omani community is in a state of uncertainty and fear. He said it is a time when the Omani community is in a state of uncertainty and fear. He said it is a time when the Omani community is in a state of uncertainty and fear.

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ARDHA CAMEL RACES CONNECT PAST WITH PRESENT

On Al Ardha day, everyone looked their best for the occasion: little girls were dressed in colourful, often matching traditional Omani dresses, men wore crisp white dishdashas and turbans, and their silver khanjars (traditional daggers) glittered in the sunshine... **P20**

German city aims to keep documenta day care exhibit open for children

A WORK OF ART at this year's documenta exhibition - a piece that was also a functioning crèche for parents and small children - could remain in the German city of Kassel if donations are forthcoming. The city, documenta, Museum Fridericianum and the artist called for donations for the purchase of the work "Parents and Toddlers Crèche /Public Daycare."

Artist Graziela Kunsch set

up the crèche on the ground floor of the Fridericianum during documenta fifteen. It was open from 10 am to 5pm and free of charge for babies and toddlers up to the age of 3, along with their carers.

With donations, the crèche would be available for use as it was during the exhibition. A parents' initiative, which is in the process of founding a supporting association for this purpose, will be

responsible for its operation. In addition, the city will provide start-up financing of ?15,000 (\$15,955) per year.

The project is inspired by the pedagogical approach of the 20th century Hungarian paediatrician Emmi Pikler, who emphasised the initiative of small children. The offer was accompanied by a photo exhibition, video work and the library of play.

The artwork is to be bought for the price of ?178,500, the

city of Kassel announced. Until further notice, suitable space and infrastructure would be available in the Kassel market hall to enable the reopening of the facility in a timely manner.

If the fundraising goal is not reached within the three-month campaign and the artist does not agree to the sum reached as the purchase price, the donors will receive their money back, it said. — dpa

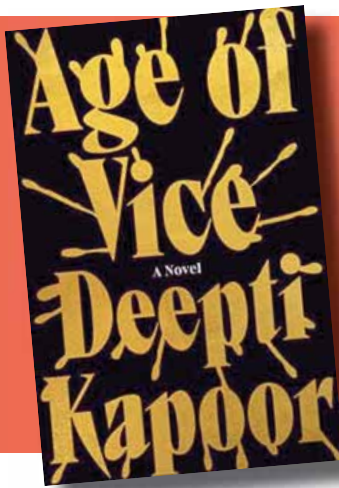


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AGE OF VICE A NOVEL

BY DEEPTI KAPOOR

Equal parts crime thriller and family saga, transporting readers from the dusty villages of Uttar Pradesh to the urban energy of New Delhi, *Age of Vice* is an intoxicating novel of gangsters and lovers, false friendships, forbidden romance, and the consequences of corruption.



LIFESTYLE

Emergency crews in New York were scrambling on to rescue marooned residents from what authorities called the "blizzard of the century," a relentless storm that has left at least 25 dead in the state and is causing US Christmas travel chaos. — AFP



CELEBRITIES

Swiss hyper-realist painter and graphic artist Franz Gertsch, famed inter alia for his large format pictures of US rock singer Patti Smith, has died aged 92, the museum that bears his name said on Thursday. —AFP





The importance of Omani heritage sites listed in Unesco

THE FIVE OMANI archaeological sites inscribed on the World Heritage List contribute to enhance the tourism and heritage elements of the Sultanate of Oman and strengthen its capability to attract investments to the tourism sector, which helps to empower the tourism sector to play its role in achieving the objectives of the Oman Vision 2040.

In this context, Ibtisam al Maamari, Director of the Directorate General of the World Heritage at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said, " the heritage is a fundamental tool for creating identity. It is considered as an indicator for the glories of nations, and a part of the means for the nation's prosperity, as well as being an essential source of pride inspiration in human thought. The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism was keen to join the World Heritage Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, in 1981, in accordance with Royal Decree No 81/69.

"The acceding to the World Heritage Convention, has paved the way for the Sultanate of Oman to nominate archaeological sites of exceptional value to be inscribed on the World Heritage List, while this concern contributes to enriching our cultural heritage and introducing its tourism importance to the world.

Al Maamari clarified that the inscription of any archaeological site on the World Heritage List, enhances the capability of the inscribed site to receive the support and attention of the international

community. It enables the countries which are homes to these sites, to obtain assistance in protecting and preserving their heritage, through direct assistance from Unesco.

It also helps the worldwide tourism promotion for the inscribed site by Unesco, in order to attract large numbers of tourists to visit it.

She pointed out that, the Omani sites met the justifications for the nomination in terms of preserving the site's authenticity, its proper management and protection. An analysis report was presented including a comparison between the nominated sites and other sites of the same type, in addition to specific criteria in Articles (1 and 2) of the convention, which ensure that, the site is of an exceptional universal value and maintains the conditions of authenticity and safety.

She clarified that there are several criteria that determine the inclusion of sites on the World Heritage List. This includes that the nominated site must be of exceptional global value, and represent one of the masterpieces of the creative human mind or manifest strong influences that took place over time or within a cultural area in the world, related to the development of architecture or technology, or to artistic edifices, town planning, or to landscape design.

The nominated sites also must be a unique or exceptional witness to a cultural tradition or civilisation that is still alive or extinct or that it represents an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, or a traditional method of using land or exploiting the seas and

represents a specific culture or interaction between man and his environment.

Among the criteria also, the nominated site must be directly or tangibly associated with events, living traditions, beliefs, or literary or artistic works of outstanding high importance, or include areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic significance.

For his part, Mohsen al Lawati, a heritage specialist at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, said that the site of Bahla Fort in the Wilayat of Bahla at the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah is considered the first site inscribed on the World Heritage List, in 1987, while the site includes the fort and the oasis, traditional Souqs , ancient lanes, and archaeological mosques within the wall of Bahla .The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has signed an agreement with the Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN), aims at managing and operating the Bahla Fort site.

Mohsen pointed out that, the Bahla Fort site contributes to strengthening investment in the tourism sector due to its capability to attract increasing investments, particularly after its inscription on the World Heritage List. The local Souq at this heritage site includes (186) shops, where the number of active shops reached (154), while (67) shops have been restored by the Ministry Heritage and tourism.

He emphasised that, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has developed a precise plan for the restoration of the Wall of Bahla that extends over a distance of 12 km.

The first stage of restoration works started in 2021, with a total

length of 729 metres on the front facade overlooking the road linking the city of Nizwa and Bahla.

He stressed that the Bahla Fort site also attracts many economic and commercial activities, such as cafes, exhibitions, antiques, gifts, local products, repairing electronic devices, and selling handicraft products, among others.

Al Lawati added that the sites of Bat, Al Khatm and Al Ayn in the Wilayat of Ibri in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah were inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1988. The sites represent a prominent example of the settlements in the third millennium BC, as they include the largest gathering of archaeological towers and tombs characteristic of that era.

He emphasised that the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism is preparing a comprehensive management plan for the sites, taking into account the historical, archaeological and architectural aspects.

The work on an investment project of the archaeological visitor centre at Bat is also underway. The project is located close to the archaeological site, which includes a number of facilities, such as a handicraft industries area, offices, an information and multimedia centre, cafes and stores.

He clarified that the sites of the Land of Frankincense were inscribed on the World Heritage List in the year of 2000. The sites are located in the Governorate of Dhofar and are represented in four sprawling sites, namely (Al Balid , Samharam/Khawr Rawri , Wadi Dawkah and Al Shasr), while Al Balid is considered as the most important and largest of these archaeological sites.

The site management plan includes information and data related to the basic aspects such as the historical, archaeological, and architectural aspects, as well as the legal framework, borders and taboos. During the year 2022, a tender was announced, aims at investing on cafes in (Al Balid , Samharam and Ubar) and to establish recreational activities in (Al Balid and Samharam). While a contract was made to invest in Wadi Dawkah site.



ART

New York artist turns tiny hip-hop street scenes into profitable business



WITH HIS NIMBLE fingers and child-like enthusiasm, Danny Cortes re-creates in miniature the hip-hop-infused street scenes of a gritty New York. But what began as a hobby has since brought him fame in the rap community and profitable sales even at Sotheby's prestigious auction house.

"We are adults, but we never stopped being kids," the 42-year-old artist said. "Who doesn't like toys? Who doesn't like miniatures?"

As he spoke from his workshop in the Bushwick neighbourhood of Brooklyn, he sat among recycled objects found on the streets.

On his table was a current project, the tiny replica of a worn and dirty building facade. Near a bricked-in window, a plastic bushel basket had been hung: a poor man's basketball hoop.

"This represents my childhood," Cortes said, putting touches to the model in his preferred medium, polystyrene.

"Everything looked like this: abandoned, empty, a lot of drugs in the area."

From \$30 to \$10,000

One of his recent creations is a modest Chinese restaurant with a battered yellow sign and with its red-and-mauve brick walls covered with graffiti.

Standing outside the restaurant – the real one – Cortes, sporting a black jacket and a baseball cap over his round face – smiles as he tells how New York rapper Joell Ortiz, who grew up in the neighbourhood, insisted on buying the model, saying, "Yo, I need that."

The price?

"Ten thousand dollars," Cortes says, adding that "the first piece I sold was like \$30, and I was so happy that I got \$30."

The artist builds collectibles based on the most banal of urban scenes, "the little things that we pass by everyday" and pay no attention to, but which collectively form the unique city scape that is New York.

It just took off

One of his first signature works was a rendering of a simple white commercial ice box – the kind that sits outside corner groceries, the words "ICE" in block red letters on its side, and often covered in graffiti, which Cortes reproduces with meticulous detail.

His repertoire also includes a classic ice-cream truck like the one in Spike Lee's 1989 film "Do the Right Thing," its musical chimes guaranteed to bring young New Yorkers running.

His work resonates with nostalgia, and he often incorporates tributes to mythical local rappers like Notorious B.I.G. and the Wu-Tang Clan.

Cortes was not always an artist – he has worked in sales, construction, and at a homeless shelter.

But the pandemic changed his life, pushing him to take more seriously what had been an enjoyable pastime.

After he displayed his first creations on social media, his work "just took off," he said.

Artistic label Mass Appeal, which partners with rap legend Nas, commissioned him to do a model of a ghetto-blasters boombox for the cover of a mini album by DJ Premier ("Hip Hop 50: Vol. 1").

In March 2022, four of Cortes' works were sold in a hip-hop auction at Sotheby's. They included an ice-cream truck that went for \$2,200.

And he has branched out, building a miniature replica of an Atlanta restaurant for its owner, the rapper 2 Chainz.

A lot of change

But Cortes' heart remains in Brooklyn.

"He has really captured the grimy, gritty atmosphere that was the birthplace for a lot of the '90s style of hip-hop music," said Monica Lynch, former head of Tommy Boy Records and a consultant on the Sotheby's auction.

Through his work, Cortes said he wants to document a place where "there is a lot of change," particularly his Bushwick neighbourhood. Now a trendy locale favoured by artistic types, it is also a symbol of gentrification – but Cortes said he's okay with that.

"I think it's good, I think it's safer, even though Bushwick is always gonna be Bushwick," he said. "There are more opportunities."—**AFP**



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AROUND THE WORLD

SPECIES

Fly away home: rare Eastern Sarus cranes released in Thailand



AS THE SUN came up, 13 Thai Eastern Sarus cranes were released over a rippling reservoir in northeast Thailand, the latest effort to revive the almost-extinct species in the kingdom.

More commonly known as Thai cranes, the birds nearly disappeared from the country roughly 50 years ago — they were last spotted in the wild in 1968 — before a collaboration between the Thai government, Nakhon Ratchasima Zoo and United Nations to save them.

A breeding programme, using fowl donated by Cambodia, began in 1989, with the first reintroduction in 2011.

Sarus cranes are classed by the ICNC as “vulnerable”, with an estimated 15,000 remaining in the wild — with the Thai sub-species having been thought to have disappeared from Thailand’s wild wetlands.

But since 2011, more than 150 captive-bred birds — which can grow to up to six feet (1.8 metres) and weigh almost seven kilograms (15 pounds) — have been released in Buriram province.

“It is the only place where the Thai cranes are able to live and reproduce on their own,” said Governor Chaiwat Chuntirapong.

The birds were transported in large, specially adapted boxes — their red-feathered heads watching through mesh windows — from the Wetland and Eastern Sarus Crane Conservation Center where they were bred to the Huai Chorakhe Mak Reservoir.

The latest flock of 13 cranes were released all at once on Christmas Day. The tall birds loudly honked and clumsily flapped as they unsteadily took to the skies accompanied by cheering children and spectators.

It was the final moment in a long journey for the researchers, who carefully nurtured the cranes from hatching, gradually introduced them to the wild and then took them to their final flight to freedom.

“The herdsman wears a suit that hides her body and wears a bird’s head puppet on her hands to teach the birds everything from feeding to familiarising them with nature,” said Nakhon Ratchasima Zoo researcher Tanat Uttaraviset.

As a result of the long process, roughly 60 to 70 per cent of the birds survive in the wild, he said.

Prior to their release, each bird is micro-chipped and tagged, allowing researchers to track them and improve the conservation efforts.

As well as rearing and releasing the cranes, an important part of the programme has been educating people about the species and the environment.

Huai Chorakhe Mak Reservoir was chosen partly thanks to its natural proliferation of water chestnuts — an important food source for cranes in the dry season.

But their habitat remains threatened by the “widespread invasion of agriculture”, said director of Nakhon Ratchasima Zoo Thanachon Kensing.—AFP

SCIENCE

2022's nature-inspired solutions



EVEN AS ANIMALS and plants face widespread extinction from human-driven causes like climate change, the natural world continues to inspire scientific discovery in unexpected ways.

“Nature has spent hundreds of millions of years optimising elegant solutions to extremely complicated problems,” said Alon Gorodetsky, a biomedical engineer at the University of California, Irvine.

“So if we look to nature, we can shortcut our development process and get to a valuable solution right away,” he said.

From squid-skin food warmers to a lubricant made of cow mucus, here is a selection of this year’s scientific work inspired by nature.

OKRA PLASTERS STOP BLEEDING HEARTS

Stopping the bleeding hearts and livers of dogs and rabbits without stitches may now be possible with a biodegradable plaster made of sticky okra gel.

Okra is a fuzzy green vegetable with a slimy texture that inspired Malcolm Xing from Canada’s University of Manitoba to turn it into a medical adhesive.

“Okra is a fantastic material,” said Xing.

In the July study published in Advanced Healthcare Materials, researchers discovered that refining okra in a juicer and then drying it into a powder creates an effective bioadhesive that quickly creates a physical barrier and starts the blood clotting process.

The researchers plan to test this plaster on humans in the coming years.

COW MUCUS LUBRICANT

Snot may invoke feelings of disgust, but laboratory tests found that a lubricant made of cow mucus showed promise at curtailing the spread of certain sexually transmitted infections.

The study, published in Advanced Science in September, is very preliminary, however. It has not yet been tested on humans and should not replace other forms of protection, like condoms.

Researchers extracted the mucus from the salivary glands of cows and turned it into a gel that binds to and constrains viruses. Mucus is made of a protein called mucin that might have antiviral properties.

It is also both a solid and a liquid.

“Being a solid, it can trap bacteria or viruses in the body. Being a liquid, it can clear those pathogens from the body,” said study co-author Hongji Yan from Sweden’s KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm.

ROBOT FIREFLIES

Fireflies that light up the night sky inspired scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to create tiny, bug-sized robots that emit light when they fly.

The glowing artificial muscles help the honeybee-sized robots communicate with each other, which may make them useful for search and rescue missions some day.

Though the robots can only operate in a laboratory

environment so far, the researchers are excited at their potential future uses.

CANCER-SNIFFING ANTS

There are an estimated 20 quadrillion ants in the world, and researchers have discovered that one species might be able to sniff out cancer in human breasts.

In a study conducted at Sorbonne Paris Nord University and published on the preprint server bioRxiv, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, scientists used a sugar-water reward to train ants to smell the difference between mouse urine implanted with, and without, human tumours.

While dogs can be trained to use their super noses to detect cancer, this is expensive and takes time.

Ants might provide a cheaper, albeit less cute, alternative.

Squid-skin tea cosies

The strange skin of squids has inspired a packaging material that can keep coffee and food warm for as long, or as little, as wanted, according to a March study published in Nature Sustainability.

Squids have miniature organs called chromatophores that can drastically change size, and also help them change colour.

To mimic “these pigment-filled organs”, study co-author Alon Gorodetsky, from the University of California, Irvine, said they developed “little metal islands that you could move apart” and contract.

The heat level can then be controlled by how much the material is stretched.

— AFP

MUSEUM

Ukraine museum in ‘shock’ after Russian looting spree



SHATTERED DISPLAY CASES and empty shelves highlight the extent of Russian looting at a history museum in the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson where Olga Goncharova has worked for four decades.

Since Russian forces retreated last month after an eight-month occupation, Goncharova, its acting director, has been trying to account for the damage and theft — a process she described as “a stab in the heart”.

“When I saw this, it was a very scary shock,” she said during a tour of exhibition rooms that have been left in shambles.

“I realised very sharply and vividly from this example of vandalism that the great Russian culture that they talk about doesn’t exist,” she said, decrying how the soldiers could have been “so cruel to the museum”.

The Kherson Regional Museum is one of four cultural institutions in the city that saw widespread pillaging by Russian troops, Human Rights Watch said in a statement this week.

The others are the Kherson Regional Art Museum, St Catherine’s Cathedral and the Kherson Region National Archives.

“Kherson residents had already suffered months of torture and other abuses during the Russian occupation, and then watched their cultural and historical heritage get packed up and taken away,” said Belkis Wille, HRW’s crisis and conflict associate director.

“The people of Ukraine are entitled to have all the stolen objects returned, and to justice for their theft.”

EVERYTHING WAS BROKEN

Specialising in local history, the Kherson Regional Museum housed about 180,000 objects in its collection prior to Russia’s invasion in February, and Goncharova had personally worked on preserving many of them.

“I didn’t know any other job. This is my second or maybe my first home. So all the exhibits that were here have passed through my hands,” she said.

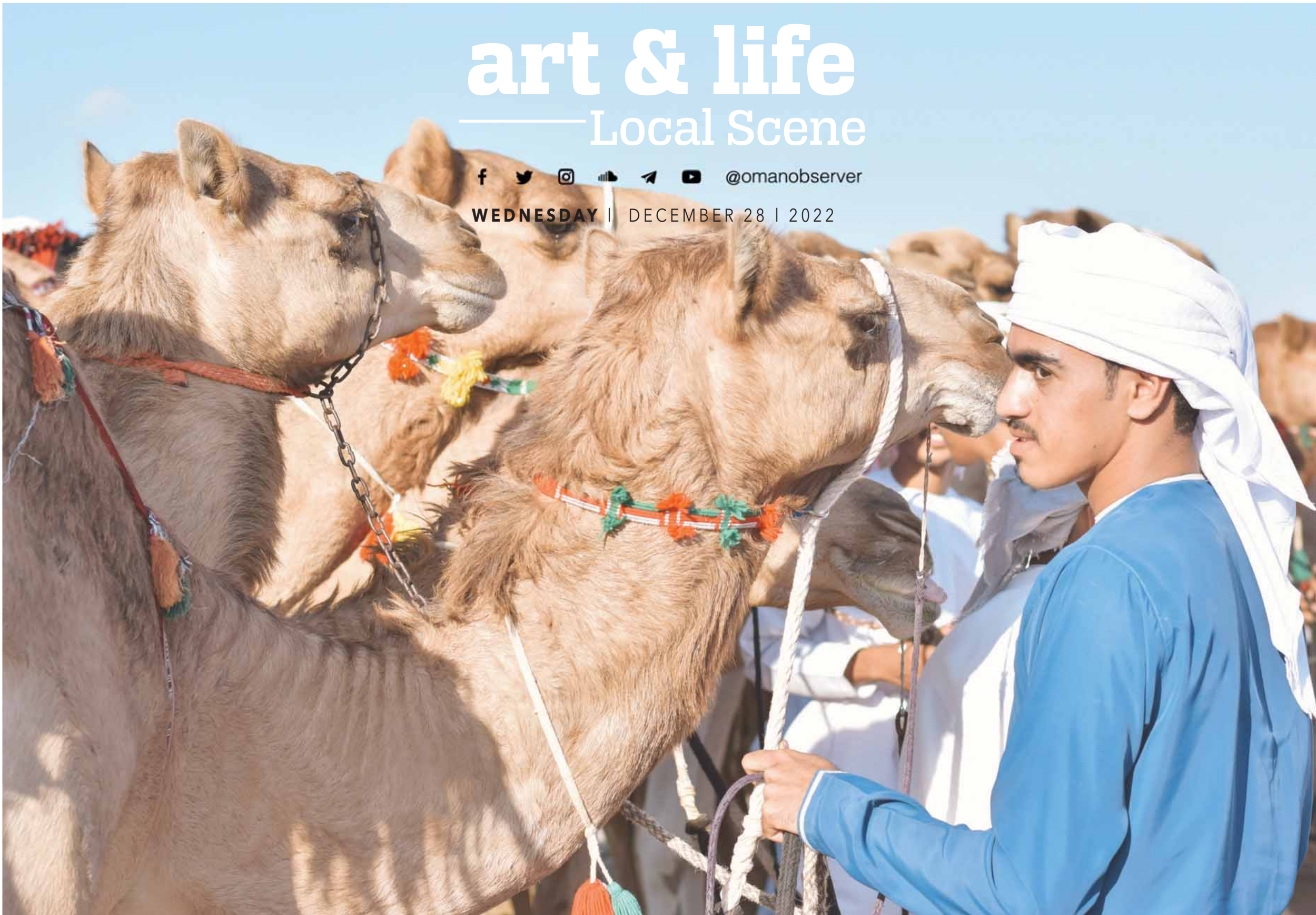
“All the photographs, all the documents, everything that was here, it was all very familiar to me. And when I came in, the feeling was unlike anything I’ve felt before. It was like a stab in the heart.”

She ticked off a long list of items that are now gone — gold, rare coins, weapons, military medals.

“Everything which was valuable, materially, they stole, kidnapped and moved to an unknown direction,” she said.

Ukrainian prosecutors suspect her predecessor, Tetiana Bratchenko, of having collaborated with Moscow’s forces. She is understood to have fled to Russia as Ukrainian troops were closing in on the city.

Over the summer, Russians in civilian clothes visited the museum “numerous times” and used the venue to mark Russian National Flag Day in August, HRW said in its statement, citing testimony from a security guard.” — AFP



ARDHA CAMEL RACES CONNECT PAST WITH PRESENT

BY OLGA VELIKAYA
Instagram: face_a_story

“I’VE been riding camels since I was 5,” said Bader eagerly. “Sometimes, it can be challenging to tame a camel, but I love participating in races.” Along with many other camel owners and jockeys, he seemed determined, enthusiastic, and jubilant. The atmosphere at the racetrack in Ibra, Ash Sharqiyah North Governorate, was not of competition but rather of unity and brotherhood. What usually appeared as a plain track in the open field was transformed into a festive celebration on the race day.

On Al Ardha day, everyone looked their best for the occasion: little girls were dressed in colourful, often matching traditional Omani dresses, men wore crisp white dishdashas and turbans, and their silver khanjars (traditional daggers) glittered in the sunshine. Even the camels were draped with vibrant decorative clothing and bright tassels. People from across the Sultanate stood along the racetrack in a spirit of community and cheer. Although the race was predominantly attended by men, there was a special place with chairs dedicated to women and children. In addition to eating snacks and watching the show, the kids sang and recited poems.

At 2:00 pm, the race was in full swing. Hundreds of viewers were so immersed in the action that they didn’t seem to mind the midday heat or the air thick with swirling dust and sand. Camel riders, mostly young and light built, demonstrated their expertise in dealing with and taming the animals. At the starting line, the camels often moaned, bellowed loudly, and tried to escape. Spectators always had to be on high alert and move aside quickly if needed. Racing at full speed, the jockeys tried to sprint side by side, join their hands, perform daring manoeuvres, and even stand on camels’ backs.

Though the majority were male, there were two female racers who received a double support and applause whenever they passed through the crowd. Everyone also happily cheered for a few father-son duos, either riding



together or separately.

Suhail, a young Omani, was taking care of camels between races. “A camel can be taught to race when it is at least 3 years old,” he explained, standing next to the female camel called Samha. “Female camels are better for racing because they are fast and powerful.” The camels usually ate grass, grains, and dates, but they had a different diet during the racing season. For example, honey was added to their water for extra energy. The prices for camels ranged from RO 1,000 to RO 20,000. I was caught completely off guard when

Samha gently nudged my head, asking to be petted on the neck.

Waiting for her turn, she calmly looked up through her exceptionally long, thick eyelashes. Except when they were forced to bend down, the camels seemed true to their laidback, slow demeanour. However, as soon as the riders made them kneel, they began to protest and tried to break free.

Life in Arabia could not be imagined without camels. These “ships of the desert” were used for transportation, food, celebrations, and traditional events throughout history. Typically,

a camel and horse racing season in Oman started at the end of September and lasted until late March, with races taking place in Bidiya, Al Khabourah, Sohar, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali and other locations.

Four years ago, Horse and Camel Ardha races were inscribed to the Unesco Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. By encouraging the younger generation to learn and participate in these traditional shows, Oman continued to preserve its invaluable heritage.