

Theyazin to open conference

HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the inaugural ceremony of the first edition of “Oman Conference on Environmental Sustainability” on January 16. The four-day conference will focus on air pollution, climate change and other issues. The event will include the launch of the ‘Green Branch Award’ designed for contributors and supporters of environmental action. **SEE PAGE 3**



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MESSI, RONALDO TO FACE OFF IN PSG VS SAUDI SELECT FRIENDLY MATCH



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GULF BOURSES ANNOUNCE UNIFIED ESG METRICS FOR GCC LISTED FIRMS



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OMAN NAMED AMONG THE 25 GLOBAL TRAVEL EXPERIENCES



MUSCAT

OMAN, UAE REVIEW ECONOMIC TIES

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Dr Thani Ahmed al Zeyoudi, Minister of State for Foreign Trade, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The two sides reviewed aspects of bilateral cooperation in business, investment and economic diversification fields.

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RAMALLAH

PALESTINE: ISRAELI SANCTIONS ‘NEW WAR’

Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh described a raft of Israeli measures as a “new war” against the Palestinian Authority aimed at pushing it “to the brink”. Israel’s new government said on Friday it will withhold millions of dollars in tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority. This followed the Authority’s successful lobbying for a UN General Assembly vote referring Israel’s occupation to the International Court of Justice.

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BANGKOK

THAILAND U-TURNS ON COVID VACCINATION

Thailand has rescinded an entry policy announced at the weekend requiring visitors to show proof of a COVID-19 vaccination, its health minister said on Monday, citing sufficient immunisation levels in China and globally. Anutin Charnvirakul said checking evidence of vaccinations was inconvenient and a panel of health experts had agreed to withdraw the new rule, which was announced on Saturday by aviation authorities.

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NURSES STRIKE WORK IN NEW YORK

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BRAZIL PROBES PRO-BOLSONARO RIOTS

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Nation to celebrate HM’s accession on Jan 11

OMAN SALUTES LEADER OF RENEWED RENAISSANCE

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman will mark the anniversary of His Majesty the Sultan’s Accession Day on January 11.

His Majesty the Sultan’s fervent determination, coupled with Omani people’s support to the leader of Renewed Renaissance, played a positive role in overcoming the challenges and revitalising the march of nation building.

This was affirmed by His Majesty the Sultan when he delivered the Royal speech in 2022 in which he said, “We are confident that you all perceive the volume of challenges that we have been through, that we have tackled with tact and patience and then, with the Almighty’s divine support, proceeded with the implementation of our social and economic plans and programmes, inspired by Oman Vision 2040. As a result, our economic and fiscal performance has improved.” The financial and economic indicators achieved by the Sultanate of Oman in 2022 confirmed the improvement of the gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices to RO 44.9 billion by the end of 2022, posting a growth rate of 32.4 per cent as against 2021 figures.

TURN TO P4



FISCAL SURPLUS
RO 1.146 BILLION IN 2022 COMPARED TO DEFICIT OF RO 1.550 BILLION IN 2021

RO 20 MILLION FOR EACH GOVERNORATE IN 10TH FIVE-YEAR PLAN

DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECTS
RO 200 MILLION

PUBLIC SPENDING
RO 958 MILLION

SOCIAL PROTECTION
RO 384 MILLION

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENTS
RO 18.14 BILLION

PUBLIC DEBT
DOWN FROM RO 20.8 BN IN 2021 TO RO 17.7 BN IN 2022

Rains likely due to impact of trough

IAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Three days of rains are expected again in from Tuesday to Thursday due to an upper air trough.

The Civil Aviation Authority has advised all to take precaution during rainfall and flow of wadis.

Analysis of the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Center indicates isolated rain and occasional thunder showers over Musandam, North Al Batinah, Al Buraimi, South Al Batinah, Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah and South Al Sharqiyah.

Rainfall between 10 and 60 mm may cause flash floods. Maximum temperature recorded is 28 degrees Celsius in Fahud, Marmul and Thamrait, while Jabal Shams recorded a maximum of six degrees Celsius and a low of two degrees Celsius.



GOALS RAIN AS OMAN BEAT YEMEN

Oman beat Yemen 3-2 at the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup in a rain soaked Group A match in Basra on Monday. **REPORT ON P10**

Official satellite will be launched in 2025

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oman’s first official satellite will blast off to space in 2025, the MoTCIT minister said on Monday as the countdown begins for the launch of nation’s first private satellite from the UK spaceport at the time of going to print

The country will also begin construction of a space station in Duqm before the end of this year.

Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), said, “The programme for the official satellite of the country is on track and it will be launched in 2025. We had slight delays due to financing, which we procured last year. We missed one opportunity for the orbit that we had booked for this satellite, but we are prepared to meet the 2025 target.”

The minister said that the centre for space and advanced

We missed one opportunity for the orbit that we had booked for this satellite, but we are prepared to meet the 2025 target

SAID AL MAAWALI
MoTCIT

technology, including National Space Services Company (Nascom) has been working on studying opportunities with many stakeholders within and outside the country.

On the launch of the Aman satellite, the minister said this is done by a private company and there are a lot of opportunities to work with Cubesats for SMEs as the barrier of entry is comparatively low. **SEE ALSO PAGES 3 & 13**



We extend our heartiest congratulations to

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
-may Allah protect and bless him-

On the Anniversary of His Accession to the Throne.

May the Almighty Allah grant His Majesty good health and happiness, as he leads Oman towards a bright and prosperous future.



الشركة العامة للتنمية والاستثمار
Oman International Development and Investment Company SAOG

www.ominvest.net

Oman, UAE review cooperation

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received Dr Thani Ahmed al Zeyoudi, Minister of State for Foreign Trade, in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The two sides reviewed aspects of bilateral cooperation in business, investment and economic diversification fields. They also affirmed the keenness of both countries' leaderships to advance mutual relations in various spheres.

The meeting was attended by Dr Saleh bin Said Masan, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion for Commerce and Industry and several officials from both sides.

Meanwhile, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) also received the UAE business delegation.

The meeting explored means of developing trade and



economic relations, as well as enhancing the trade exchange between the two countries. Businessmen and

businesswomen were briefed on investment opportunities in the two countries.

The meeting also touched on mechanisms of diversifying and enhancing joint interests between the two sides. Emphasis was laid on investment sector in commensurate with markets in both countries.

The meeting also highlighted mechanisms of exploiting joint investment opportunities. It also urged businessmen to set up joint ventures between the two sides.

The Omani imports from UAE hit more than RO 2.957 billion till the end of August 2022 whereas the Omani exports to the UAE stood at more than RO 890.9 million.

The meeting was attended by Faisal bin Abdullah al Rowas, Chairman of OCCI Board of Directors and Omani businessmen. — ONA

Heritage minister receives 10 qualified teams of BHA Award



MUSCAT: Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, on Monday received members of the ten teams qualified for the final phase of the 2nd edition of Bilal bin Haitham Award (BHA) for Architectural Design.

Al Mahrouqi lauded the creative aspects in the qualified projects. He also underscored the importance of the Maritime History Museum project and its strategic position at the Wilayat of Sur, South Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

The designs of the project, to be implemented by the ministry, must consider diversity of facilities and services offered to various segments and age groups, the minister said. — ONA

Oman, Britain ink additional annex for defence agreement

MUSCAT: An additional annex for the joint defence agreement between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Kingdom was signed at the Ministry of Defence here on Monday.

Signing the annex came within the framework of the Omani military relations with different countries in various military

fields particularly training areas.

The additional annex was signed from the Omani side by Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za'abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence while it was signed from the British side by James Goldman, charge d'affaires of UK Embassy in Muscat.

— ONA





شركة تنمية نفط عُمان
Petroleum Development Oman



Warm felicitations to
His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik
and the people of Oman
on the occasion of the 3rd Anniversary
of His Majesty's Accession



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Theyazin to open conference on environmental sustainability

MUSCAT: HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the inaugural ceremony of the first edition of "Oman Conference on Environmental Sustainability" on January 16. The four-day conference will focus on air pollution, climate change and other issues.

The event will include the launch of the 'Green Branch Award' designed for contributors and supporters of environmental action. The prize, up for grabs by institutions and individuals, is aimed at encouraging outstanding contributions to environment sanitation and sustainability.

An environmental exhibition will be held on the sidelines of

the conference. It will showcase the latest technologies, solutions and techniques in addressing common ecological challenges. It will also include specialised workshops focusing on green hydrogen energy and methane management.

The conference promotes the values of research, development and innovation through the establishment of a 'Youth Ecothon' within an initiative code-named 'Manafei' (benefits), which paves the way for Omani students to participate in improvising solutions for generate developmental revenue against less risk to air pollution or climate change.

The conference will be held as part of events marking Oman Environment Day. — ONA

Symposium reviews space sector executive programme

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology on Monday organised Oman Space Sector Symposium, themed 'Future Approaches and Investment Opportunities'. The symposium reviewed the executive programme for the space sector, the reality and future of the space sector plans and investment opportunities in this field. The symposium was opened by Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Zaabi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence.

The symposium was aimed at introducing the space sector policy and executive programme drafted by the ministry in cooperation with partners in the sector. It sought to achieve the objectives of the Digital Economy Programme and Oman Vision 2040, raise awareness among relevant authorities about its technologies and identify current and future opportunities for cooperation and partnerships in this sector.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said in a statement that the symposium focused on investment opportunities available in the field of space.



He added that the National Centre for Space, Advanced Technology and Artificial Intelligence conducted a study about research in the field of space investment opportunities.

Speaking to reporters, the minister said that the outcome of the study shows that 90 per cent of opportunities that the ministry seeks to create during the next 20 years will be in downstream structures of the space sector, with some opportunities in upstream investments.

So far, more than 15 investment opportunities have been identified in the space sector, with 10 opportunities to be offered this year, said the minister. He added that steps are under way to launch

of Oman Communications Satellite and that recent estimates indicate that the launch will take place in 2025. Dr Ali bin Amer al Shaithani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Communications and Information Technology, pointed out that the ministry espoused a methodology of harmonisation and partnership when drafting the policy and executive programme for the space sector.

He explained that the policy brought about promising investment opportunities for Oman in the field of Space services and applications. These investments will benefit from several realistic potentials, including Oman's

strategic location, infrastructure laid down by the government over the past decades and growing demand for various space services.

In the same context an agreement was signed by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman LNG Company. The agreement provides for the establishment of a gallery for space science and technology at the Children's Museum with the purpose of simulating virtual reality of a spacecraft.

The platform also paves the way to study space missile launch, encourage specialised tourism and attract amateurs to space activities.

— ONA



SOCIAL, ECONOMIC ASPECTS RECEIVE EQUAL ATTENTION

FROM PAGE 1

Accordingly, Oman achieved fiscal surplus of about RO 1.146 billion, compared to an approved deficit of about RO 1.550 billion, according to indicators of preliminary results of the State's General Budget 2022.

In 2022, the social and economic aspects received commensurate attention that reflected in a rise by about RO 958 million in net public spending.

This included setting a cap on fuel prices, an increase in allocations for Oman Housing Bank's loans, augmenting the spending for subsidising expenditures of electricity sector, the waste sector and food commodities.

This is in addition to offering further support for "social security and limited income families", raising allowances for students on scholarship abroad by 25 per cent and exempting entrepreneurs who hold Riyada card from additional emergency loans, as well as borrowers from Oman Development Bank's emergency loan portfolio.

The government of His Majesty the Sultan was able to pay off part

of its public debt and manage the loan portfolio by the end of 2022. This contributed to diminishing the total volume of public debt from RO 20.8 billion by the end of 2021 to RO 17.7 billion in 2022.

The persistent implementation of procedures on controlling financial conditions led to upgrading the Sultanate of Oman's credit rating, while at the same time improving Oman's future outlook among international credit rating agencies during 2022.

His Majesty the Sultan accorded great attention to the execution of accelerated national programmes for the realisation of national targets of Oman Vision 2040.

The aim is to find sustainable solutions for the financial and economic aspects and employment, which was represented in the National Programme for Financial Sustainability and the Development of the Financial Sector, the National Programme for Economic Diversification, the Government Digital Transformation Programme, the National Programme for Investment and Export

Development, and the National Employment Programme (NEP).

The Sultanate of Oman, through its 2023 Budget, has introduced projects with a developmental impact, for which about RO 200 million have been allocated, in addition to supporting the social protection system with about RO 384 million, according to Royal Decree No (33/2021) to achieve integrated social protection directed to the neediest groups. This is in addition to boosting efficient investments, ensuring financial sustainability, and improving work environment by rounding up retirement benefits.

The vision of His Majesty the Sultan to establish a modern approach of decentralised local administration in governorates of Oman brought about a Royal dimension manifested in "determining developmental, economic and social priorities, benefiting from the comparative

advantage among them and streamlining service procedures for citizens".

The development of the governorates is one of the major priorities of the 10th Five Year Plan, which aims at achieving balanced economic and social development, considering the spatial dimension of development and the sectoral dimension of the different economic sectors.

Thanks to His Majesty the Sultan's attention, a sum of RO 20 million has been accorded for each governorate during the 10th Five Year Plan to provide support to the governorates' developmental projects.

The sum will be expended through the Budget's Electronic System.

Total financial allocations set for these projects for the year 2023 amount to RO 1.2 billion, reviewed from time to time, depending on the financial and economic developments in the

country.

In the field of competitiveness, Oman has made progress in several sub-indicators, such as the Innovation Index, as a result of the improvement of scientific research and innovation system in Oman and the initiatives pertaining to motivating and developing researchers.

Oman also achieved improvement in indicators related to information technology.

As a result, the Sultanate of Oman ranked 15th globally and scaled up its ranking in the pillar of education to find its place among the top 10 countries in the world. This is in addition to its remarkable progress in other international indicators, such as food security, food quality and safety, food availability, sustainability, resilience, and others.

His Majesty the Sultan strengthened Oman's foreign policy by maximising mutual interests with various countries of the world, benefiting Oman and its esteemed people. Economic diplomacy played an important role in attracting investments in various fields, thanks to the stimulating

legislative environment that Oman possesses, free economic zones, natural and environmental resources, supportive infrastructure and logistics and a prominent geographical location.

Economic diplomacy also sought to enhance tourism in Oman and benefit from the yearlong diverse environments, stunning beaches, attractions, heritage sites, museums, modern tourism and luxurious hotel facilities.

Tourism in Oman also benefits from the experiences of various countries of the world in the fields of scholarly research, innovation, technology and renewable energy.

Statistics indicate the advantages of what has been achieved so far in the volume of foreign direct investments (FDI), which stood at about RO 18.14 billion until the third quarter of 2022, posting an increase of 10.4 per cent compared to the corresponding period in 2021.

These efforts also contributed to upgrading the volume of trade exchange between Oman and the countries of the world to stand at RO 30,421.4 million until September 2022, a rise of 46.18 per cent.





Oman, Jordan review education ties



MUSCAT: Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, received here on Monday Dr Osama Yousef Obeidat, Chief Executive Officer, at Queen Rania Teacher Academy (QRTA) of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The two sides reviewed areas of joint cooperation in educational fields. They also discussed challenges facing the education sector. During the meeting, the ministry's continuous support extended to teachers were highlighted. — ONA



Over 50,000 books at ISC book festival

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As many as 50,000 titles in English and Arabic in addition to 12 other different languages will be up for grabs at the third edition of the book festival organised by the Indian Social Club (ISC) under the aegis of Embassy of India as part of the celebrations of 75 years of Indian Independence.

The four-day fest will open from January 12 to 15 and will be held at the multipurpose hall of the Indian Social Club Oman in Darsait.

The public can visit the fair from 10 am to 10 pm.

According to the organisers, the event will be organised in association with Al Bhaj Books, a leading book distributor in Oman for more than 30 years.

The fair is being conducted as part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebrations and will also feature acclaimed Omani authors who will be feted during the four-day book festival.

Dr Said al Saqlawi, acclaimed poet and Chairperson of Oman Writer's Society; Dr Ali Mehdi, member of Oman Environment Association and Founder of 'Penned Thoughts'; Nasra al Adawi, award winning writer from Oman, Jassim Issa Obeid al Qartoubi, another renowned Omani poet will share the podium with Dr P Mohammed Ali, founder and former Vice

Chairman and Managing Director of Galfar, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of National University, Dr Sivkumar Manickam, Chairman, Board of Directors of Indian Schools in Oman, will grace the inaugural ceremony.

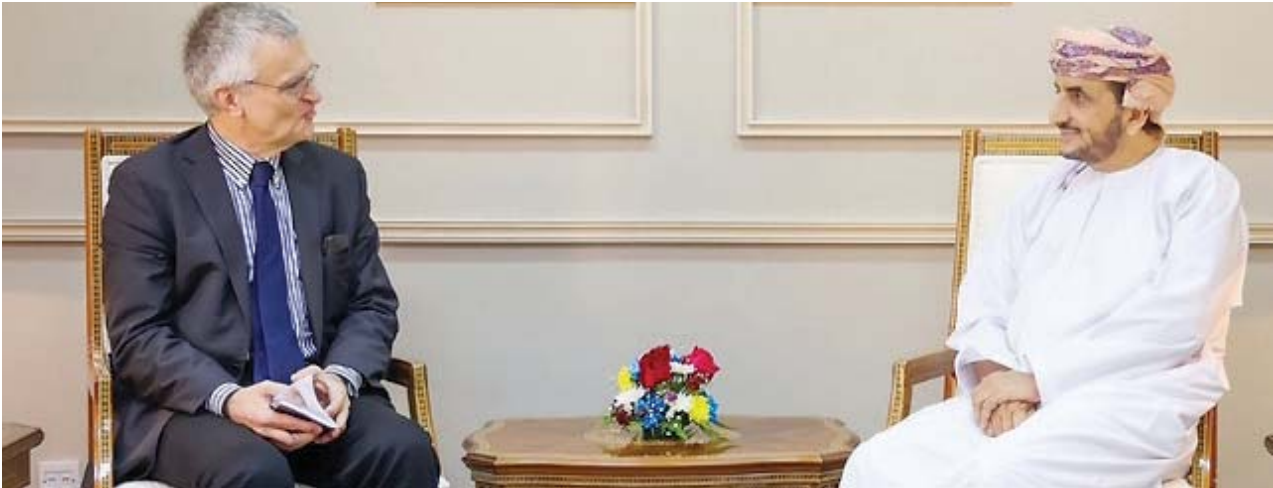
Speaking to the media, Babu Rajendran, Hon General Secretary, ISC Oman said they were proud to present the 3rd edition of book fest and a plethora of events are lined up for students as well as the public which includes book launch and panel discussion.

"Apart from the 50,000 books up for grabs, we will be hosting book recommendations, panel discussions and book launches of authors based in Oman which is organised in coordination with Oman Book Lovers Group," he said, adding that a number of competitions such as colouring contest, poetry recitation, short story writing and book review have been put together for the children.

"We have included latest books for all ages including fiction, non-fiction, children's activity and story books, academic, study guides and grammar books, among others, said P M Shouckath Ali, Managing Director of Al Bhaj books, adding that it was a privilege to be a part of the Book Fest conducted by the ISC Oman under the aegis of Embassy of India in Sultanate of Oman.

SECURITY, STABILITY IN YEMEN DISCUSSED

Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Diplomatic Affairs, received on Monday Peter Sempney, Swedish Special Envoy to Yemen, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' General Court. During the meeting, they reviewed the efforts made to support the Yemeni parties to reach a political solution that achieves security and stability for Yemen and the countries in the region. The meeting was attended by officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. — ONA



Municipal Council members in Musandam take oath

KHASAB: Members of the Municipal Council of Musandam Governorate on Monday took the oath of office before Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, Chairman of the council, in implementation of Article 14 of the Municipal Councils

Law.

During the meeting, a Deputy Chairman was elected electronically by the members, who used 'Tanmia' app, which was launched by the Ministry of Interior. They also formed the council's standing committees. — ONA



SEZAD's forum calls for reducing carbon emissions

MUSCAT: Coinciding with the Sultanate of Oman's celebrations of the Omani Environment Day, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) organised the second environmental forum "Together to Reduce Carbon Footprint in Duqm". A number of lecturers and specialists from government and private bodies, concerned with climate change affairs and reducing carbon emissions, took part in the Forum.

The forum was presided over by Shaikh Bader bin Nasser al Farsi, Wali of Duqm, with representatives



of the municipal council, officials in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, specialists from the Environment Authority, Sultan Qaboos University, Duqm Refinery Company (OQ8) and representatives of companies

operating in SEZAD.

The forum aimed to identify the potential environmental challenges resulting from the various construction and industrial activities and projects in the SEZ at Duqm. It also touched on

discussing appropriate solutions to environmental issues that require strengthening cooperation between the various concerned parties operating in the zone. The Forum urged joining efforts to develop plans to reduce carbon emissions in pursuit of zero neutrality in Duqm.

The Forum was held with the participation of other partners including SQU, OQ Company, Jindal Shadedee Company, Worly Company and other corporates specialised in providing environmental services, consultancy and other sectors.

Oman, Jordan discuss joint training



MUSCAT: Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Chairman of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies (ASDS), received in his office at Bait Al Falaj, on Monday a delegation of the Royal Jordanian Command and Staff College (RJCS) led by Brigadier Ali Abdulqadir Abdulhafidh Al Matar. The two sides exchanged views on a range of joint academic and training topics. The meeting was attended by Air Commodore Ahmed bin Mohammed al Meshaihi, Commandant of the Joint Command and Staff College at the ASDS. — ONA

RNO chief receives Qatari military official



MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Monday Commodore Mohammed Dasmal al Kuwari, Head of the Qatari delegation of the Office of Water Sciences.

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

They also touched on enhancing mutual cooperation. The meeting was attended by several senior RNO officers. — ONA

1,781 artisanal fishermen in Seeb

MUSCAT: The craft of practicing fishing in the Wilayat of Seeb in Muscat Governorate has been of great importance to the residents for a long time now.

Yousef bin Hamad al Nahdi, Director of the Fisheries Department in Al Seeb, says, "There are about 1,781 fishermen in Al Seeb who practice fishing on about 800 fishing boats with a monthly production reaching about 8-and-a-half tonnes.

Yousef added: "With the requirements of developing the fisheries sector and in cooperation with the relevant authorities, 2023 is set to witness modern and advanced electronic systems related to fish procedures and transactions."

The director of the Department of Fisheries in Al Seeb explained



that among the types of fish that are found in the wilayat are those on the seabed at a depth of 40 to 50 metres. Of which the most important are grouper, antelope and squid, and some of them are found on the surface of the sea. The important fishes found are Jayther, kingfish, sahwa, molasses,

shark, sardines and dolphins."

Yousef bin Khalfan al Mahrami, a fisherman in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, said the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, is working to provide all services and facilities to fishermen, as it has established a special port for sea fishing, in

2023 is set to witness modern and advanced electronic systems related to fish procedures and transactions

addition to distributing large refrigerators that are placed in the boat during the fishing trip, in which various fishes are placed.

They are caught to save them from damage, and fishermen are also provided with modern boxes to transport the fish from the boat to the auction hall (market) and other services that facilitate the fishermen's work to practice their profession smoothly. — ONA



Palestinian Prime Minister says Israeli sanctions ‘new war’

RAMALLAH: Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh on Monday described a raft of Israeli measures as a “new war” against the Palestinian Authority aimed at pushing it “to the brink.”

Israel’s new right-wing government said on Friday it will withhold millions of dollars in tax revenues from the Palestinian Authority (PA). This followed the



Mohammad Shtayyeh

Authority’s successful lobbying for a UN General Assembly vote referring Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories to the International Court of Justice.

The Palestinian premier said the retaliatory measures amounted to “a new war against the Palestinian people, their capabilities and their funds, and a war against the national authority (PA) and

its survival.” Such sanctions were “aimed at undermining the authority and pushing it to the brink — financially and institutionally,” Shtayyeh said at the start of a weekly cabinet meeting. The deductions amount to around \$40 million, which the Israeli government said will be distributed to “families of victims murdered in Palestinian terrorist

attacks.” Israel has repeatedly withheld tax and customs revenues it collects on behalf of the PA, particularly in response to the body making payments to the families of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces or during attacks on Israelis. Discussing the move on Sunday, Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich warned the cash-strapped PA “will have to decide if

it wants to continue existing.”

“As long as the PA encourages terror and is an enemy, what interest do I have in helping it continue to exist?” Smotrich said.

The Israeli government also ordered a moratorium on Palestinian construction plans in the largest part of the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since the 1967 Six-Day War. — **AFP**

Thailand U-turns on Covid vaccination rule for visitors

BANGKOK: Thailand has rescinded an entry policy announced at the weekend requiring visitors to show proof of a COVID-19 vaccination, its health minister said on Monday, citing sufficient immunisation levels in China and globally.

Anutin Charnvirakul said checking evidence of vaccinations was inconvenient and a panel of health experts had agreed to withdraw the new rule, which was announced on Saturday by aviation authorities ahead of an expected deluge of visitors from China, where Covid-19 cases have surged.

Anutin said those not vaccinated would also be granted entry without restriction.

“Showing proof of vaccination would be cumbersome and inconvenient, and so the group’s decision is that it is unnecessary,” Anutin told reporters.

One of Asia’s most popular travel destinations, Thailand is enjoying an influx of visitors during its first peak season since the removal last year of tight entry restrictions that had caused its



Travellers from a Xiamen Airlines flight are greeted by Thai health and government officials as they arrive at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok on Monday. — **AFP**

tourism sector to collapse.

In November, it recorded 1.75 million visitors, quadruple the number for the whole of last year when flights and foreign arrivals were limited.

China has been crucial for Thailand, accounting for about a quarter of its annual visitors

before the pandemic. Anutin said the government was now expecting 7-10 million Chinese visitors, compared to an earlier 5 million estimate.

The first flight from China arrived in Thailand on Monday with the first group among an expected 3,465 passengers on

the first day. “We’re very excited to come back to Thailand. We have been waiting for three years already,” said Wang Zhenyin, 39, one of the first to arrive.

“Before the start of Covid, we came here every year. And this time I take my family to come here.” — **Reuters**

More than 7,000 nurses go on strike in New York City

CHICAGO: Thousands of nurses at two New York City hospitals went on strike on Monday after contract negotiations stalled over pay and staffing levels, a move that caused one of the facilities to postpone procedures and appointments.

The walkout involves more than 7,000 nurses at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx and Mount Sinai Hospital in Manhattan, the New York State Nurses Association said in a statement.

“These nurses are dedicated professionals who provide quality patient care under unimaginable conditions,” New York State AFL-CIO president Mario Cileto said.

“The hospitals’ treatment of these nurses is proof that all their words of adulation for their healthcare heroes during the pandemic were hollow.”

The hospitals said in separate statements on Monday that they offered a 19.1 per cent compounded wage increase to the nurses. Montefiore Medical



Striking union nurses from the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) walk the picket line outside Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx borough of New York City on Monday. — **Reuters**

Center also said it was committed to create over 170 new nursing positions.

“We remain committed to seamless and compassionate care, recognising that the union leadership’s decision will spark fear and uncertainty across our community,” Montefiore Medical Center said.

Montefiore said the strike forced them to reschedule all elective surgeries and procedures and postpone appointments at ambulatory locations. — **Reuters**

Australia PM pledges aid to flood victims in northwest

SYDNEY: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese promised help to repair homes, replace property and rebuild infrastructure as he toured remote flood-ravaged communities across the northwest after “1-in-100-year” floods.

The crisis in the Kimberley - a sparsely populated area in Western Australia state about the size of the US state of California - was sparked last week by severe weather system Ellie, a former tropical cyclone that brought a year’s worth of rain to some areas in a matter of days.



Supplies are unloaded from a barge as part of relief efforts to flood-affected communities in the Kimberley on Monday. — **Reuters**

Albanese announced on Monday A\$10,000 (\$6,900) for home repair and up to A\$10,000 to replace household goods. He said that it was too soon to estimate the full cost of rebuilding wrecked highways and bridges but that the final figure will be “very large.”

“There’s going to be massive infrastructure investment required,” Albanese told radio station 6PR on Monday from Broome, roughly 2,000 kilometres northwest of state capital Perth.

“There will also be required support for individuals, and that support needs to be not just

financial of course, but we need to bear in mind the need for counselling and support as well.”

The flooding follows a year of unseasonably wet weather that brought four major floods across parts of the country’s east. The Bureau of Meteorology said 2022 was the ninth-wettest year on record.

“I’m afraid I’ve now been to Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and now WA (Western Australia) in the relatively short time that I’ve been Prime Minister... talking about a 1-in-100-year event over and over

again,” Albanese said.

The Great Northern Highway, which connects the country’s vast north, is broken in several places, as the swollen Fitzroy River pours onto floodplains with waters that have spread as far as 50km from the riverbed in some places, authorities say.

Military aircraft helped airlift supplies and evacuate residents in cut-off towns such as Fitzroy Crossing, home to roughly 1,000. More than 280 people across the region have been evacuated or relocated, state authorities said on Sunday. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

ISLAMABAD

Pledges of \$8.57 bn for flood recovery

Pakistan has already received total pledges of \$8.57 billion for helping in flood recovery at a conference in Geneva, information minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said on Monday.

The pledges received are higher than the amount sought initially, with PM Shehbaz Sharif saying the South Asian nation needed \$8 billion over the next three years, as officials from some 40 countries as well as private donors and international financial institutions meet



in Geneva. The Islamic Development Bank has pledged \$4.2 billion over the next three years to Pakistan as aid for its climate rebuilding effort, the bank’s president said on Monday.

MANILA

Marcos picks ex-military chief as defence minister

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has chosen a former military chief who led the country’s fight against the coronavirus as his new defence minister.

Carlito Galvez, 60, headed the Philippines’ Covid-19 task force and as a regional army commander was in 2017 credited with overseeing the defeat of militants loyal to IS, who took over and held a southern town for five months in 2017.

Galvez will be responsible for protecting the Philippines



maritime territory and its exclusive economic zone, amid tension with China over the prolonged presence in the South China Sea of fishing boats believed to be manned by militia.

BOGOR

Indonesia, Malaysia agree to fight for palm oil

Indonesia and Malaysia, the world’s biggest producers of palm oil, agreed on Monday to work together to fight “discrimination” against the commodity after a meeting between leaders from the countries.

The comments by Indonesian President Joko Widodo followed a meeting with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who was making his first overseas trip since being elected last November.

Widodo, popularly known as



Jokowi, said the two countries would “fight discrimination against palm oil” and “strengthen cooperation through the Council of Palm Oil Producing Countries” to address concerns.



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In brief

■ MOSCOW



NAVALNY: SPENT NEW YEAR'S EVE IN PUNISHMENT CELL

Jailed Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny said on Monday he spent New Year's Eve inside a punishment cell for inmates.

Navalny, President Vladimir Putin's most vocal domestic critic, is serving nine years in jail on charges he says are politically motivated.

He said he was accused of washing his face in the morning earlier than scheduled and was transferred to the punishment cell for the maximum term of 15 days. "Thus my plans for a fancy New Year were ruined," Navalny wrote with irony, adding that he had saved a bag of potato chips and some tinned fish for the occasion.

■ GENEVA



UN CHIEF CALLS FOR SWEEPING GLOBAL FINANCIAL REFORMS

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres called on Monday for sweeping reform of the international financial system to allow for low-income countries vulnerable to climate calamities to receive adequate funding from richer nations.

Addressing a conference in Geneva on rebuilding efforts in the wake of devastating floods in Pakistan, Guterres said the international financial system was skewed to benefit wealthy countries and should be reformed to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources.

"It is very clear that the present system is biased," he told reporters.

■ BANGKOK



THAI PM HINTS AT RE-ELECTION BID UNDER NEW PARTY

Thailand's long-serving leader Prayuth Chan-ocha vowed to continue his work running the country under a new political party on Monday, hinting at a bid to remain prime minister after an election this year.

The 68-year-old retired general, who has been in power since leading a coup in 2014, early last month said he was ready to stay on longer, even though the constitution limits him to just two more years.

Prayuth is currently trailing in opinion polls on the top choice for next prime minister, a distant second behind the 36-year-old niece of Yingluck Shinawatra.

Brazil probes pro-Bolsonaro riots

BRASILIA: Brazil's Supreme Court late on Sunday removed the governor of Brasilia from office for 90 days due to flaws in security in the capital, after thousands of backers of far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro ransacked government buildings.

Supreme Court Justice Alexandre de Moraes also ordered social media platforms Facebook, Twitter and TikTok to block coup-mongering propaganda.

Brazilian authorities have begun investigating the worst attack on the country's institutions since democracy was restored four decades ago, with President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva vowing to bring those responsible for the riot to justice.

Tens of thousands of anti-democratic demonstrators on Sunday invaded the Supreme Court, Congress and the presidential palace and smashed windows, overturned furniture, destroyed art works and stole the country's original 1988 Constitution. Guns were also seized from a presidential security office.

Leftist president Lula, who took office on January 1, said the local militarised police force that reports to Brasilia Governor Ibaneis Rocha, a former Bolsonaro ally, did nothing to stop the advance of the protesters.

Lula decreed federal intervention of public security



A person walks past a broken window, after the supporters of Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro anti-democratic riot at Planalto Palace, in Brasilia on Monday. — Reuters

in the capital and promised exemplary punishment for the leaders of the "fascist" assault that was aimed at provoking a military coup that could restore Bolsonaro to power.

"All the people who did this will be found and punished," Lula told reporters from Sao Paulo State.

The assault raised questions among Lula's allies about how public security forces in the capital were so unprepared and easily overwhelmed by rioters

who had announced their plans days ahead on social media.

Lula blamed Bolsonaro for inflaming his supporters after a campaign of baseless allegations about election fraud after the end of his rule marked by divisive nationalist populism.

From Florida, where he flew 48 hours before his term ended, Bolsonaro rejected the accusation, tweeting that peaceful demonstrations were democratic but the invasion of government

buildings "crossed the line."

The invasion, which recalled the assault on the US Capitol two years ago by backers of former president Donald Trump, was quickly condemned by world leaders, from US President Joe Biden and France's Emmanuel Macron to Latin American heads of state. Police retook the damaged public buildings in the iconic futuristic capital after three hours and dispersed the crowd with tear gas. — Reuters

Attacks shock world, draws condemnation from leaders

RIO DE JANEIRO: World leaders have reacted with shock and dismay to the storming of Brazil's Congress, Supreme Court and presidential palace by thousands of supporters of far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro.

The rioters refuse to acknowledge Bolsonaro's defeat in recent elections. The former president has not made a public statement explicitly conceding that he lost.

In a tweet addressed to Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote he was "deeply concerned about the news of rioting and vandalism."

"Democratic traditions must be respected by everyone. We extend our full support to the Brazilian authorities," Modi said.

China on Monday said it "firmly opposes the violent attack" on government buildings in the Brazilian capital. "China closely follows and firmly opposes the violent attack on the federal authority in Brazil on January 8," foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Monday that "the violent assaults on democratic institutions are an attack on democracy that cannot be tolerated" and that Berlin "stands with President Lula and Brazilians."

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen tweeted out her condemnation of "the assault on democracy in Brazil," while European Council President Charles Michel wrote that Lula was "democratically elected by millions of Brazilians through fair and free elections" and had the EU's full support. — Agencies

Pope meets Benedict's aide as memoir rattles Vatican

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis on Monday privately met Archbishop Georg Ganswein, former Pope Benedict's closest aide, who has rattled the Vatican with a book describing what he says were the strains while two men wearing white lived within its ancient walls.

Hours after Benedict was buried on Thursday, an Italian publishing house sent some news outlets including Reuters advance copies of Ganswein's 330-page "Nothing But The Truth - My Life



Archbishop Georg Ganswein

Beside Benedict XVI.

Ganswein, 66, was Benedict's personal secretary from 2003,

when Benedict was still Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, and remained as his side for nearly 20 years until his death on December 31.

He was also Francis' gatekeeper until the two had a falling out.

The main question now facing Francis is what position to give Ganswein.

Many are waiting to see if he will get another job in the Vatican or be assigned somewhere else in the world.

The decision is important because now that Benedict is

dead, Ganswein could be called upon by conservatives to fill his shoes as a rallying point for those alienated by reforms ushered in by Francis, including cracking down on the old Latin Mass.

In the book, due to be in bookstores on January 12, Ganswein gives an insider's view of Benedict's election in 2005, his 2013 decision to become the first pope in 600 years to step down, his post-papacy years, his sickness and his final hours. — Reuters

Harry's racism 'olive branch' dismissed in UK

LONDON: Prince Harry's denial that he accused his family of racism was interpreted in the UK press on Monday as a bizarre peace offering, but commentators argued the damage had already been done as his unflinching memoir comes out.

The midnight release of "Spare" is being accompanied by four television interviews in Britain and the United States, where Harry now lives with wife Meghan.

In the first to air, with Britain's ITV, the Duke of Sussex caused bafflement by insisting he and his mixed-race wife never accused the royal family of racism over comments made about the skin tone of their unborn son.

"No I didn't. The British press said that," Harry said, adding that Meghan had also not called the royals "racist".

The initial allegation, made in a bombshell interview given by Harry and Meghan in March 2021 to US chat show host Oprah Winfrey, caused a transatlantic uproar.

Harry's elder brother and the heir to King Charles III's throne,



A poster advertising the launch of the book "Spare", by Britain's Prince Harry, the Duke of Sussex, is seen in the window of a bookstore in London on Monday. — Reuters

Prince William, told reporters at the time that "we are very much not a racist family", but Harry himself stayed silent then.

The late Queen Elizabeth II, the mens' grandmother, said then that "recollections may

vary" about what was said — a line that was repeated by some UK commentators in mocking response to Harry's interviews.

Several described his denial to ITV as an "olive branch", but one that was contradicted by the

Oprah interview and coming too late, given the incendiary nature of his other allegations in the book.

The British public is not impressed, a YouGov poll indicated on Monday, finding that 64 per cent have a negative view

of Harry and that Meghan also scores dismally.

And after days of TV trailers and newspaper leaks, a relatively low figure of 4.1 million people tuned into the ITV interview, according to official ratings data.

Accusing the press of effectively killing his mother Princess Diana, Harry used another interview with US network CBS to take aim also at his father's second wife, Camilla.

The queen consort waged a cunning but "dangerous" campaign to win over the press herself, he said, calling her "the villain".

The book includes a claim that William physically attacked Harry as they argued about Meghan.

It also gives an account of how he lost his virginity, an admission of teenaged drug use and a claim he killed 25 people while serving in Afghanistan with the British military.

To ITV, Harry also defended a long-serving royal courtier, Susan Hussey, after she grilled a black British guest at a palace reception about where the woman "really" came from. — Reuters

The rise of non-fiction reflects our changing world



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Assoc Prof, Dept of English Language and Literature, SQU

If the Harry Potter series made reading fashionable again after a lull brought about by the Internet, books on grand ideas, politics and motivation have become even more popular in the last few years. Fiction may always be a popular genre, but interest in non-fiction has been seeing a rapid rise in readership.

The global non-fiction books market grew from \$13.27 billion in 2021 to \$14.02 billion in 2022, almost 6 per cent over the year when most people across the world were looking for new books to read in the global lockdown.

While there are international prizes for works on fiction and translation, increasing number of awards are also coming up

for books on history, politics, economics and even philosophy.

The rise of the non-fiction form can be seen to be reflection of our time. Globalisation has of course made us all aware of ideas and conflicts around the world and their impact in real time.

Ongoing conflicts like the financial crisis, regional political conflicts and climate change are not just limited to one place – they have a domino effect and their impact is likely to reach us sooner than later. There is thus a curiosity to know more and if complex ideas are put across in accessible ways, they are likely to be popular.

Some of the most popular non-fiction books exploring the origins of humanity include Yuval

THE WORLD OF NON-FICTION HAS WIDENED IMMEASURABLY AND IF YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL, THERE IS A PLATFORM AVAILABLE FOR IT

Hariri’s ‘Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind’ and Stephen Hawking’s ‘A Brief History of Time’. Both answer the eternal question of where we come from, but in ways that challenge our established perceptions and existing knowledge.

‘Talking to My Daughter About the Economy: A Brief History of

Capitalism’ by Yanis Varoufakis and ‘Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything’ by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner became popular as they explored the challenges of capitalism and the way in which economics impacts our everyday life in unpredictable ways.

Around the world, non-fiction has come of age, whether through the historical works in India which explore current debates on who and how history should be written, to stories of the trauma of leaving one’s country in a time of war. ‘The Pianist from Syria: A Memoir by Aeham Ahmad and ‘No Friends but the Mountains’ by Behrouz Boochani explore the theme of

escape and living as refugees at a time when these stories are losing headline space.

Ever since Edward Said wrote his famous book ‘Orientalism’, non-fiction by Arab writers in English has been increasingly popular.

‘Our Women on the Ground’ by Zahra Hankir is a collection of essays by Arab women reporting from the Middle East and ‘I was their American dream’ by Malaka Gharib challenges what it means to be an immigrant Muslim woman in America.

Be it biographies, history, travel, spirituality or any other area of interest, the world of non-fiction has widened immeasurably. If you have a story to tell, there is a platform available for it.

UN urges ‘massive outlay’ for Pakistan flood recovery

NINA LARSON

The UN chief called on Monday for “massive investments” to help Pakistan recover from last year’s devastating floods, saying it was “doubly victimised” by climate change and a “morally bankrupt global financial system”.

“No country deserves to endure what happened to Pakistan,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told an international conference in Geneva, which is seeking billions of dollars to support recovery from the disaster.

Guterres opened the one-day event appealing to the world to help Pakistan bounce back from floods which submerged a third of the country, killing more than 1,700 people and affecting more than 33 million others.

Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, who attended with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, called the floods “a climate disaster of monumental scale”.

Eight million people were displaced, millions of acres of agricultural land were ruined and around two million homes destroyed, while nine million more people were pushed to the brink of poverty. The UN chief hailed how Pakistan and its people had responded to “this epic tragedy with heroic humanity”.

“We must match the heroic response of the people of Pakistan with our own efforts and massive investments to strengthen their communities for the future,” he told the conference.

According to Pakistan’s so-called Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework, which it will officially present during Monday’s conference, it will need \$16.3 billion.

Pakistan’s government has said the country should be able to cover half the cost, but is asking the international community to fund the rest.

“This is the greatest climate disaster in our country’s history,” Zardari told the conference, decrying a “colossal calamity.”

“Pakistan will need considerable support over the next several years from our international partners to implement this comprehensive plan,” he said. The UN chief said the international community had a particular responsibility to help Pakistan, which has been “doubly victimised by climate chaos and a morally bankrupt global financial system.”

He slammed a system that “routinely denies middle-income countries the debt relief and concessional financing needed to invest in resilience against natural disasters.” Around 450 participants from some 40 countries had registered for Monday’s event. French President Emmanuel Macron, his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen were also due to address the conference via video-link. — AFP

The house is in ruins, but the holiday feast goes on



Megan Specia

The writer is a correspondent on the International Desk in London

The smell of oranges and roasting duck wafted from behind the metal door of a small barn as Oksana Kovtun put the final touches to her family’s Christmas dinner.

As she hustled from the outbuilding into the warmth of a small modular home carrying the bird towards the table, a thin dusting of snow settled on the collapsed walls and scattered debris in the centre of her yard.

It is all that is left of her family’s house in Makariv, destroyed by shelling in the spring as the Russians made their failed grab for the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, some 30 miles away.

In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, Christmas this year fell on Saturday — the church still uses the Julian calendar, rather than the newer Gregorian one — and the set-piece family meal comes on Christmas Eve.

Friday was the first Christmas Eve the Kovtuns have spent at war, now living alongside the ruins of their house in a donated temporary building.

With one of her sons in the army in the east, and with no permanent home, the past several months have at times felt punishing, said Kovtun, 49.

“But there is nothing else to do; we have to hold on,” she added.

“You can sit and cry, but then you get up and get to work. And that’s how it is.”

The Kovtuns were among countless

THE KOVTUNS WERE AMONG COUNTLESS UKRAINIAN FAMILIES CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAY UNDER STARK NEW CIRCUMSTANCES. MANY HAVE DAMAGED HOMES; MANY MORE WERE DISPLACED ENTIRELY OR HAVE FLED THE COUNTRY AS REFUGEES

Ukrainian families celebrating the holiday under stark new circumstances. Many have damaged homes; many more were displaced entirely or have fled the country as refugees.

Even in areas that have never been near the front lines, celebrations were taking place amid hardship and uncertainty, after weeks of attacks by Russian forces on critical civilian infrastructure that have crippled Ukraine’s ability to provide consistent electricity, heat and water.



Oksana Kovtun prepares an Orthodox Christmas Eve meal after the power went out in the family’s temporary home in Makariv, Ukraine.

Such conditions can turn the Christmas Eve meal into both an act of defiance and a demonstration of resilience. In the Kovtuns’ modular home, the electricity flickered out two hours before dinner was set to begin. But flashlights were close at hand.

The youngest in the family, Kovtun’s 7-year-old grandson, David, struck a match to light candles on the table with the swift hand of someone for whom it has become a nightly ritual.

“You can’t really call it a house now,” Viktor Kovtun, Kovtun’s husband, said of the tiny prefabricated building, which had been sectioned off into three rooms.

Without its electric heating, it would cool quickly, Viktor Kovtun, 53, explained, lighting a gas heater instead. “But we will rebuild,” he said of the family’s lost house.

It will not be the first time they have remade their home of nearly three decades.

“When we bought it, it was just walls and a roof, no windows, doors or floor,” Oksana Kovtun said of the house they bought in 1997. “And we have been building and building.”

They raised their two sons there and then added on to make room for their daughter-in-law and eventually their grandson — three generations under one roof.

They had more work planned for when their son Mykhailo, 22, was scheduled to return last year from military service. He had joined the army in 2021.

But only days after they finished renovating their kitchen in February, Russian forces occupied Makariv as they invaded Ukraine from the north. Battles between Ukrainian and Russian troops soon engulfed the area.

“There was no siren, no alert; we just heard the shelling,” said Tetiana Kovtun, 30, who is married to the couple’s oldest son, Vitalii, also 30. They barely had time to grab a few belongings as they fled.

Weeks later, on March 16, artillery fire burst through the wall of the elder couple’s bedroom.

A second rocket slammed into another wall. — *New York Times*

Time for a Kintsugi touch

We have completed one week of 2023 and are we as excited as on the New Year's Eve or have we started contemplating what we want to achieve?

There comes a point in life when it is not what we want to achieve that we focus on but what we want to let go. If seasons must change, so must we — change for the better.

Life need not be a battlefield nor need it be a comfort zone for it is the list of challenges we go through to make us grow.

We can see it in teenagers. They want to break away from the over-bearing protection and go and explore to learn about life.

Meanwhile, parents stress out fearing how safe their children are little realising the world has been evolving and every generation parents have gone through this.

'It is not about you, it is about the others,' they say but reflect and one would want to add, 'but not at the expense of me.'

Can you imagine how brilliant the world would be without the broken hearts?

What would it be like if all these hearts would be thriving and alive not to just exist but to live, celebrating life.

In other words there are crisis points at all stages of life; it is just that the other age groups are brushed aside.

Is it too late to maneuver in life? A change in career, a place or in lifestyle could all lead to a crisis.

At least for a short time. Then again if a building can have a makeover, why not a life?

So why fix something that is not broken?

And if it is broken, is it too late?

This is where we can learn from the Japanese art of fixing broken pottery called Kintsugi.

The centuries-old art uses gold to fix broken pottery and objects.



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

A CHANGE IN CAREER, A PLACE OR IN LIFESTYLE COULD ALL LEAD TO A CRISIS. AT LEAST FOR A SHORT TIME. THEN AGAIN IF A BUILDING CAN HAVE A MAKEOVER, WHY NOT A LIFE?

Imagine if not, it might be just thrown out. Instead Kintsugi in a way celebrates what the object has gone through.

And the second chance is not with just glue but with gold.

Who is without imperfections?

After all the years of trying to attain perfection there comes a point in life when it is alright to be okay.

To enjoy what comes your way instead of missing it all while swimming against the current. If it was fun then it is time for joy.

Instead of seeking, how about attracting?

And so they say it is possible when you are in the right frame of mind and know what you want, and if it is good for you then even better.

How long does it take to realise that there are ways beyond your limitations?

In our thoughts we have limitations controlled by our emotions that can be often biased.

It takes that extra help to cross that bridge to reach the shore of reasonableness.

Even this is an achievement. The only difference is everyone prepares you to get into the mode of achieving from childhood to schooling to higher studies and career.

We are taught how to qualify and never want to be thought of being disqualified.

Yet there comes a time when even health is looked into consideration as part of qualification for jobs. If only the corp

orate world would learn more about Kintsugi and let people enjoy their life and companies benefit from their skills.

Being in the competitive labour market maybe this is the time when one feels like being part of the elimination round.

But it is never too late. It is only the mind that needs the touch of Kintsugi and thoughts that are creative and positive.

NO BAN ON PATRIOTISM



People celebrate the Serbian national holiday, banned by the constitutional court, in East Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on Monday. — Reuters

McCarthy starts his stint with too much luggage

Finally, after four days of gruelling ballots that was laced with coercing, pleading, arm-twisting, bribing and finger-jabbing, Kevin McCarthy (pictured) was able to flip some 20 conservative holdouts to become his supporters – or at least not explicit opponents in his bid to Speakers' gravel.

This kind of intraparty standoff is unprecedented in modern times.

With 15 ballots - not since 1860 in the build-up to the American Civil War has the lower chamber of Congress voted this many times to pick a speaker - and a midnight vote that witnessed a near-fistfight, McCarthy has been eventually elected a Speaker of the House.

The fact is that McCarthy has made many generous compromises and concessions to the conservatives that will seriously hamper his handling of the House in the coming days.

He conceded to the most crucial demand of the conservative holdouts pertaining to the "motion to vacate", giving power to any of 435 members of the House to initiate a vote on whether to remove the Speaker any time.

The motion to vacate allows that even one legislator can trigger a vote of no-confidence against the speaker.

As per the existing rule, five members are needed to launch any such vote to remove the speaker, but the conservatives have been demanding



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

THE CONSERVATIVES HAVE BEEN DEMANDING A CHANGE IN THE RULE TO ALLOW ANY SINGLE MEMBER TO INITIATE SUCH PROCEEDINGS – MAKING MCCARTHY AND ALL SUBSEQUENT SPEAKERS VULNERABLE TO UNCERTAINTY

a change in the rule to allow any single member to initiate such proceedings – making McCarthy and all subsequent speakers vulnerable to uncertainty.

Another important concession promised by McCarthy is related to the process of passage of different bills in the House, which over the years have tilted towards more behind closed doors negotiations and passed on short notice with little debate.

The conservatives want the return of the detailed process of olden days and McCarthy has yielded to this demand.

While reverting back to the traditional rules of the legislation in the House is a good cause in its spirit, but it creates more complications for McCarthy in steering the House as well as it will pile up a lot of legislative burden.

He also promised to his opponents within his party to pursue deep cuts in government spending to achieve a balanced federal budget in 10 years, beginning in October.

For quite some time, the conservatives have been seriously criticising the unprecedented surge in the federal spending and they demanded from McCarthy to employ restraints during his speakership.

Obviously, being in majority, Republicans have the leverage



to control the budget levels, but they will be compelled to bargain with Democrats in the Senate to approve spending legislation. But, in a divided Congress, compromises are the necessity, and McCarthy's concessions raise the spectre of a deadlock between the two parties to reach a deal when the federal government comes up against its \$31.4 trillion (\$46 trillion) debt limit later this year.

In case of their failure to reach agreement, or even a long standoff, has the potential to trigger a journey towards default that

would jolt the global economy.

The chaotic start to the new Congress, that too from within the Republican majority, will be quite problematic for McCarthy in the same way that some of his Republican predecessors, including former Speaker John Boehner, had problems in dealing with a cohort of rebellious right-wingers, which resulted in premature resignation of Boehner.

Ceding powers to an extremist group of the party, despite full-fledged support of Donald Trump, who actually claimed credit for McCarthy's win in the speaker

fight, is going to cast its long shadow over Republicans' intent to create problems for President Biden by launching much-hyped investigations into his family business and administration.

Regardless of the fact that conservative group within Republicans comprises less than two dozen members, they have exploited McCarthy very astutely and they will soon start a new palaver in the House to ensure their existence.

It will be interesting to see how McCarthy and Trump maneuver this group to have smooth sailing.



25th Arabian Gulf Cup



Iraq goalkeeper concedes an own-goal against Oman at the Basra Stadium.

PICTURES BY ABDULWAHID AL HAMADANI

Oman edge Yemen to keep semifinal hopes alive

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH MUSCAT, JAN 9

A one-handed penalty save by goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini saved Oman from blushes as they edged past a fighting Yemen 3-2 in the Group A match of 25th Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra, Iraq on Monday.

The win kept the Red Warriors in contention for a semifinal spot from the group.

At the Basra International Stadium, it offered a thrilling experience for the 60,121 fans who braved rain to attend the match.

Al Mukhaini spoiled Yemen's chance for an equaliser in the final moments of the game when his reflex save in the right corner of the post denied Mohammed al Dahi from the spot kick.

Oman conceded the penalty after Ahmed al Kaabi fouled Yemen's Ahmed al Sarori inside the box.

An own-goal by Iraqi goalkeeper Ali Abbas put Oman

ahead in the second minute. Yemen pulled level in the 12th minute after a penalty goal by Abdulwasea Al Matari.

Yemen took the lead in the 30th minute through Omar al Dahi but Arshad al Alawi pulled Oman level seven minutes later.

Issam al Subhi netted the winner for Oman in the 57th minute.

Oman went ahead in the second minute itself when Yemen goalkeeper Ali Abbas gloved a corner into his own net.

Yemen, who started with a long ranger from Emad Al Godaimah in the first minute, tried in the same vein to put pressure on Oman defence.

They found success in the 12th minute after Abdulwasea Al Matari converted a penalty to pull level at 1-1.

Al Matari earned the penalty himself after a foul by Omani defender Juma al Habsi close to the goal.

Oman goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini had no chance in the penalty as Al Matari fired to the bottom left corner for the



equalising goal.

Buoyed by the goal, Yemen pushed ahead after some serious attacks from Oman.

Omar al Dahi broke through after a nice pass from Al Matari and sent a strong shot, which went past a diving Oman keeper Al Mukhaini in the 30th minute.

DRAMA APLENTY

There was drama aplenty in the rain-soaked match as Oman

the penalty kick, slipped and his shot ballooned over the post.

Yemeni defender Mudir al Radaei conceded the penalty after bringing Oman's Jameel al Yahmadi down in the penalty area.

Mudir received a yellow card for the foul.

Salah al Yahyaei won a free kick in the added time after a foul from Mohammed al Tairi, who was booked by the referee.

Oman tried another attempt next as Al Mundhir's shot from the centre of the box was put away by the Yemen defence.

In the second-half, Yemen replaced the goalkeeper Abbas with Mohammed Khairalah.

Oman sprang into action immediately by taking the lead after two minutes into play.

Arshad al Alawi's strong header from a cross by Salah al Yahyaei hit the left post from close range. The ball bounced back to Issam al Subhi who unleashed a diving header forward as the ball entered the net for a third Oman goal.

In the 49th minute, Yemen's Emad al Godaimah got a yellow

card for a foul on Arshad.

In the 57th minute, Oman substituted an injured Mahmood Mabrook with Ahmed al Khamisi.

In the next minute, Al Mundhir's firm shot from outside the box was saved by Yemen keeper Khairalah.

Yemen made a double change next.

Hamza al Rimi replaced Emad al Godaimah and Jarallah al Zaghari substituted Hamza Hanash.

Al Mundhir's attempt with a header from the centre of the box went high and wide in the 73rd minute.

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic made some changes to the attacking line-up with 15 minutes to go.

Zahir al Aghbari replaced Arshad al Alawi, while Musab al Maamari came in place of Salah al Yahyaei and Omer al Malki substituted Issam al Subhi.

In the 78th minute, Jameel al Yahmadi's right-footed shot from the centre of the box went off the target to the left.



BRANKO HAPPY WITH TOUGH AND CRUCIAL WIN

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 9

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic affirmed that the match was very tough after Oman edged Yemen 3-2.

“At the end, we managed to register a difficult victory. I expected that the opponent will show a very top game and that happened in the game,” the Croatian coach added in the post-match press conference.

Oman’s goalie Ibrahim al Mukhaini saved Oman from a draw in the dying minutes. Al Mukhaini, who hails from Sur, saved Yemen’s

penalty by Mohammed al Dahi in the injury time.

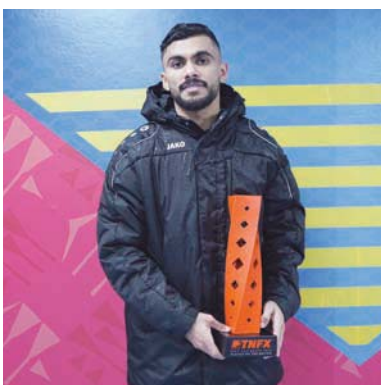
Despite the triumph, Oman team did not show their top performance and the opponent could easily reach to Oman’s scoring areas. Moreover, Yemen team registered a 2-1 lead before Red Warriors shifted the encounter to their side at 3-2.

“The players were in the right position to record a strong bounce back despite Yemen leading 2-1. The victory was very crucial to continue and revive our chances in the tournament. The focus of the players reduced a lot in the last



OMAN HEAD COACH
BRANKO IVANKOVIC

minutes.”
“The forthcoming match against Saudi Arabia will be again



MAN OF THE MATCH
SALAH AL YAHYAEI

a challenging match and there will not be any easy game in this tournament. It is a great event to

have a good contact with the teams that has perfect attendance at international level,” he added.

The 69-year-old referred the tough win of Oman against Yemen to different reasons. “The continuous rain impacted the green field which caused difficulty for the players to play properly. Both team players faced many obstacles on delivering the balls to their teammates due to slippery surface.”

Coach Branko said injured player Amjad al Harthi will miss rest of the Gulf Cup.

Amjad suffered injury during

the first game against Iraq which ended in a goalless draw.

“Amjad will not be able to play in the rest of the Gulf Cup matches due to his injury. Moreover, Mahmood Mabrook is injured as well and he may not take part in the game against Saudi,” he concluded.

Man of the match, Salah al Yahyaei, said that it is great the match ended on a winning note. “Our focus now is to prepare very well for the forthcoming match against Saudi Arabia. I have recovered from injury and in full readiness to continue play in the rest of the matches,” he said.

F A N Z O N E



OMAN AND YEMEN FANS DURING THE MATCH.

PHOTOS BY ABDULWAHID AL HAMADANI



Iraq blank Saudi to boost last-four qualification prospects

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 9

Hosts Iraq boosted their semifinal hopes in the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup with a 2-0 win over Saudi Arabia in a rain-affected Group A match at the Basra Stadium on Monday night.

Aso Rostam’s goal in the 86th minute confirmed the Iraqi triumph after a first-half goal by Ibrahim Bayesh.

Dhurgham Ismail sent a cross to the right and Rostam’s diving header went into the bottom left corner of the Saudi net. The goal was awarded following a VAR review.

With the win, Iraq are on top of Group A with four points from two matches. Oman are second on the same points with lesser goal average.

Saudi Arabia are third with three points and Yemen are bottom with no points.

Ibrahim Bayesh made the Iraqi fans ecstatic with the brilliant goal in the 30th minute. Bayesh’s inch perfect shot after a corner rested



Saudi Arabia’s Ahmed Bamsaud in action with Iraq’s Hasan Abdulkareem. – Reuters

inside the right corner of the Saudi net. The corner was headed away by the Saudi defender but fell on trot for Bayesh to unleash a powerful shot.

Rain continued unabated for the second match at the Basra stadium as the pitch looked drenched and difficult to maneuver ball movement.

In the 44th minute, Iraq advanced to the Saudi penalty box after a through ball from

Mohammed Ali Abbood, but Aymen Hussein was caught offside.

In the 43rd minute, Aymen Hussain’s good attempt was saved by Saudi goalkeeper Nawaf al Aqidi.

Saudi made a good move in the 40th minute. Raed al Ghamdi was offside after receiving a through ball from Ziyad al Sahafi.

Iraq’s Dhurgham Ismail was booked in the 37th minute for a foul on Madallah al Olayan of



Iraq’s midfielder Ibrahim Bayesh (C) celebrates scoring with teammates during the Arabian Gulf Cup match between Iraq and Saudi Arabia at the Basra International Stadium in Iraq’s eponymous southern city. – AFP

Saudi Arabia.

Dhurgham earlier put his shot outside the Saudi box high and wide to the left in the 19th minute.

In the 10th minute, Iraq pushed ahead with a perfect cross from Hasan Abdulkareem to Aymen Hussein, whose shot went wide to the right.

In the fourth minute, Saudi missed a chance from close range as Qassem Lajami’s left-footed shot

missed the target to the right.

The match started with Iraq making the first attack and Aymen Hussain’s shot after an assist from Alai Ghasem was saved by the Saudi keeper.

NEAR MISSES

The second-half started with Iraq missing a close opportunity. Hasan Abdulkareem’s nice cross was connected by Aymen Hussein

with a close-range header but was saved by Saudi keeper Nawaf.

Saudi’s Raed al Ghamdi was caught offside after a through pass by Ahmed Bamasud in the 56th minute.

Iraq’s Amjad Attwan had his two attempts missed in a span of five minutes.

In 51st minute, Attwan’s left-footed shot from outside the box was saved by goalkeeper Nawaf. Three minutes later, Attwan’s header missed the target to the right.

Both the coaches opted for some substitutions in the difficult playing condition in the next phase.

Iraq coach Jesus Garcia replaced Aymen Hussein and Hasan Abdulkareem with Aso Rostam and Sherko Karim respectively.

Saudi coach Herve Renard substituted Raed al Ghamdi and Musab al Juwayr with Mohammed Maran and Turki al Ammar respectively.

Saudi made two good attempts in the next few minutes but Sumayhan al Nabit fell to the off-side traps on both the occasions.



Manchester City's Cole Palmer in action with Chelsea's Trevoh Chalobah during the FA Cup third round at Etihad Stadium, Manchester, Britain. – Reuters

City rip Chelsea apart in FA Cup

ANDY JALIL
MANCHESTER, JAN 8

Having reached the last three FA Cup finals, Chelsea were knocked out in the third round for the first time in 25 years by Manchester City's superb performance in a 4-0 win. It was an injury-ravaged Chelsea's second defeat in four days by a weakened City who had beaten them 1-0 in the Premier League. Chelsea are out of both domestic cup competitions and are ten points off the Champions League places leaving their supporters frustrated with the manager Graham Potter who has been there just four months. Under him they have won just one of their last seven games in all competitions. Potter said: "The results in

a small space of time aren't positive. You can make excuses and look for reasons, say it isn't good enough. But we have to keep improving and stick together, because clearly we are suffering as a club and it's not nice at all." He added: "This opponent is the worst you can play when you are not doing well. They can make you look like you're not running and trying. The first half was painful and tough. You can understand the supporters' frustration, we respect that. But our job is to keep working. There are always other opinions, negativity and criticism – the results have not been positive. That's part of the job, part of the challenge." City's victory was virtually completed by the end of the

first half with a 3-0 lead. While the London side were poor throughout the half, City opened the scoring in the 23rd minute. Lewis Hall fouled Mahrez who took the free kick 25 yards out and curled a marvellous shot in the top corner of the near post slightly grazing the head of Chelsea's Conor Gallagher. On the half hour came the second goal with Julian Alvarez converting a penalty. It was awarded after a handball by Kai Havertz who rose to head away a corner and inexplicably leaving his left arm up in the air. After relentless attack by City, the third goal came eight minutes later. In a fine combined move, Rodri sent the ball crossfield to Mahrez and the Algerian found Kyle Walker in the box who in turn gave a short pass to Foden

to send the ball into the net. The three goals had come in a space of 15 minutes leaving Chelsea humiliated. They improved a little with double substitution at half time but had no answer to City's domination. The scoring was completed five minutes before end of normal time. Foden had raced on to a pass by Bernardo Silva but was floored by Kalidou Koulibaly in the box and Mahrez drove the spot kick into the roof of the net sending Kepa Arrizabalaga the wrong way. City manager, Pep Guardiola said about his team: "Really good from the first minute to the end. We made it an incredibly intense game against a top side. When we play in this way, with this incredible hunger, we don't even give them time to think."

Strenserv inch past Douglas OHI

MUSCAT: Strenserv brushed past Douglas OHI by 2 wickets in the A Division League Season 2022-23 powered by Khimji Ramdas LLC. Douglas OHI won the toss and elected to bat first. Douglas got off to a steady start although Strenserv's pacers held their discipline well. With Douglas losing just 1 wicket in the powerplay, they looked to go big on Strenserv but Jaleel K and Devansh Loya executed their plans well to pick wickets at regular intervals packing half of Douglas' batsmen on just 69 in 20 overs. Shamsudheen and Barakath Ahmed's 40 run partnership to resurrect their innings couldn't last long resulting in Douglas OHI packed for 152 runs. Jaleel K and Devansh Loya picked 3 wickets each while Vijeesh Velunni picked 2 wickets. In response, Strenserv lost two of their top order batsmen within the 1st 4 overs getting



(L-R) Jaleel K, Devansh Loya and Ali Muhammed of Strenserv.

Douglas OHI back in the hunt. Supriyo S and Devansh Loya's 43 run partnership stabled the ship for Strenserv which was then ably cashed in by Ali Muhammed scoring a half century to take Strenserv through the line in the contest. Strenserv registered their second win of the league in six matches. BRIEF SCORES: Douglas OHI 152 all out in 41.1 overs (Shamsudheen S 41 (43b, 1x4, 5x6); Jaleel K 3-19, Devansh Loya 3-38) lost to Strenserv 154-8 in 36.5 overs (Ali Muhammed 57 (61b, 9x4); Shahid Khan 2-35) by 2 wickets.

Martinez appointed Portugal coach, will contact Ronaldo

LISBON: Portugal named former Belgium coach Roberto Martinez as their new manager on Monday and the Spaniard said he would sit down with Cristiano Ronaldo to talk about his future in the team. Martinez, 49, replaces Fernando Santos, who left his job after Portugal suffered a shock defeat by Morocco in the World Cup quarterfinals. "I appreciate the enthusiasm and ambition with which he (Martinez) received the invitation," Portuguese Football Federation (FPF) President Fernando Gomes told a news conference as Martinez stood next to him. "This is an important moment for the national team," he said. Martinez stepped down as Belgium coach following their World Cup group stage exit, saying he had made the decision to end his six-year tenure some time ago and would have left even if they had been crowned champions. It ended a long spell in charge of the side in which he took them to number one in the world rankings and third place at the 2018 World Cup in Russia.



Portuguese Football Federation chief Fernando Soares Gomes da Silva (L) and Portugal's new head coach Spanish Roberto Martinez during his official presentation. – AFP "I am delighted to be able to represent one of the most talented teams in the world," Martinez said. "I understand there are great expectations ... but I also understand there is a very large team (at the FFF) ... and together we will achieve our goals." Questioned about the future of Ronaldo in the national team, Martinez said that he would contact the 37-year-old, who last month joined Saudi Arabian club Al Nassr on a 2-1/2 year deal. "I want to contact all 26 players who were at the last World Cup ... Cristiano is a player on that list," he said, adding he would "sit down and talk" with the forward. — Reuters

Messi, Ronaldo to face off in PSG vs Saudi select friendly

PARIS: Lionel Messi and Paris Saint-Germain will play a friendly against a select side made up of players from Cristiano Ronaldo's new club Al Nassr and their Saudi rivals Al Hilal in Riyadh on January 19, the French champions announced on Monday. Qatar-owned PSG will travel to Doha on January 17 before moving on to the Saudi capital for the match at the King Fahd Stadium which will see Messi and Ronaldo renew their rivalry. Messi returned to training with Paris Saint-Germain last week after being given a fortnight off following Argentina's World Cup triumph in

Qatar in December. Meanwhile Ronaldo, who will turn 38 in February, recently joined Al Nassr after agreeing a contract that runs until 2025 and is reportedly worth more than 200 million euros (\$214m). His arrival at Al Nassr, who are coached by Frenchman Rudi Garcia, comes as Saudi Arabia seeks to improve the profile of football in the country ahead of a possible joint bid to host the 2030 World Cup along with Greece and Egypt. Ronaldo and Messi have dominated the sport over the last 15 years, winning the Ballon d'Or 12 times between them.

Their rivalry grew during nine years in which they came up against each other in Spain, when Messi was starring for Barcelona and Ronaldo for Real Madrid. Riyadh clubs Al Hilal and Al Nassr are Saudi Arabia's two most successful sides. PSG have made a habit of travelling to Qatar in winter since the Gulf state bought the club in 2011. However, this trip comes despite the Ligue 1 leaders having a French Cup tie scheduled for the weekend of January 21 and 22 against lower-league opponents yet to be determined. — AFP



Paris Saint-Germain's Argentine forward Lionel Messi (2ndR) and French head coach Christophe Galtier (L) take part in a training session at the club's 'Camp des Loges' training ground in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, west of Paris. – AFP

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Oman plans rocket launch station in Duqm

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 9

The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced an upcoming scientific space rocket launch platform in Duqm as part of its space sector executive programme.

The project is a collaboration between the ministry, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and National Space Services Company (NASCOM).

In a symposium titled Omani Space Sector: “Future Directions and Investment Opportunities, the ministry signed a usufruct contract for the rocket launch project. According to the ministry, the



launch platform, which will be open to researchers and hobbyists, aims to develop scientific environments for scientists and researchers in the field as well as to attract hobbyists and boost sectoral tourism.

The ministry also unveiled various investment opportunities in the space sector as part of its executive plan.

Dr Saud bin Humaid bin Salim al Shuaili, DG of Policies & Governance Department and Head of the National Space at the ministry shared: “The space sector has witnessed a great growth in terms of private sector investments in the recent years.”

“The number of countries that have invested in the sector in 2020 was 82 countries. Previously, if we go back to the days of the

Cold War, perhaps four countries invested in the space sector, and it was monopolised by governments and not the private sector.

This is the second change, the investment of the private sector within the space industry which exceeds the investments of governments,” he added.

According to Al Shuaili, space cloud partnerships, grounding stations hub, direct receiving stations, and national space data platform and end-user application booster programmes (sandbox), are amongst the various space sector initiatives that will be open to investors. Investment opportunities will be offered via the National Program for Investment & Export Development.

Towards continued Renaissance

We are honoured to extend our heartfelt congratulations to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

- may the Almighty protect and preserve him - and to the Omani people on the anniversary of His Majesty's accession to the throne.





Toyota Hilux: Inspiring performance, legendary capability

MUSCAT: Toyota Hilux has been one of Toyota's finest workhorses that has long offered customers a perfect balance of work and play. The Hilux with its robust build quality, thrilling driving dynamics and go anywhere capability has made the Hilux one of the most popular pick-ups for customers.

In Oman customers can choose from two versions of the Hilux. The rugged Hilux with J-Deck and the sporty 4.0 Litre V6 Hilux Adventure with the A Deck. The 4.0 Litre V6 Toyota Hilux Adventure is a truly exciting mean machine that's been developed by Toyota for exciting and thrilling journeys.

The Hilux Adventure is equipped with a mighty 4.0 Litre V6 engine packing a mighty punch with 235 HP & 38.3 Kg-m Torque. It has an Auto Disconnect Differential to keep the tempo going.

Equal importance has been provided to the technical superiority and safety features of the Hilux 4x4.

The noteworthy features include a 2.7 Litre Petrol Engine that is available in 5-speed Manual Transmission and 6

Speed Automatic Transmission, outputting 164 HP.

The Hilux is not only a tough vehicle but also an advanced pick-up with stylish design. This is achieved by the horizontal Bars that make up the Grille and Sleek Headlamps that wrap around the front of the Fenders.

The Hilux sports a thick, chunky Front Bumper sculpted like an SUV, Front Fog lamps, Alloy Wheels, apart from Side Stripes that adorn the vehicle.

The Toyota Hilux rises above expectations, to deliver some of the finest on-road and off-road experiences ever. The Hilux really is two vehicles in one: a work truck through the week and a family vehicle on weekends, thanks to added comforts and safety features. Indeed the Hilux models are stunning in design and features.

For the latest Press Releases, Test Drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/. For any further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota Showroom.

Pact signed for second phase of \$650m Al Nakheel ITC in Barka

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 9

Oman-based developer Al Nakheel has signed an agreement with civil contractor National Company for Construction Works (NCCW) covering the implementation of the construction package of the \$650 million Al Nakheel Integrated Tourism Complex (ITC) project.

The project, being developed by Alargan Towell Investment Company in Oman, is coming up on the seafront in the Wilayat of Barka in South Al Batinah Governorate.

The agreement was signed by Mohammed bin Moosa al Abri, CEO of Al Nakheel, and Wissam al Aani, Executive Representative of NCCW. The signing covers the construction package for the roads enabling works of the project. It will stretch over 500,000 sq m with the usufruct right, and almost one kilometre of waterfront overlooking the Sea of Oman.

The Al Nakheel project seeks to take shape as a masterpiece of affordable community living that will elevate urban development in Oman to new heights. A unique water body Crystal Lagoon



covering an area of 51,000 sq m will be the centrepiece of the development.

The project will also be home to one lakefront hotel and two seafront hotels, along with villas, apartments, townhouses, and serviced apartments. It will also include a shopping mall, a souk, an international school, various restaurants, an aqua park and other entertainment and service

facilities.

Al Abri said: "The signing reflects our commitment to develop the Al Nakheel project and to present new concepts to buyers, investors and tourists, citizens and residents, to support the Government's endeavours towards achieving Oman Vision 2040. We believe the project will attract local and foreign investments across various

components of the project, create added value and contribute to the GDP of the Sultanate of Oman."

Al Aani said: "We are confident that the Al Nakheel project will be one of the most prominent tourism and real estate projects in the region. The development of the project will empower the growth of Oman's tourism and real estate sector and deliver a positive impact on the national economy."

ONEIC targets e-wallet launch this year

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 9

Oman National Engineering and Investment Company (ONEIC), a local company listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange says it plans to launch an 'electronic wallet' service during 2023. It follows confirmation of a license



'in-principle' from the Central Bank of Oman to operate as a Payment Service Provider (PSP).

The company said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority that it had received an 'in-principle' PSP license following an approval from the Central Bank's Board of Governors.

"ONEIC efforts to obtain

this license come in line with its strategy aiming at establishing its own electronic wallet and to cope with the latest technologies in the billing sector. ONEIC is hopeful that it shall launch its electronic wallet during 2023," the CEO said, noting that it seeks to position the e-wallet as the "main pillar of its future vision".

Al Kiyumi Oilfield and Gas Equipment opens new showroom

MUSCAT: Al Kiyumi Oilfield and Gas Equipment and Industrial Appliances LLC inaugurated its new showroom in Muscat. The new showroom, strategically located in Al Ghubrah, features a modern and state-of the art display of products range from compressor to valves, hoses and fittings to pumps, pressure gauge and industrial tools and a lot more.

Al Kiyumi Oilfield and Gas Equipment and Industrial Appliances LLC, a group company of Al Kiyumi Electric and Trading Co LLC, is an extension of the company's vision to expand throughout the 50 years in service.

The company is engaged in supply of oil field, gas equipment and industrial equipment and the company's integrated capabilities span the entire spectrum of 'supply to deliver the items with quality' to achieve 'one stop solution for all your mechanical and industrial needs' to the customers.

The showroom was inaugurated by Shaikh Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura as the Chief Guest and joined by Adil al Kiyumi — Chairman of Al Kiyumi Electric and Trading Co



ADIL AL KIYUMI
Chairman, Al Kiyumi Electric
and Trading Co LLC



LLC, Mohammed al Kiyumi — Managing Director, Tushar Hamalai — General Manager, Waleed al Jahwari — Director, Ali Raza — Sales Manager and other guests.

Commenting on the inauguration, Waleed bin Abdullah al Jahwari, Director Al Kiyumi Oilfield and Gas Equipment and Industrial Appliances LLC, said,

"This showroom is the first branch of Al Kiyumi Oilfield and Gas Equipment and Industrial Appliances LLC to serve its customers directly after the company has been serving customers in the previous eight years through indirect demand.

Al Kiyumi Oilfield and Gas

Equipment and Industrial Appliances LLC is an extension of Al Kiyumi Electric and Trading Co LLC, which will complete its 50th year of giving and serving customers inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman."

Al Kiyumi Electric and Trading Co LLC is one of the leading electrical companies in the Sultanate of Oman specialised in importing branded products from all over the world. Al Kiyumi Electric also maintains a wide range of qualitative and quantitative products to meet the needs of customers, and has a showroom near Azaiba roundabout that includes all kinds of electrical products.



Oman among top countries to benefit from investment momentum in 2023



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 9

Boosted by high oil prices and fiscal stability, the Sultanate of Oman ranks among the top countries in the world that is expected to benefit from an upsurge in investment inflows in 2023.

A new report by fDi Intelligence (fDi stands for Foreign Direct Investment), an English-language bimonthly magazine that specialises in up-to-date movements of foreign investment around the world, said that Oman is among the leading countries globally that will capitalise on this investment momentum in the coming year.

Using macroeconomic trajectory and foreign investment flows analysis of the top 50 investment destinations (using data from the International Monetary Fund and investment monitors fDi Markets), the “FDI Standouts Watchlist 2023” has revealed the ranking of the top 10 most attractive powers in terms of foreign investment.

Topping the list is Qatar with 87.64 points, followed by India with 86.20 points, Morocco with 82.46 points, Oman with 81.14 points and Ireland with 80.61 points. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Singapore, Greece and UAE complete the top ten list of the report.

Foreign investment has played a major role in Oman’s economic growth. According to Oman’s Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion

(MoCIIP), the total volume of direct foreign investments, till the third quarter of 2022 reached RO 18.14 billion, recording an increase of 10.4 per cent, compared to the same period in last year.

Data show that the volume of trade exchange between Oman and other countries until Q3 2022, reached RO 30.421 billion, with an increase of 46.18 per cent. The value of foreign direct investments (FDI) in the manufacturing sector until Q3 2022 reached RO 1.717 billion, compared to RO 1.512 billion in the same period in 2021.

To attract foreign investments into the country, MoCIIP implemented the investor residency initiative which is a tool and a competitive advantage to attract foreign investments and stimulate various economic sectors.

The initiative links residency with investment by facilitating the granting of residency to investors and their family members, who are interesting to invest in the Sultanate of Oman for periods ranging from 5 to 10 years, subject to extension, provided that the procedures and controls established for that are adhered to in accordance with the categories offered.

As of January 1, 2023, the total number of investors who obtained investor residency in Oman reached 1219 investors of various nationalities, including the issuance of 725 investor residency cards for the 10-year category, and 489 cards for the 5-year category, as well as 5 Retirement cards.

Salalah Mills to set up Oman’s first grain trading business

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 9

Salalah Mills Co, a publicly traded Omani company listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX), has announced plans to venture into grain trading – a move that marks the Sultanate of Oman’s maiden foray into the multibillion dollar global grain commodities market.

The Raysut-based firm, which owns and operates Oman’s biggest flour mill and grain storage complex by capacity, said its board had approved the establishment of a new grain trading arm as part of its expanding and diversifying business portfolio.

The new outfit, named Salalah Grains Trading International, will be set up at the Dubai Multi Commodities Centre (DMCC), a Dubai-based commodities exchange dealing in agricultural commodities, besides precious commodities, as well as energy, steel and metals.

Of all commodities currently being traded in the global market, grain trading is the most critical for human sustenance, say experts. It has currently valued at roughly \$120 billion annually, with an estimated 576 million tonnes of grain traded in 2021, according to data from the Foreign Agricultural Trade of the United States (FATUS).



Grain commodities typically include wheat, corn, oats, barley and rice – cereals that form the mainstay of most types of food for human and animal consumption.

Following the global food crisis of 2005 – 2008, the Sultanate of Oman adopted urgent measures to secure the nation’s basic food requirements, notably through the establishment of stockpiles of food grains and essential commodities.

More recently, Oman Investment Authority (OIA) and its subsidiaries, notably Oman Food Investment Holding Co (Nitaj) and Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), began investing in projects aimed at strengthening domestic production capacity in the dairy,

poultry, red meat, fisheries, aquaculture, and fresh fruit and vegetable farming sectors as well.

The country’s two main grain importers – Oman Flour Mills and Salalah Mills Co – too have also invested in flour milling and grain storage capacity to help support the nation’s basic food requirements.

Significantly, Sunday’s announcement by Salalah Mills to set up a grain trading arm underscores the company’s strong appetite for growth across the food value chain. Early last year, announced plans for the establishment of a Food Industries Hub at Khazaen Economic City in South Al Batinah Governorate.

In addition to investments in an industrial bakery, the

Khazaen facility will also host production lines for frozen and semi-cooked pastries in the first phase, followed by frozen cakes, snacks, noodles and biscuits in the second phase.

Over the 2022 – 2025 timeframe, the company aims to expand into a number of food related fields, notably food grain trading and storage, manufacture of flour blends, improvers, vitamins and minerals for bakeries, flour mills, fodder factories, starch production, fish and pet feed, production of grass capsules, and manufacture of flexible packaging films and FFS bags.

Besides, the company is weighing partnerships for the production of plastic medical supplies.

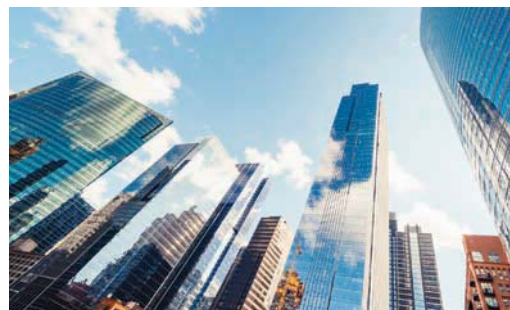
Strong growth of GCC economies fuels global real estate investments

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 9

With economies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) expected to be relative global outperformers in 2022 and 2023, regional investors’ appetite for global real estate investment opportunities is likely to grow, according to JLL’s latest “The Resurgence of Outbound Real Estate Investment from the GCC” report.

The challenges posed by spiralling inflation, elevated energy costs, and hawkish monetary policy are impacting investor sentiment globally. This is not only triggering delayed decision-making but also weakening liquidity in international real estate markets, further painting an uncertain global outlook.

However, the Middle East, in particular



the GCC, is bucking this trend, as the region’s relatively robust economic conditions have helped strengthen market confidence as well as enhance appetite for discounted investment opportunities abroad.

In addition, the strong recovery in oil prices from mid-2020 has also served as an impetus for increased consumer confidence and buoyant investor sentiment in the region, leading to

higher levels of capital being deployed into international real estate.

Fadi Moussalli, Executive Director, International Capital Coverage (ICC), said: “While the healthy momentum of global real estate investment by GCC’s state-owned entities and sovereign wealth funds will continue in the near-term, in all probability, they will proceed with caution and selectivity.

Although oil prices have seen a partial reversal in recent months, they remain elevated in comparison to recent history and are unlikely to significantly impact investor confidence in the region. Therefore, the willingness of investors to take advantage of discounted buying opportunities will continue to emerge in the face of the uncertain economic outlook in Europe, the US and moderated competition in bidding.”

Gulf bourses announce unified ESG metrics for GCC listed firms

Disclosure guidelines: Unified metrics include 29 standards, aligned with the World Federation of Exchanges and Sustainable Stock Exchanges Initiative

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 9

The GCC Exchanges Committee, chaired by the Saudi Exchange, published a unified set of ESG Disclosure Metrics yesterday. The metrics comprise 29 standards that are aligned with the World Federation of Exchanges and Sustainable Stock Exchanges



Initiative, and include categories across GHG emissions, energy usage, water usage, gender pay, employee turnover, gender

diversity, data privacy, ethics and more.

The GCC ESG Disclosure Metrics are an important step

towards standardising ESG disclosure across the GCC region, due to differences in standards of reporting. The metrics are

voluntary and serve as a guideline for companies wishing to embark on their ESG disclosure journey.

The metrics do not replace existing ESG disclosure guidelines for GCC stock exchanges.

Saeed bin Hamad al Dhaheri, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange, commented: “Exchanges play a pivotal role in enhancing governance and sustainability among the region’s companies and ADX is proud to take part in creating unified disclosure metrics for GCC listed companies. In 2020, we issued ESG disclosure guidelines for our listed companies- which illustrates ADX’s commitment to

drive sustainability in financial markets- Our participation in the establishment of the GCC ESG Metrics reinforces our support for the adoption of the highest reporting and disclosure standards across GCC markets.”

The GCC Exchanges Committee comprises Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange, Bahrain Bourse, Boursa Kuwait, Qatar Stock Exchange, Muscat Stock Exchange, Saudi Exchange and Dubai Financial Market. The committee aims to support the development of regional capital markets, create an advanced capital market ecosystem in the GCC region, and elevate their position on the global stage.

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OMAN OBSERVER DAILY

Observer

ESTABLISHED IN 1981 EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: ABDULLAH BIN SALIM AL SHUELI VOL. 39 NO. 239 | PAGES 16

Be Careful. Be Responsible! #Living_with_Covid19

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

NEW YORK: António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen. In a virtual video call to countries lacking the global ceasefire initiative, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed to establish peace and security in Yemen. "The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said. Guterres added that the "Sultanate represents a unique model, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world." He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advocating and supporting peace and stability. — OANA

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries Dr. Saud bin Hamoud bin Ahmed al Habsi (pictured), Chairman of the Supreme Court Sayyid Khalifa bin Said bin Khalifa al Busaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court Shauk Al Muhtair bin Abdullah bin Issa al Harthy, took the oath of office at Al Barakah Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and in commemoration of the memory of its 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. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL KUTTY
MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are filling our ears. A drive around the downtown Ruwi and its adjoining areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walk shoulder-to-shoulder. While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not. "In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental strain, we should discipline ourselves," said bin Abdullah bin Issa al Harthy, who stopped his car to scare away a group of people at a sidewalk in Ruwi. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19. While expressing his ire, Harthy said, "The attitude of some people is not acceptable that they pave the way for the spread of the infection. Even if we do not have the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING NORMS

and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behavior of other people as well," said Harthy al Wahabi, who stopped his car to



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Oman named among the 25 global travel experiences

A pair of writers, a chef, an architect and a landscape photographer prepared a bucket list of travel locations from all over the globe. The Sultanate of Oman rightly earned a place for its natural beauty, the famed desert oasis of Wadi Bani Khalid or the Al Wasil camel rides... **P20**

Paris museum numbers recover but still hit by pandemic

WITH ASIAN VISITORS still largely absent, major Paris museums struggled to regain pre-pandemic numbers in 2022, despite a huge recovery from the previous year, official figures showed on Thursday.

The Louvre, the world's most visited museum, welcomed 7.8 million people last year — a 170-per cent increase on 2021, but still down 19 per cent on 2019.

Louvre president Laurence des Cars said the numbers were "a great encouragement" — especially given that 60 per cent were

seeing the museum for the first time and 45 per cent were below 25-years-old.

Almost a fifth came from the United States, and visitors from western Europe were also up, despite continued travel restrictions in the first part of the year.

But the continued absence of Chinese tourists (who made up eight per cent of Louvre entries in 2019) was keenly felt.

The palace of Versailles, where roughly three-quarters of visitors are foreign, was down 16 per cent on pre-pandemic levels.



The second half of the year saw stronger figures across the city thanks to blockbuster shows such as an Edvard Munch retrospective, which pulled in a record 600,000 people for the Orsay Museum, even if its overall numbers were down 10 per cent on 2019.

Some sites, including the Mont-Saint-

Michel Abbey and the Arc de Triomphe, managed to return to roughly pre-pandemic levels, according to authorities.

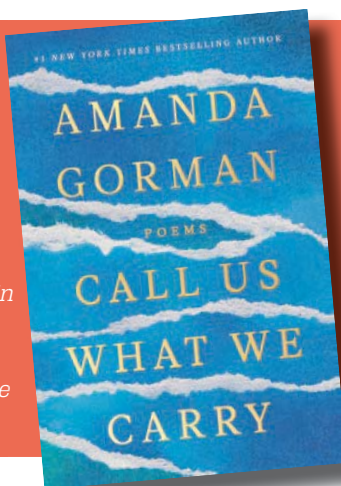
The Pompidou Museum of contemporary art even saw a slight increase on 2019 for its permanent collections (from 1.4 to 1.5 million), thanks largely to local art-lovers flocking back. — **AFP**

READ

CALL US WHAT WE CARRY

BY AMANDA GORMAN

This new collection reveals an energizing and unforgettable voice in American poetry. Call Us What We Carry is Gorman at her finest. It includes "The Hill We Climb," the poem read at the inauguration of the 46th President of the US, Joe Biden.



LIFESTYLE

Detail of the accessories used by revellers participating in the traditional festival of Our Lady of the Rosary, St. Efigenia and St. Benedict, through the historic streets of Ouro Preto, Brazil.

— **AFP**



SPECIES

Scientists have discovered a new species of dwarf boa, 20 centimetres (7.8 inches) long, in the Ecuadorian Amazon and named it after an Indigenous activist. — **AFP**





‘Can’t keep up’: pandemic cooking boom sharpens Japan knife sales

IN A JAPANESE CITY once famous for forging samurai swords, craftsmen sharpen and polish kitchen knives, but even at full tilt their small factory can't keep up with global demand.

The export value of knives and other bladed tools like scissors hit a record high in Japan last year, partly thanks to a home-cooking boom sparked by the pandemic.

Japanese knives are also winning more converts among aspiring and professional chefs, who prize their delicate precision, sleek finish and long lifespan.

Katsumi Sumikama, head of Sumikama Cutlery in the central city of Seki, puts the popularity down to a "combination of technology and traditional craftsmanship".

To achieve the formidably sharp edge needed to make perfect sushi or cut precise slices of Wagyu beef, the company uses machines that guarantee accuracy to one-thousandth of a millimetre, then artisans finish the job by hand.

But even at full capacity, "we can't keep up", Sumikama told AFP.

"We're seeing demand stronger than pre-pandemic levels in all countries."

Seki's renowned blade expertise dates back to the 14th century, when the city became a major producer of swords thanks to its rich natural environment.

"The clean water, charcoal and raw materials were ideal for sword-

making," Sumikama said.

High-quality iron made from ironsand was forged into a tough sword by folding red-hot metal multiple times, and moulded into a curved shape by plunging it into cool water.

When samurai were ordered to abandon their swords in 1876, the industry faltered, but after World War II the city began producing pocket knives for export.

Business boomed at first, with the fixed yen-to-dollar rate a boon for mass exports to the United States.

But when that policy ended in the 1970s and China began making cheaper products, Japan could no longer compete.

TRULY WORLDWIDE

"There were difficult times," Sumikama said.

"Seki's blade-makers decided they needed a new direction."

At the time, German products, including knives by Zwilling, dominated the market for high-end knifeware, and luxury Japanese offerings were few and far between.

In the 1990s, Sumikama went all in — launching a full line-up of top-of-the-range kitchen knives that cost up to several hundred dollars each.

To emphasise their made-in-Japan pedigree, his company adds a wavy two-tone finish to the metal that evokes the traditional appearance of samurai blades, and a kanji-

character logo.

Despite their elegant appearance, Sumikara said he faced scepticism from both within and outside the company that his expensive knives would sell.

"We were trapped in the idea that Japanese products... would not be accepted by consumers unless they were cheaper than German products," he said.

But the line was a success and the company now sells their luxury knives in more than 50 countries.

The export value of kitchen bladed tools hit a record 12 billion yen (\$90 million) in 2021, a 30 per cent jump from around nine billion yen the previous year, according to Japan Customs.

French chef Olivier Oddos, whose Tokyo restaurant boasted a Michelin star between 2014 and 2021, has been a devotee for more than two decades.

Japanese kitchen knives now have a "truly worldwide" reputation, he told AFP in his restaurant's small kitchen.

"I know a lot of French chefs who have come to Japan, and every time they buy Japanese knives. Sometimes they even buy them for their whole team," he said.

ESSENCE OF THE KNIFE

Oddos says the formidable sharpness of the Japanese blades makes all the difference.

"It cuts perfectly. It cuts straight. It's regular," he said, adding it "changes the quality of the cooking".

Japanese knives have to be maintained regularly with sharpening stones, but "if you take good care of them, they have a pretty exceptional lifespan", Oddos said.

Daisuke Kumazawa owns Kama-Asa, a shop that has operated on Tokyo's famous Kappabashi kitchenware street for over a century.

He says Japanese knives have exploded in popularity overseas in the last decade along with a growing interest in Japanese food.

Chefs want quality blades to do "delicate work", he said.

The products are so popular that he opened a Paris branch four years ago.

But he has also noted a pandemic rise in interest.

"Probably because they were at home more often, more people wanted to take time to cook, and cook better," he said.

At Kama-Asa, assistants explain dozens of different knives to a steady stream of Japanese and foreign customers.

Kumazawa wants buyers to think about Japanese knives as more than a simple kitchen tool.

"We want them to know why they are good — the essence of the knife, the thoughts of the craftspeople behind the knife." — AFP



MOVIES

New movie turns spotlight on France's forgotten colonial troops



"THEY MADE us join up to wage war," said Ndiogou Dieye, 103, casting his memory back more than eight decades to when he and other young Senegalese donned uniforms to fight for distant France.

"We didn't know where we were going."

The wizened old soldier is one of the last survivors of France's colonial-era African infantry -- a force that fought in two world wars and colonial conflicts in North Africa and Indo-China.

After years of neglect, the troops are the subject of a blockbuster movie, "Tirailleurs," opening in France and Senegal this week, starring Omar Sy, best known internationally for the Netflix crime series "Lupin".

Sy plays a Senegalese father who voluntarily enlists in the French army in World War I to keep an eye on his son, who has been forced into uniform. Both are pitched into the horrors of the Western Front.

The "tirailleurs" — loosely translatable as "skirmishers" — were born in Senegal in 1857, to forge a corps of lightly armed, mobile troops who would harass the enemy ahead of an advancing main force.

After World War I broke out, France recruited across its West African colonies to transform the tirailleurs into a force designed to hammer the Germans on the Western Front.

They took part in several key battles, notably holding the line at a crucial moment in Verdun in 1916, arguably the most important battle in the four-year-long conflict.

Toll

Some 30,000 of the 134,000 tirailleurs who fought in WWI were killed, according to the specialist French magazine *Historia*.

Survivors were often crippled or scarred by trauma, yet their tale was often relegated to footnotes, and their names never featured on local war memorials in France — the daily reminder to French people of the cost of the conflict.

High-sounding plans to provide hospitals and pensions were downgraded or sapped by bureaucracy, and tirailleurs sometimes suffered second-class treatment compared with their French counterparts.

In World War II, tens of thousands of tirailleurs fought in sub-Saharan and North Africa and took part in the 1944 landings in southern France.

Dieye said he was recruited in May 1940 in his home town of Thies, about 70 kilometres (45 miles) from Dakar, and joined the Seventh Regiment of tirailleurs.

After basic training near Dakar, his unit was shipped out to Madagascar but had to turn around because of a submarine threat.

It then headed to the French Congo and on to Gabon, liberating the capital Libreville from the collaborationist Vichy government "after a few shots", he said.

The regiment was sent to the Middle East to prepare for operations in Europe, but by then, Berlin had fallen.

Dieye returned to Senegal in 1945 as a sergeant, and in the post-colonial period joined the police, retiring in 1972 at the age of 52.

Today, he lives in a house in Thies surrounded by photos and memorabilia from his years of service.

Anger

Slow-moving but sharp-eyed, he is bitter towards France, accusing it of "dishonesty".

In December 1944, French troops at a barracks near Dakar opened fire on mutinous tirailleurs demanding back pay for years spent in prisoner-of-war camps.

The official toll of 35 dead is disputed, and the common grave where the soldiers were buried has never been found. The episode remains murky and bitterly remembered in Senegal despite an attempt by former French president Francois Hollande to shed light for reconciliation.

"You send someone to war, he claims his money and you punish him" by killing him, said Dieye, a tone of disgust in his voice.

He reserves his greatest anger for France's failure to pay his military pension, equivalent to 750 euros (dollars) annually, for the past two years.

"France hasn't kept its promise," he said. "I depend on the Good Lord and my children to survive. I get nothing as a former tirailleu. Zilch from France."

France's Veterans' Affairs Office told AFP that military pensioners who were very old had to show documented proof from their national authorities that they were still alive.

Dieye's pension payments were suspended in 2021 as he had failed to provide this document, it said. Last year, "in early 2022, he submitted proof, and his situation will therefore soon be put in order," it said.

Historian Mamadou Kone said he believed only 10 or so tirailleurs from World War II were still alive in Senegal. The last tirailleu from World War I, Abdoulaye Ndiaye, died in 1998 at the age of 104.

At home, tirailleurs were long "ostracised, considered armed enforcers of French imperialism. Their image was stained," said Kone.

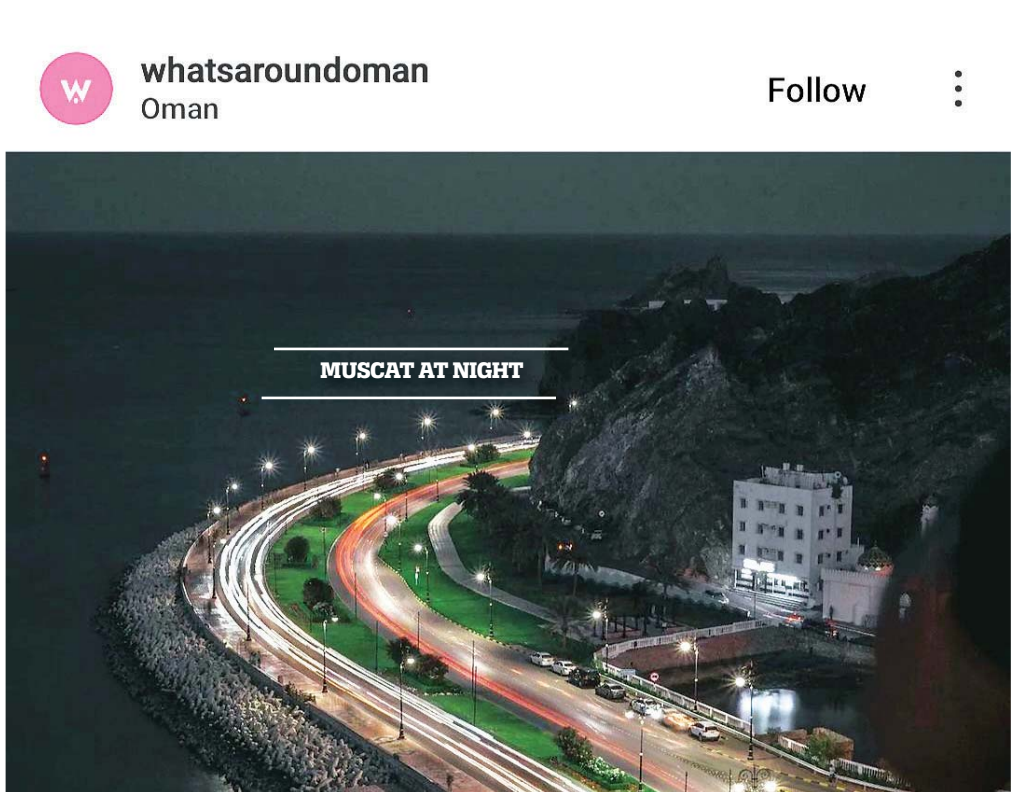
Things changed in 2004, when then president Aboulaye Wade named December 1 as an annual day to commemorate the tirailleurs, enshrining their achievements "in two world wars which freed the world from Nazism and fascism," he said.

— AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

MUSIC

Iggy Pop gets back to his rock roots



FROM GODFATHER OF punk to francophile crooner, Iggy Pop has always made unexpected moves. But he returns to his hard rock roots on Friday with help from some stalwarts of the US indie scene that he helped create.

New record "Every Loser" features guitarists and drummers poached from a who's who of the 1980s and 1990s rock fraternity: Duff McKagan of Guns N' Roses, Stone Gossard of Pearl Jam, Dave Navarro of Jane's Addiction, Chad Smith of Red Hot Chili Peppers and the recently deceased Taylor Hawkins of Foo Fighters.

The firepower is evident from the first track, "Frenzy", and anyone who saw the 75-year-old rocker perform on his recent world tour knows there is no sign of him slowing down.

"He's really the last of the Mohicans since the passing of David Bowie and Lou Reed," said Gilles Scheps, co-author of "Iggy Pop and The Stooges" and founder of his French fan club.

That trio collaborated closely through the 1970s and helped define modern alternative rock, but it took Pop many years to reach the same level of renown as Bowie and Reed.

"Iggy Pop was not recognised in his own country -- American audiences passed him by," said Jean-Charles Desgroux, author of "Iggy Pop: Shake Appeal".

But since then he has become an icon, as his original band, The Stooges, and many of his solo records have become lodestars for successive generations of artists.

Returning to the sound that made his name, surrounded by acolytes, "consecrates Iggy as the godfather," said Desgroux.

The rocker left his hard-partying lifestyle behind in the 1990s.

"I could see the end of the road," he told the *New York Times* of his decision to go clean.

"My teeth were falling out, my ankles were swelling up, my music was getting [expletive]."

On record, however, he remained adventurous, with spoken word albums like "Avenue B" from 1999 or the uncharacteristically jazzy, low-key album "Free" from 2019.

He has even tried his hand at some French chansons on "Après" and alongside Thomas Dutronc on "Frenchy".

"He took the fans in an unexpected direction with 'Free' and just when we no longer expect him to rock, he comes back at a gallop," said Scheps.

The variety reflects the fact that the musician, after decades of seeking attention with wild antics on and off the stage, can let people come to him.

"When I started, the demand was very low," he told the *New York Times*. "Now I've got more than enough to do."

— AFP

SPECIES

Hard to bear: UK's only panda pair to return to China



It was supposed to be a match made in heaven that would produce a cub but after years of trying, Edinburgh Zoo said on Wednesday it is now sending its breeding pair of giant pandas back to China.

The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS) said it plans to give Yang Guang ("Sunshine") and Tian Tian ("Sweetie") a "giant farewell" at the zoo before their departure later this year.

"As the UK's only giant pandas, they have been incredibly popular with visitors, which has helped to connect millions of people to nature as well as raising vital funds for wildlife conservation," said RZSS chief executive David Field.

"We will be providing as many opportunities as possible for people to say goodbye and to celebrate the tremendous impact these two charismatic bears have had on our communities, helping to create a world where nature is protected, valued and loved."

Yang Guang and Tian Tian arrived in Edinburgh in December 2011 as part of a 10-year arrangement

with the China Wildlife Conservation Association.

The popular pair even had a special tartan created in their honour, in black, white and grey representing their fur, and red to symbolise China.

But it was soon clear the two were not eager to breed. Officials at the zoo failed in an attempt to artificially inseminate Tian Tian in 2013.

Yang Guang was later castrated after being treated for testicular cancer.

- Eats shoots and leaving -

Giant pandas are notoriously difficult to breed in captivity, with bears losing interest in mating the natural way — or simply not knowing how.

A female panda has a single oestrous cycle in the spring in which she is fertile for only 24 to 36 hours, according to the Pandas International conservation organisation.

Attempts to breed pandas in captivity first began in China in 1955. In 1963, Ming Ming, the first ever captive-bred giant panda was born at the Beijing zoo.

Pandas are found in the wild in southwest China, along the Tibetan Plateau.

Their population has been cut by poachers, who hunted them for their pelts and also illegal logging, which harms the growth of bamboo, its main food source.

Pandas International estimates the population of wild Giant Pandas is currently at 1,864.

There are approximately 600 in captivity in panda centres, zoos and wildlife parks around the world.

Edinburgh Zoo said the Yang Guang and Tian Tian could leave the Scottish capital as early as the end of October 2023, two years after their loan was extended.

"By collaborating with partners in China and welcoming Yang Guang and Tian Tian to Scotland, we have had many successes for... the past 11 years in terms of technique exchanges, scientific research and public engagement," Field said.

"We are also very proud of the contribution we have made to giant panda breeding research alongside our partners at the University of Edinburgh and our findings have been of real benefit to international efforts to protect the species."

— AFP

ART

Vermeer works inspired by pinhole camera, new book says



DUTCH MASTER JOHANNES Vermeer's photo-like paintings were likely inspired by a 17th-century pinhole camera that was first introduced to him by Jesuit priests, a new biography said on Friday.

The book also reveals for the first time the extent of the influence of the Catholic church on Vermeer (1632-1675), who was born Protestant but later converted, Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum said.

The museum will in February stage the biggest ever exhibition by the Dutch Golden Age painter, whose works such as "Girl with a Pearl Earring" are world famous but about whose life little is known.

His home in Delft was next to a Jesuit mission with a hidden church where he "quite possibly first came into contact with the Jesuits in connection with the camera obscura," says the biography by Gregor Weber, the Rijksmuseum's fine arts department head.

Used in various forms for thousands of years, the "camera obscura" involves a darkened room or box into which the outside image is projected through a small hole or lens.

"Lighting effects which are particular to the camera can also be found in Vermeer's paintings, leaving little room for doubt that the artist drew inspiration from the device," the museum said.

Speculation has swirled for years that Vermeer experimented with a camera obscura for his works, which are renowned for their use of light and shade.

The Jesuits "regarded the camera obscura as a tool for the observation of God's divine light" and Weber had discovered a drawing by the priest living next door to Vermeer that shows its effects, the Rijksmuseum said.

The characteristic effect produced by the device, with the centre in focus but other areas blurred, is "precisely what Vermeer achieves" in his painting *The Lacemaker*, which hangs in the Louvre in Paris, it added.

Although Vermeer was baptised in the Reformed Church, he likely converted to Catholicism just before marrying Catharina Bolnes in 1653.

Public Catholic worship was outlawed in the late 16th century by the Calvinist Dutch, but around a third of the population remained faithful to the Vatican.

Vermeer's fame has soared in recent years but he died in relative obscurity, leaving his wife and children in debt.

The Vermeer exhibition opens in the Rijksmuseum on February 10, bringing together 28 of the master painter's works under one roof

— AFP

art & life

Local Scene

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TUESDAY | JANUARY 10 | 2023



Oman named among the 25 global travel experiences

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijucherianoman

The *New York Times* recently published an article about the 25 travel locations one must experience during their lifetime.

A pair of internationally minded writers, a chef, an architect prepared the bucket list of locations and a landscape photographer who mentioned about the most extraordinary adventures a person should seek.

The Sultanate of Oman was one among the 25 included in the bucket list for the adventure lovers.

Prominent writers Pico Iyer and Aatish Taseer, architect Toshiko Mori, chef and food scientist David Zilber and landscape photographer Victoria Sambunaris formed the five-person jury.

They gathered over Zoom to debate what, exactly, constitutes a "travel experience" and how some might rise above the rest.

Oman took the tenth spot with a title 'swim in a desert oasis in Oman,' mentioning Wadi Bani Khalid, as the best-known wadi (valley) in the Al Sharqiyah North Governorate located about 150 miles southeast of Muscat.

It mentions that many of Oman's wadis dry up in the scorching summer months, but at Wadi Bani Khalid, wide pools of water glisten year-round.

Writers who experienced the desert sands mentioned the drive as 'cliché of a gleaming desert mirage,' which was no illusion.

Above the pristine pools, date palms sway in the breeze, and the rocky white cliff sides of the Al Hajar Mountains reveal canyons and caves.

"If you hike into them, you can see shimmering waterfalls. Thousands of tiny garra fish flash beneath the surface of these pools, ready to nibble at the dead skin on your toes," the article mentioned.

"Wadi Bani Khalid is a three-hour drive from Muscat,



making it an ideal day trip, although there are lots of budget hotels and desert camps in the area. Many visitors stop first at the sandy outpost of Al Wasil for camel rides and an overnight stay in a Bedouin-style tent. From there, the mountain road winds through fishing villages until the vast expanse of Wadi Bani Khalid, with its nearly 12-mile stretch of water, appears on the horizon."

The article further praises Oman's natural beauty saying it is as intact today as it was when Oman's Bedouin tribes relied on it, and a visit here offers an instant connection to the region's deep history. The Oman government has helped develop the site in recent years, too, bringing with it a paved parking lot, bridges and public restrooms.

Pico Iyer writes that he is so happy to see Oman on the list. "I think of it as the Bhutan of the Middle East because it's so tastefully developed and preserved," he adds.

Toshiko Mori writes that the geographical diversity is incredible, and Oman is a peaceful and stable place. "It's absolutely gorgeous, the air is clear, the food is great and the climate is wonderful. It's so easy for people to go here, yet Dubai takes all the tourists."

Others which made to the list include Asador Etxebarri in Spain's Basque Country, Muslim Spain in Al Andalus, Northern Lights in Norway, Trans-Siberian Railway Network, lunch at Ntounias in Western Crete, Greece, white Christmas in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, desert towns of Morocco's Draa Valley, Dugongs of Mozambique for its elusive sea creatures, courtyard gardens of Yazd (Iran) and the 6,000-plus years of historic Erbil Citadel in Iraq.

Photos by Nasser bin Hamed al Harthy