

Oman’s satellite set for launch

MUSCAT: A roughly weeklong window of opportunities opens up at Britain’s Cornwall spaceport tomorrow, January 9, 2023 for the launch of Virgin Orbit’s air-launched rocket carrying a payload of satellites that includes the Sultanate of Oman’s first satellite, dubbed ‘Aman’. It follows the successful completion on Thursday of an end-to-end launch rehearsal by Virgin Orbit’s Launcher One rocket strapped to a repurposed Boeing 747 jet that has been prepped for take-off from Cornwall’s Newquay spaceport. **SEE P13**



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MUSCAT

MUSEUM TO SHOWCASE SEAFARING HERITAGE

The Bilarab Bin Haitham Award (BHA) for Architectural Design recently announced the names of the 10 top projects qualified to the finalists in the award’s second edition. This competition invited to design for the Maritime History Museum (MHM) in the Wilayat of Sur, South Al Sharqiyah Governorate in line with the plans of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to establish a new world-class destination.

The museum will be developed as a cultural and educational national institute that will house, preserve, and showcase the seafaring Omani heritage. **P3**

MAJOR STRIDES IN TRANSPLANT

The Sultanate of Oman has made major strides in organ transplant procedures after the Ministry of Health (MoH) expedited the process for organ transplant procedures in order to streamline the same. The Ministry has been preparing a list of patients with organ failure, mostly kidney and liver who need donors on a priority basis based on their medical condition and the Royal Hospital is working on increasing the number of transplant procedures in the hospital since last year. **P2**

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CAN AFRICA’S HEAT OFFICER MAKE HER CITY LIVABLE?

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OMAN ENVIRONMENT DAY TODAY



The Sultanate of Oman is marking Oman Environment Day, which is celebrated on January 8 every year, today. Oman Environment Day comes as affirmation to the continuity of efforts being made to conserve the environment. Celebrating Oman Environment Day embodies the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts in conserving the environment with partnership between the public sector, private sector and civil society organisations. **SEE P2 & P4**

After UN vote, Israel slaps sanctions on Palestinians

TEL AVIV: Israel’s security cabinet voted to place sanctions on the Palestinian Authority in retaliation for its effort to have the International Court of Justice in The Hague review Israel’s occupation of the West Bank.

The Israeli sanctions against the Palestinian government came after the UN General Assembly voted in favour of the Palestinian request for an expert opinion from the court last week.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the sanctions as a response to the Palestinian Authority’s “political and legal war against the State of Israel” and said that Israel “will respond as necessary.”

The Israeli sanctions will, among other measures, freeze Palestinian construction projects in Zone C of the occupied West Bank, a spokesperson for Netanyahu said.

Israel will also seize 139 million shekels (about \$39 million) in taxes collected by Israel for the Palestinian Authority and distribute the money to families of terror victims instead.

In addition, Israel plans to implement further measures against organisations that promote what it considers hostile activities “under the guise of humanitarian work.”

The Palestinian Authority condemned the new sanctions, saying that these measures will not prevent it from fighting “Israeli occupation.” — **dpa**

Three rescued as heavy rains lash governorates

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, Jan 7

The governorates of Musandam, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah, Al Buraimi and Al Dhahirah witnessed thundershowers of varying intensities on Saturday as a trough of low pressure continued to affect the country.

Rains measuring between 30 to 50 mm centred on the coastal strip of the Sea of Oman with the Met Office issued heavy rains alert on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the rescue teams of the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) rescued a family of three members whose vehicle



was washed away on a running wadi in the Wilayat of Khasab in Musandam Governorate. The rescue teams exerted much effort handling incidents caused by overflowing wadis due to heavy rains in Musandam Governorate.

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority advised citizens and residents to be cautious and not to cross running wadis and to avoid low-lying areas.

Rare visitor: Comet not seen in 50,000 years is coming

PARIS: A newly discovered comet could be visible to the naked eye as it shoots past Earth and the Sun in the coming weeks for the first time in 50,000 years, astronomers have said.

The comet is called C/2022 E3 (ZTF) after the Zwicky Transient Facility, which first spotted it passing Jupiter in March last year.

After travelling from the icy reaches of our Solar System it will come closest to the Sun on January 12 and pass nearest to Earth on February 1. It will be easy to spot with a good pair of binoculars and likely even with the naked eye, provided the sky is not too illuminated by city lights or the Moon. The comet “will be brightest when it is closest to the Earth”, Thomas Prince, a physics professor at the California Institute of Technology who works at the Zwicky Transient Facility, told reporters.

Made of ice and dust and emitting a greenish aura, the comet



is estimated to have a diameter of around a kilometre, said Nicolas Biver, an astrophysicist at the Paris Observatory. That makes it significantly smaller than NEOWISE, the last comet visible with an unaided eye, which passed Earth in March 2020, and Hale-Bopp, which swept by in 1997 with a potentially life-ending diameter of around 60 kilometres.

But the newest visit will come closer to Earth, which “may make up for the fact that it is not very big”, Biver said.

While the comet will be brightest as it passes Earth in early February, a fuller moon could make spotting it difficult.

For the Northern Hemisphere, Biver suggested the last week of January, when the comet passes between the Ursa Minor and Ursa Major constellations.

The new moon during the weekend of January 21-22 offers a good chance for stargazers, he said. — **AFP**



‘WOODEN SCULPTURE’ EXHIBITION BY FINE ARTS TEACHERS OPENS

MUSCAT: Bait Al Zubair in partnership with the Ministry of Education launched the “Wooden Sculpture” exhibition by the fine arts teachers of Al Dhahirah Governorate on January 4 at Bait Al Zubair.

Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed

al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, inaugurated the exhibition.

Oman’s environment is full of materials that inspire artists in various fields of fine arts. Wood is one of the materials found all over the Omani environment, and

varies in terms of shapes, sizes and types, which opens an extensive horizon for studying and knowing its characteristics.

From this viewpoint, there was an idea to implement a training programme for fine arts teachers, to enrich their artistic expertise,

to direct teachers’ thoughts to benefit from wood and apply it in various arts curricula, and transfer knowledge related to students.

The idea of the exhibition comes through the participation of the Arts Unit to enhance the production of teachers through

programmes and training workshops in which they can participate in the professional development plan for fine arts teachers in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The exhibition contains 30 sculptural works with various

techniques and treatments by teachers.

‘Wooden Sculpture’ continues until February 5 at Bait Al Zubair and visitors can see the exhibition during opening hours from Saturday to Thursday from 9 am to 5 pm.

Oman marks Environment Day today

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is marking Oman Environment Day, which is celebrated on January 8 every year, today.

Oman Environment Day comes as affirmation to the continuity of efforts being made to conserve the environment. Celebrating Oman Environment Day embodies the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts in conserving the environment with partnership between the public sector, private sector and civil society organisations.

In comments to ONA, Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, said that the Sultanate of Oman has made many environmental achievements thanks to the programmes and initiatives it has adopted owing to the fact that it depends on continued planning and development with methodologies that enhance and upgrade environmental work and ensure its sustainability.

In addition, the Environment Authority worked on other projects that included environmental protection, nature conservation and air quality, reuse and recycling, clean energy, carbon management projects, reducing the risks of climate change and global warming leading to zero carbon neutrality by the year 2050 according to the national plan recently approved by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, he said, adding that governance, legislations, digital transformation, improving research and innovation and



enhancing environmental culture directly contributed to enhancing the Sultanate of Oman’s international position. Besides, the Sultanate of Oman managed to improve its environmental performance index.

The chairman of the Environment Authority said we have great ambitions that can be realised only through partnership between the government, the private sector and the civil society. The Authority gave much attention

to improving the sectors of the environment performance index in line with Oman Vision 2040.

The Sultanate of Oman has achieved satisfactory figures and that reflects the efforts exerted on the national level. The Sultanate of Oman achieved first place in the Gulf region and the fourth place in the Arab world in realising the sustainable development goals.

Besides, it has not scored low in any one of the sustainable development goals. Instead, the

Sultanate of Oman has maintained its good performance and is moving on the right path in terms of the other goals, said the chairman of the Environment Authority.

The Environment Authority will hold a press conference today (Sunday) to review the outcome of the previous year and the most important environmental achievements and initiatives in addition to the environmental performance index. — ONA

MIIC acquires leading contracting company



MUSCAT: Musandam International Investment Company (MIIC) signed a purchase agreement for the ‘Sultanate Investment Services’ company, which operates in the construction contracting sector classified primarily in the Tender Board. The company has implemented projects worth more than RO 15 million and other projects and tenders are currently under implementation.

This agreement comes within the framework of building the capacities and potentials of Musandam Global Investment Company, which is the largest local community company in Musandam Governorate, a closed joint stock company based in Musandam and the only private company for all the governorate’s states.

The agreement is part of a group of agreements scheduled to be concluded during the first quarter of this year, which will enable Musandam Global

Investment Company to achieve its plans to be a locomotive for the local economy in the Governorate of Musandam, an investment vessel for the people of the governorate, a catalyst for foreign investment, and an incubator for SMEs.

The company seeks to apply best practices and policies in governance, sustainability, social responsibility, scientific research and innovation.

The signing of the agreement was attended by Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, and Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The number of shareholders in the company is about 1,885 shareholders from the people of Musandam Governorate, and the company was established recently under the supervision of the Office of the Governor of Musandam.

Oman makes major strides in organ transplant procedures

KABEER YOUSUF
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The Sultanate of Oman has made major strides in organ transplant procedures after the Ministry of Health (MoH) expedited the process for organ transplant procedures in order to streamline the same.

The Ministry has been preparing a list of patients with organ failure, mostly kidney and liver who need donors on a priority basis based on their medical condition and the Royal Hospital is working on increasing the number of transplant procedures in the hospital since last year, according to Dr Naifain al Kalbani (pictured), Paediatric Nephrologist and Head of Organ Transplant at the Royal

Hospital.

“We conducted nearly 350 organ transplant procedures in the Sultanate since the beginning of the programme in 1988, of which 317 were kidney transplants and 13 liver transplants,” Dr Naifain said, adding that as many as 300 kidney transplants were conducted from living-related donors and 17 from brain-dead donors. Organ transplantation is undoubtedly one of the most important achievements in the field of modern medicine, as it is the only treatment for organ failure, such as failure of the heart, liver, kidneys, and other organs,” Dr Naifain added.

There are currently approximately 2,500 patients with renal failure on haemodialysis and



Dr Naifain al Kalbani

200 patients on proton dialysis. Fifty children under the age of 13 are on one of either type of dialysis. “These numbers are on the rise mostly due to congenital malformations and genetic diseases among children, and due to lifestyle disorders, such as diabetes, obesity and blood pressure among

The ‘Shifa’ application for registering organ transplantation is the first of its kind in the Sultanate and in the Arab world

the adults. There has also been an increasing disproportion to the availability of organs,” she said.

Dr Naifain further said that it is a lesser known fact that any living person can safely donate a kidney or lobe of their liver to save lives. However, certain organs, including heart, pancreas, small intestine and lungs, can only be donated after death.

“Accordingly, a brain-dead donor can save the lives of eight

people by donating the heart, kidneys, pancreas, liver, lungs and small intestine besides tissues, such as corneas and heart valves, and improve the quality of life for more than 50 people. The Omani Association for Organ Transplantation is seeking to support the national efforts aimed at establishing a national programme for organ transplantation, which came within the framework of the Royal blessing,” Dr Naifain, who is also member of National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation, added.

The liver transplantation programme began in 2017 at The Royal Hospital whereas the Organ Transplant Department in the hospital was established in

2019 with the first liver transplant performed in 2021 on a five-year-old child.

“Currently, the Sultanate allows transplantation of kidney and liver for adults and children. The Omani executive regulation for organ transplantation restricts donations by living donors to relatives within the fourth degree. The hospital is working in cooperation with MoH to complete the establishment of an integrated national system for organ donation, according to Dr Naifain.

Those who wish to take part in the national drive of organ transplant can register themselves on the “Shifa” application, which is the first of its kind in the Sultanate and in the Arab world for organ donation.



Oman, Qatar sign MoUs in oil, gas



MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman and Qatar signed last week minutes on exchanging documents of memoranda of understanding (MoUs) in fields of oil, gas and tourism. The minutes was signed by Mohammed bin Nasser al Wahaibi, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Administrative and Financial Affairs, representing Oman, while it was signed from the Qatari side by Shaikh Jassim Abdulrahman al Thani, Ambassador of Qatar to Oman. — ONA

Tenders worth RO 505.3m awarded in 2022

MUSCAT: The Tender Board awarded tenders worth RO 505.3 million in 2022 compared to RO 252.5 million, a 100 per cent increase. The increase in the value of tenders coincided with a rise in public revenues and spending to meet citizens' needs and stir the economy. It was also aimed at improving the business environment, boosting infrastructure efficiency and upgrading the health, education, social and cultural sectors.

The top five tenders in terms of value were distributed in the sectors of health, infrastructure, education and IT technology.

On top of those was a tender worth RO 59.9 million awarded for cleaning and pest control services at hospitals and health centres of the Ministry of Health.

Next came a tender for the supply of medicines and vaccines



for the Ministry of Health to the tune of RO 52.1. This was followed by a tender for the construction of a protection dam at Wadi Adai in the Wilayat of Al Amerat at a cost

of RO 38.6 million.

A tender worth RO 26.7 million was approved for the construction of 13 schools in different governorates. The Tender Board

approved a RO 21.3 million tender for the supply and installation of the government financial system for a five-year period at the Ministry of Finance. — ONA

MoSD participates in Arab exhibition for productive families

CAIRO: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD), is participating in the Arab Exhibition for Productive Families in Cairo, under the slogan "The Arab House", with four productive families in the field of silverware, perfumes, incense, cosmetics and the frankincense industry.

Jamila bint Salem Jadad, Assistant Director General for Family Development at the Ministry of Social Development, head of the Omani delegation, said: "Egypt was able to gather a large number of productive families from various Arab countries to participate in the exhibition, and the participation of Omani families came with products inspired by Omani local environment."

On the sidelines of the opening of the exhibition, a symposium on marketing the products of productive families was also held.

Working papers were presented by a number of Arab countries, and pioneering experiences of some countries



were presented on how to market family products through investing in social media, which has become a modern method in marketing, in addition to the importance of having trained and capable cadres.

The exhibition also highlighted the role of conducting training the families in various fields from its production to the sales and marketing outlets. — ONA



Maritime History Museum to showcase Omani heritage

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The Bilarab Bin Haitham Award (BHA) for Architectural Design recently announced the names of the 10 top projects qualified to the finalists in the award's second edition.

This competition invited to design for the Maritime History Museum (MHM) in the Wilayat of Sur, South Al Sharqiyah Governorate in line with the plans of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to establish a new world-class destination.

The museum will be developed as a cultural and educational national institute that will house, preserve, and showcase the seafaring Omani heritage.

The Museum will be located on Sur Beach on a site area of 14,154 m2 and the building must be mainly accessed by car, coach, and pedestrians from the nearby neighbourhoods.

Designers must know large numbers of visitors will arrive and exit the site safely, as well as the size and location of the car park.

The finalists will contest the final three positions.

Of the six group teams which qualified for the design are Qais bin Khalfan al Rawahi and Adnan bin Ahmed Qatan; Mwada bint

The Museum planned to be a new world-class destination will be developed as a cultural and educational national institute that will preserve and showcase the seafaring Omani heritage

Saif al Sawafi and Mohammed bin Najm al Tamami; Ammar bin Abdulhameed al Kiumi, Firas bin Nasser al Hashar, and Mouaid Mubarek al Aرامي; Hafsa Mohammed al Balushi, Reem Rashid al Hashimi and Shatha Abdullah al Sifi and Kawthar Nasser al Azri, Fatima Abdullah al Balushi and Amal Salim al Zawawi; Mohammed Khodabaksh al Balushi, Ammar Saleh al Saleh and Rawnaq Rashid al Ismaili.

Individual finalists are Yousef Ahmed al Ibrahim, Al Motaz Abdullah al Nabri, Mohammed Salah al Balushi, and Ahmed Abdullah al Abadi.

The finalists will present their projects before the jury panel in the Wilayat of Sur between January 30 and February 1.

The committee will deliver its observations directly on the projects for the candidates to



finalise those projects and submit the final format by February 10.

DESIGNS:

The first project of the 10 finalists embodies the idea of a historical path that relies on the famous pole star as a landmark for travelers to reflect the skill of the people of Sur in sailing with the help of the stars.

The second project carries broader dimensions for the Maritime History Museum Project, as the museum will contribute to reshaping the coastline of Sur in terms of its impact on life and society with its components and

construction elements.

The third project is characterised by a dynamic façade that harmonises with the wind movement affecting the suspended metal panels, and the flowing movement in the exterior surface expresses the white sails.

The fourth project embodies the extended maritime history of the Sultanate of Oman architecturally, taking its details from Omani ships. The fifth project underlines the main historical trade lines of the city of Sur, the idea of directions, and the experience of Omanis in maritime navigation.





CLEAN AND GREEN OMAN

JAN 8
OMAN
ENVIRONMENT
DAY

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

As the Sultanate marks Environment Day on January 8, one can rightly claim that 2022 was the year in which the government took several steps towards sustainable development goals.

As part of the efforts to go eco-free, the country completely banned the import of plastic bags from the start of this year, while the ban on single-use bags has been already in force since 2021.

The Environment Authority (EA) in a statement said, “Plastic bags do not decompose easily and remain polluting the environment for hundreds of years.”

It may be noted that close to 400 million tonnes of plastic wastes are generated every year – a figure set to double by 2040. Only a fraction of that is recycled and many infiltrate the environment, including the ocean, where it causes a host of problems for humans and wildlife.

This year, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) campaigns raised awareness about a multitude of environmental issues. World Environment Day, the International Day of Clean Air for blue skies, and the International Day of Awareness of Food Loss and Waste engaged millions of people around the world.

Two major UNEP studies, the Emissions Gap Report and the Adaptation Gap Report, cast a spotlight on the scale of the climate crisis and what humanity must do to stave off the worst of climate changes.

At the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Egypt, states agreed to establish a fund that will support developing countries grappling with the fallout from the climate crisis.

The deal which observers termed as historic,

the so-called loss and damage fund helps vulnerable nations contend with droughts, floods and rising seas, all of which are expected to become more severe as the planet’s climate changes. The Carbon Management Laboratory of the Sultanate sought to achieve the goals of a net-zero carbon economy under an integrated plan, which will be implemented in various sectors by the concerned agencies.

The laboratory tried to find a comprehensive national strategy and an operational plan for zero neutrality, in line with development objectives in various sectors, and that supports balanced and resilient ecosystems to protect the environment and the sustainability of its natural resources.

It was revealed that the laboratory will focus on four main sectors, energy sector (electricity, oil, and gas,) manufacturing, transportation, and the cities and buildings sector.

It may be noted that the Sultanate is currently working on updating the climate affairs management regulation in line with local and global developments.

The regulation aims to follow up on the performance of companies and establishments in the field of climate affairs, whether in the field of mitigation or adaptation.

Work is also underway to draft a climate change law, in cooperation with the relevant authorities, which will be an organisational framework for setting general provisions related to climate affairs issues in the Sultanate of Oman. Oman had worked on preparing a database to track the achievement of nationally determined contributions as it is committed to reducing carbon emissions by seven per cent by 2030.

OMAN'S CARBON MANAGEMENT LABORATORY SEEKS TO ACHIEVE GOALS OF A NET-ZERO CARBON ECONOMY UNDER AN INTEGRATED PLAN, WHICH WILL BE IMPLEMENTED IN VARIOUS SECTORS BY CONCERNED AGENCIES



Plumes of smoke rise from a Russian strike during a 36-hour ceasefire over Orthodox Christmas declared by Russian President Vladimir Putin, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, from the frontline Donbas city of Bakhmut, Ukraine. — Reuters

Fighting continues in Ukraine despite ceasefire

MOSCOW: Despite a unilateral ceasefire ordered by Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russia's army said it had responded on Saturday to Ukrainian attacks during the Orthodox Christmas holiday.

"All positions of the Ukrainian army from which shelling was carried out were knocked out by the Russian armed forces by returning fire," said Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov.

Fighting occurred in the Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya regions, according to the statement. Regardless, Konashenkov claimed Russia was abiding by the self-imposed 36-hour ceasefire, which was to officially end at 2100 GMT on Saturday.

Putin announced the temporary ceasefire on Thursday, citing Christmas, which many Orthodox Christians celebrate on January 6-7.

It would have been the first ceasefire along the entire front line since Russia began the war on February 24 last year.

Ukraine, however, rejected this as a hypocritical propaganda gesture and continued its attempts to recapture the

Putin announced the temporary ceasefire on Thursday, citing Christmas, which many Orthodox Christians celebrate on January 6-7

occupied parts of the country. There could be no peace as long as Russian troops occupied Ukrainian territory, Kiev said.

Many international observers also doubted from the outset that the Russian weapons would really remain consistently silent. According to British intelligence, fighting continued at the usual level even during Orthodox Christmas.

Early on Saturday, Russian air defences once again repelled a drone attack on the Crimean peninsula, annexed by Moscow in 2014, state sources reported.

The unmanned aerial vehicle was shot down in the early morning over a breakwater near Sevastopol — the naval base of Russia's Black Sea Fleet — the

city's Russian-appointed governor Mikhail Razvozhayev wrote on Telegram, according to state news agency TASS.

The port has been the target of Ukrainian drone attacks several times, most recently on January 4 when two drones were shot down.

Razvozhayev complained that even "holy Christmas" could not stop the "inhuman beings" from attacking his "heroic city."

Russia supplies its occupying forces in southern Ukraine mainly via Crimea, so Ukraine repeatedly targets logistic and military objectives on the peninsula.

Moreover, winning back Crimea is one of Kiev's declared goals as the Russian war has increasingly faltered in recent months.

Meanwhile on Saturday, Putin celebrated the first Orthodox Christmas since his army invaded Ukraine on the grounds of the Kremlin.

Photos and footage circulated by Russian state media showed the 70-year-old standing alone, in the presence only of church attendants, in the Cathedral of the Annunciation. — dpa

China's 'great migration' kicks off

SHANGHAI: China on Saturday marked the first day of "chun yun", the 40-day period of Lunar New Year travel known pre-pandemic as the world's largest annual migration of people, bracing for a huge increase in travellers and the spread of Covid-19 infections.

This Lunar New Year public holiday, which officially runs from January 21, will be the first since 2020 without domestic travel restrictions.

Over the last month China has seen the dramatic dismantling of its "zero-Covid" regime following historic protests against a policy that included frequent testing, restricted movement, mass lockdowns and heavy damage to the world's No 2 economy.

Investors are hoping that the reopening will eventually reinvigorate a \$17-trillion economy suffering its lowest growth in nearly half a century.

But the abrupt changes have exposed many of China's 1.4 billion population to the virus for the first time, triggering a wave of infections that is overwhelming some hospitals, emptying pharmacy shelves of medicines and causing long lines to form at crematoriums.

The Ministry of Transport said on Friday that it expects more than 2 billion passengers to take trips over the next 40 days, an increase of 99.5 per cent year-on-year and reaching 70.3 per cent of trip



Passengers make their way with bags to the entrance of the Beijing railway station in the Chinese capital as annual migration begins with people heading back to their hometowns for Lunar New Year celebrations. — AFP

numbers in 2019.

There was mixed reaction online to that news, with some comments hailing the freedom to return to hometowns and celebrate the Lunar New Year with family for the first time in years.

Many others, however, said they would not travel this year, with worry of infecting elderly relatives a common theme.

"I dare not go back to my hometown, for fear of bringing the poison back," said one such comment on the Twitter-like Weibo.

There are widespread concerns that the

great migration of workers in cities to their hometowns will cause a surge in infections in smaller towns and rural areas that are less well-equipped with ICU beds and ventilators to deal with them.

Authorities say they are boosting grassroots medical services, opening more rural fever clinics and instituting a "green channel" for high risk patients, especially elderly people with underlying health conditions, to be transferred from villages directly to higher level hospitals.

— Reuters

Five migrants drown in shipwreck off Tunisia

TUNIS: Five migrants from sub-Saharan Africa drowned and five more were missing after their boat sank off Tunisia en route for Europe, authorities said on Saturday.

The Tunisian coastguard rescued around 20 others from the Mediterranean, according to Faouzi Masmoudi, the district attorney from the port city of Sfax.

Boats were continuing to scour the waters off Sfax for any more survivors, Masmoudi added.

Parts of the Tunisian coastline lie less than 150 kilometres from the Italian island of Lampedusa, making them a favoured departure point for migrants ready to risk the dangerous sea crossing.

More than 23,500 migrants of various nationalities were intercepted off Tunisia between January and September last year, according to the FTDES rights group which tracks migration issues.

— Reuters

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR PROVISION OF CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR REVIEW OF THE BULK SUPPLY TARIFF (BST) METHODOLOGY



The Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP), a member of Nama Group, is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the OPWP license.

Tender Description	OPWP is responsible for the procurement of new capacity and output for the Main Interconnected System and the Salalah Power System and in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the Sector Law and OPWP's license as issued by the Authority for Public Services Regulation. OPWP is responsible of developing the methodology for electricity Bulk Supply Tariff (BST); OPWP seeks proposals from interested bidders to provide consultancy for the review the current Bulk Supply Tariff (BST).
Tender Number	OPWP/2023/1
Tender Purchase Period	4 January 2023 till 12 January 2023
Tender Fee	50 OMR
Submission date	19 February 2023 at 12:00 PM Gulf Standard Time (GST)
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents will be provided in electronic format upon evidence of payment. The payment can be submitted through the Company's website: https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx For any queries please contact: Procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om
Bank Guarantee	A Tender Bond (in the form set out in the tender) of not less than 1% of the tender value, to be valid for a period of 120 days from the submission deadline date referred to above.



Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP)
5th Floor, Building 5, Muscat Grand Mall, Tilal Complex (Office)
Tel.: +968 24508400 | Fax: +968 24399946 | www.omanpwp.com

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (2/2023)

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/22/154	2023/MM/QS-6	Supply & Installation of Chain Link Fence at AL Seeb	25	28/01/2023	16/02/2023	Specialist
PRE/22/174	2023/MM/QS-7	Supply & Installation of Playground Equipment in Different Parks	25	28/01/2023	16/02/2023	Specialist
PRE/22/177	2023/MM/QS-8	Annual Maintenance Contract for Data Center Systems Muscat Municipality	25	28/01/2023	16/02/2023	First

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200/24402330).



People take part in a tribute march in the memory of three Kurdish activists, who were murdered in January 2013, in Paris. – AFP

Thousands march in Paris in tribute to killed Kurds

PARIS: Thousands of demonstrators marched in central Paris on Saturday to pay tribute to three Kurdish activists murdered a decade ago.

The march, an annual event since the killings on January 9, 2013, came two weeks after an eerily similar triple slaying on December 23 at the Kurdish Cultural Centre in Paris — just a few minutes’ walk from the site of the earlier shootings.

The organisers said more than 25,000 people from all over Europe had joined the rally.

They carried banners with the pictures of the 2013 victims as they walked from the Gare du Nord station in the north of the capital towards Place de la Republique, a popular spot for demonstrations.

In 2013, Sakine Cansiz, 54, a founder of the PKK Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), which has waged a long insurgency against Turkey, was killed execution-style with shots to the head.

Two other women were killed in the same way: Fidan Dogan,

28 and Leyla Saylemez, 24 at the Kurdish Information Centre in Paris’ 10th district.

The PKK, which fights for increased autonomy for the Kurdish population, is considered a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

Turkey is a member of the Nato and considered as crucial for the protection of the military alliance’s southeastern flank.

A Turkish maintenance worker at Charles de Gaulle airport had been due to go on trial for the 2013 attack, but he died from a brain tumour shortly before his trial was due to start, in December 2016.

Kurdish activists in France, home to the second-biggest Kurdish community in the European Union after Germany, have always alleged that the Turkish secret service ordered the killings. In May 2019, a French anti-terrorist judge was tasked with re-opening the investigation.

— AFP

After bitter dispute, McCarthy named US House speaker

WASHINGTON: Republican favourite Kevin McCarthy was named speaker of the US House of Representatives on Saturday as he quelled a fierce rebellion among his party’s ranks that had paralysed the lower chamber of Congress for days.

McCarthy was always the frontrunner to lead the Republican-led House, but his victory in the small hours of the morning was almost derailed by a right-wing revolt in his party that extended the contest to a historic 15 rounds of voting.

The speaker wields huge influence in Washington by presiding over House business and is second in line to the presidency, after the vice president.

As he accepted the gavel, McCarthy vowed House Republicans would “pass bills to fix the nation’s challenges, from the wide open southern border to ‘America last’ energy policies, to woke indoctrination in our schools.”

“America’s long term challenges — the debt and the rise of the Chinese Communist Party — Congress must be with one voice on both of these issues,” he told the House.

Democratic US President Joe Biden congratulated McCarthy in a statement calling for cooperation between the leaders of the two parties.

“As I said after the midterms, I am prepared to work with Republicans when I can and



Newly elected Speaker of the US House of Representatives Kevin McCarthy takes the oath of office after he was elected on the 15th ballot at the US Capitol in Washington, DC. – AFP

voters made clear that they expect Republicans to be prepared to work with me as well,” Biden said.

REPUBLICAN INFIGHTING

McCarthy had been hoping to secure the gavel in the 14th voting round before midnight on Friday but suffered a shock setback amid astonishing scenes of Republican infighting as he came up short of a majority by just one vote out of more than 400 cast.

As Matt Gaetz voted “present” to deny McCarthy the gavel, the disappointed Republican leader went over to talk to the Florida lawmaker-elect face-to-face.

Gaetz pointed a finger at McCarthy, who began retreating as Alabama’s Mike Rogers lunged at Gaetz and had to be held back with a restraining arm across his face.

“The ‘Speaker’ selection process, as crazy as it may seem, has made it all much bigger and more important than if done the more conventional way,” former president Donald Trump chimed in on his Truth Social platform.

“Congratulations to Kevin McCarthy and our GREAT Republican Party!”

The Republicans, who hold a razor-thin majority, had been mired in internecine warfare as Trump-backed McCarthy failed to win the speakership in multiple ballots, with around 20 conservative hardliners blocking his path since Tuesday.

But the 57-year-old Californian was able to pick up more than a dozen votes among the defectors in two afternoon voting rounds on Friday after offering major concessions. — AFP

Flood warnings issued as UK hit by heavy downpours

LONDON: Some 35 flood warnings have been issued across England and Wales after heavy downpours hit parts of the country.

As a band of rain pushed eastwards across Britain on Saturday morning, there were 27 flood warnings in England and eight flood warnings in Wales.

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency issued six flood alerts for around Scotland.

It comes after the Met Office issued yellow weather warnings for rain in Wales and south-west England overnight which forecast that “many” places had been expected to see 20-30 mm of rainfall over six to nine hours, with around 50-60 mm falling over higher ground.

South Wales was hit by heavy downpours in the 12 hours to 9 am on Saturday.

Libanus had 44 mm of rain and Gorslas had 42.2 mm. There was “significant rainfall” in south-west England at the same time, said Met Office meteorologist Alex Burkill.

This included the 27.2 mm of rain which hit Harbertonford and the 26.5 mm downpour in Cornwood overnight.

Recent rain had made some areas “more susceptible” to disruption, said Burkill. — dpa

Himalayan town evacuated after homes develop cracks

LUCKNOW: Indian authorities have moved nearly 200 people from their homes in the Himalayan town of Joshimath, an official said on Saturday, after hundreds of buildings in the area popular with pilgrims and tourists developed cracks due to shifting soil.

For years, experts have warned that large-scale construction work, including hydro power projects, in and around Joshimath could lead to land subsidence — the sinking or settling of the ground surface.

In recent weeks, cracks have been reported in more than 600 houses in Joshimath, prompting local authorities to move around 193 residents to safer locations, including hotels and guest houses, government official Himanshu Khurana said.

“The evacuation process is under way and a team of scientists from different institutes have been trying to know the cause and how to contain the situation,” said Khurana, the district magistrate in Chamoli district, where Joshimath is located.

“The administration is helping the affected people with everything they need.”

A flash flood in February 2021 in Chamoli district killed over 200 people and swept away two hydro electric projects, alarming some scientists studying climate change and how it is affecting the world’s highest mountains.

A town of around 17,000 people in northern Uttarakhand state, Joshimath is a gateway to pilgrimages to Hindu and Sikh shrines, and popular with tourists looking to trek parts of the Himalayas.

Atul Sati, the convener of the Joshimath Bachao Sangharsh Samiti that has been protesting government inaction to stop land subsidence, said local residents had been flagging the issue for months. — Reuters

Refugees celebrate first Christmas since fleeing Ukraine

WARSAW: Filled with sadness and hopes of a victorious 2023, hundreds of Ukrainian refugees celebrated their first Christmas since fleeing the Russian invasion at a contemporary theatre in Warsaw.

The celebrants at the Nowy Teatr, a former truck repair workshop, were among the 1.5 million Ukrainians who have settled in Poland since the war began — the highest number for any country.

Almost all were women as most Ukrainian men of recruitment age are not allowed to leave.

They spoke of the pain of marking the family holiday separated from husbands and sons.

“How can one feel?” said Svitlana Borysova, a hairdresser, before breaking down in tears.

Helped by friends, Borysova left Ukraine in the first days of the war with her two children, aged three and six, but had to leave her 21-year-old son behind.

Olena Sigitova, who came to the dinner with her 10-year-old daughter Daryna, said: “We feel sad but there are new friends, new opportunities.”

“At least we are not alone,” she said, wearing a paper crown typical of Polish Christmas celebrations for the Three Kings feast day.

The Christmas Eve meal was organised by the Ukrainian House in Warsaw — a non-governmental group that has helped refugees settle in Poland.

“The main goal is to give warmth, a sense of home,” Myroslava Keryk, head of the organisation, told reporters.

The meal included popular Ukrainian dishes such as borscht beetroot soup as well as vareniki, a type of dumpling, and kutia — a wheat grain pudding.

Many wore brightly embroidered Ukrainian shirts.

About 500 people attended the dinner, which also featured typical Ukrainian carols and words of



Celebrants at the Nowy Teatr, a former truck repair workshop, were among the 1.5 million Ukrainians who have settled in Poland since the war began – the highest number for any country. – AFP

support for the soldiers defending their country.

“The most important thing for everyone this year is victory. We dream about it to be able to calm down and think about the future,” Keryk said.

Several of the women said childcare duties meant they had difficulty finding steady work but that their children were settling in and beginning to learn Polish in

kindergartens and schools.

Sigitova, from Dnipro in eastern Ukraine, said she found it difficult to make time for Polish classes and was grateful to the host family who has put her and her daughter up since the beginning of the war.

“They said we can count on them as long as we need,” said Sigitova, whose husband is in the army.

Borysova said that during the first three months in Poland she barely left the house.

“I was so afraid, panicking,” she said.

Since then, she has been working as a hairdresser in people’s homes, unable to find more settled work because of having to look after her children.

But Natalia Golomsha, who attended the dinner with her eight-year-old son Marko, said she had managed to find a full-time job in a company that helps Ukrainian children study in Poland.

— AFP

She is Africa’s first heat officer. Can she make her city livable?

ELIAN PELTIER

Before Sierra Leone’s capital of Freetown exploded into a sprawling metropolis — eating up wooded hills and encroaching on the Atlantic — Eugenia Kargbo loved it for the pristine beaches and lush forests that once enveloped the city, and for its green landscape.

Kargbo, who grew up in the capital in the 1990s, would like to see the city reclaim those vistas. And as Freetown’s first chief heat officer, a post created in 2021, that is her seemingly impossible mission: to make the city verdant and livable again by helping it cope with rising temperatures and other climate changes. These disruptions, along with decades of uncontrolled urban development, have left the capital prone to deadly landslides and annual floods, with heat waves almost all year long.

“Heat is invisible but it’s killing people silently,” Kargbo said in an interview on one of the top floors of Freetown’s city hall, a massive air-conditioned building that towers over the dozens of informal settlements dotting the capital of the small West African nation.

“Children are not sleeping at night because of extreme temperature,” she said. “It affects their ability to learn and their parents’ productivity.”

But this is a city of 1.2 million people, where up to 60 per cent of people live in makeshift housing made of corrugated iron roofs and walls that turn the place into an open-air oven most of the year. The country is one of the world’s poorest; few people have air conditioning; and there is not nearly enough money to finance ambitious fixes, Kargbo said. Where does one start?

Kargbo is going for near-term fixes first. “People are suffering now,” she said.

A 35-year-old mother of two, Kargbo was a child when Sierra Leone plunged into a decade-long civil war that left at least 50,000 dead. She studied at the University of Sierra Leone and in Milan, and began her career as a banker.

As she began raising a family, Freetown started suffering from hotter days and other weather-related disasters, and Kargbo was drawn toward a role in government. In 2017, a landslide on the slopes of the capital that killed more than 1,100 people served as an “eye opener into the problems we faced,” she said.

Kargbo’s portfolio as heat officer is part of a broader plan known as “Transform Freetown” that is championed by her boss, Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyer. Her position was created and funded by the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center, part of the Washington-based Atlantic Council.

As heat officer, Kargbo has installed a few public gardens that provide tiny oases of freshness to elders sipping tea under the shade of trees. Her office has also set up canopies in outdoor markets meant to protect vendors selling fish, meat and vegetables for long hours from the blazing sun. She wants to provide buildings with white roofs that will reflect heat instead of absorbing it, install public fountains and plant many, many more trees.



Eugenia Kargbo, Freetown’s first chief heat officer, by newly installed market canopies at Congo Market.

Kargbo is also in charge of the city’s sanitation policies, and has vowed to replace most of the city’s illegal dumping sites with green spaces. But whether she can accomplish all this remains an open question.

Extreme and lengthy heat can debilitate bodies; some of the far-reaching effects of extreme heat are already taxing countries in much of the world.

Freetown has an equatorial climate that brings little variation in temperature throughout the year, and barely any respite at night.

Average temperatures range from the mid-70s to the high 80s, with regular peaks in the 100s and 110s. In 2020, there were just over about 30 days with an average temperature above 81 degrees Fahrenheit throughout the day. But by 2050, the city expects to have temperatures that high almost half the year, according to predictions by Vivid Economics, a London-based consultancy.

Kargbo is one of seven women appointed chief heat officers by the Arsht-Rockefeller foundation across four continents. Kathy Baughman McLeod, the programme’s director, said she hoped Kargbo’s job would be replicated in other African countries.

“This role or something similar will be popping up everywhere, because leaders will need to have visible, tangible action to protect people,” Baughman McLeod said. “Eugenia is the face of heat.”

But for the moment Kargbo’s work, and salary, depends on foreign money. The World Bank, United Nations agencies and private partners, like financial institutions, pay for her projects.

“City Councils in Africa are not well equipped to cope with key but not always obvious phenomena” like rising temperatures or urban heat islands, said Wanjira Mathai, a Kenyan environmentalist who called Kargbo’s work so far “remarkable.”

Last fall, Kargbo was listed as one of 100 rising stars by *Time* magazine. And she is working on a blueprint for a strategy to combat heat in other African cities.

Critics, though, say she can have only limited effect because the problem is too large for any one official to tackle alone. From uncontrolled sand mining on beaches to mudslides from hills, “Freetown is a geographical hazard which can’t be fixed,” said Alhaji U N’jai, a professor of environmental science at the University of Sierra Leone’s Fourah Bay College.

On a recent afternoon, Kargbo walked unrecognised in Congo Market, one of the city’s largest, where city workers have installed about 40 canopies made of Plexiglas roofs to protect vendors from the heat. Many people around her were unaware she was behind the initiative.

Much more conspicuous was Kargbo’s boss, the mayor, Aki-Sawyer, who arrived at the market in an air-conditioned car and was greeted by hundreds of passersby as she rolled down the window — the air conditioning still on. Not all the vendors had received a canopy. Many sheltered from the sun underneath beach umbrellas covered with black plastic bags.

“Why is there cover for some, and not for others?” Mavel Dixon, a 45-year-old vendor, asked as she wiped sweat from her forehead and pointed at her stall.

Making America the opposite of great

PAUL KRUGMAN

Admit it: Like many liberals, I’m feeling a fair bit of MAGAfreude — taking some pleasure in the self-destruction of the American right.

There has, after all, never been a spectacle like the chaos we’ve seen in the House of Representatives this week. It had been a century since a speaker wasn’t chosen on the first ballot — and the last time that happened, there was an actual substantive dispute: Republican progressives (yes, they existed back then) demanded, and eventually received, procedural reforms that they hoped would favour their agenda.

This time, there has been no significant dispute about policy — Kevin McCarthy and his opponents agree on key policy issues like investigating Hunter Biden’s laptop and depriving the Internal Revenue Service of the resources it needs to go after wealthy tax cheats. Long after he tried to appease his opponents by surrendering his dignity, the voting went on.

But while the spectacle has been amazing and, yes, entertaining, neither I nor, I believe, many other liberals are experiencing the kind of glee Republicans would be feeling if the parties’ roles were reversed. For one thing, liberals want the US government to function, which among other things means that we need a duly constituted House of Representatives, even if it’s run by people we don’t like. For another, I don’t think there are many on the US left (such as it is) who define themselves the way so many on the right

do: by their resentments.

And yes, I mean “resentments” rather than “grievances.” Grievances are about things you believe you deserve, and might be diminished if you get some of what you want. Resentment is about feeling that you’re being looked down on, and can only be assuaged by hurting the people you, at some level, envy.

Consider the phrase (and associated sentiment), popular on the right, “owning the libs.” In context, “owning” doesn’t mean defeating progressive policies, say by repealing the Affordable Care Act. It means, instead, humiliating liberals personally — making them look weak and foolish.

I won’t claim that liberals are immune to such sentiments. As I said, MAGAfreude is a real thing, and I’m feeling a bit of it myself. But liberals have never seemed remotely as interested in humiliating conservatives as conservatives are in humiliating liberals. And a substantial part of what has been going on in the House seems to be that some Republicans who expected to own the libs after a red wave election have acted out their disappointment by owning Kevin McCarthy instead.

And does anyone doubt that resentment on the part of those who felt disrespected was central to the rise of Donald Trump? Are there any pundits left who still believe that it was largely about “economic anxiety”?

I’m not saying that the decline of manufacturing jobs in the heartland was a myth: It really did happen, and it hurt millions of Americans. But the failure of Trump’s trade wars



The US Capitol reflected in a puddle in Washington.

It had been a century since a speaker wasn’t chosen on the first ballot and the last time that happened, there was an actual substantive dispute

to deliver a manufacturing revival doesn’t seem to have turned off his base. Why?

The likely answer is that Trump’s anti-globalism, his promise to Make America Great Again, had less to do with trade balances and job creation than with a sense that snooty foreigners considered us chumps. “The world is laughing at us” was a consistent theme of Trump speeches, and his supporters surely imagined that the same was true of domestic globalist elites.

And I have a theory that Trump’s own underlying ludicrousness, his manifest lack of the intellectual capacity and emotional maturity to be president, was part of what endeared him to his base. You fancy liberals think you’re so smart? Well, we’ll show you, by electing someone you consider a clown!

The irony is that the MAGA movement has succeeded beyond the wildest dreams of sinister globalists (if any exist) in making America the opposite of great. Right now the world really is laughing at us, although it’s terrified, too. America is still the essential nation, on multiple fronts. When the world’s greatest economic and military power seemingly can’t even get a functioning government up and running, the risks are global.

I mean, even with a speaker in place, how likely is it that the people we’ve been watching the past few days will agree to raise the debt ceiling, even if failing to do so creates a huge financial crisis? And there may be many other risks requiring emergency congressional action even before we get to that point.

Do we need a helpline for suicide in Oman?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
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The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

Few weeks ago, we heard about the sad case where a couple committed suicide by hanging in their home — leaving behind young children who could be traumatised for a very long time.

Last year we read about the college student who posted her suicide note on Twitter then killed herself before she could receive professional help.

I remember how the public reacted differently to such cases, and when a group of psychologists passed on an online petition for a hotline dedicated for people who have suicidal thoughts.

I signed the petition along with other colleagues but am not aware of any progress in that matter. This made me ask the question, do we really need a hotline in Oman for people thinking of ending their lives?

According to the World Health

Organization (WHO), suicide is the fourth leading cause of death worldwide among people aged 15-29 years. It is a complex behaviour as it involves the ending of one's life, which is in my opinion against human nature.

What goes through the minds of people who commit suicide is still a mystery since very few people survived a suicide attempt were able to tell us.

Several psychological theories have been suggested to explain the events leading to the act of suicide, with most stating that the person's lack of fear of death and pain gives him the ability to overcome any hesitation.

A suicidal person may lack the ability to understand how his death might impact his family and friends.

Suicide prevention hotline is available in most countries as a way

SUICIDE PREVENTION
HOTLINE IS AVAILABLE IN
MOST COUNTRIES AS A WAY
OF HELPING PEOPLE WHO
ARE HAVING SUICIDAL
BEHAVIOUR WITHOUT
JUDGING THEIR FEELINGS,
ACTIONS OR PERSONAL
CIRCUMSTANCES

of helping people who are having suicidal behaviour. Staff members who operate these lines are trained to deal with people in distress without judging their feelings, actions or personal circumstances.

They truly listen to callers and let them know that someone does care about their lives. Callers often open up to strangers in an honest way that they find difficult to do elsewhere, as the lack of visual contact makes it

feel less intrusive. Hotline operators can make referrals to mental health professionals that many callers follow up on. So what would be the challenges to setting up suicidal help line in Oman?

Obstacles can be divided into those related to the person experiencing suicidal thoughts — which includes stigma and fear of being known and exposed to the community which would carry with it feelings of shame — and the fear of being judged by the operator who may have his own religious and cultural beliefs about suicide.

The most important objectives to creating such a system are having enough trained and qualified counsellors to operate the suicide helpline and another team of healthcare professionals to provide the long-term care for the person to prevent further suicidal acts.

Raising awareness is even more important and a wider health and education campaign addressing misconception about mental health and mental illness should be held.

After 27 years of practicing psychiatry in Oman, I still have patients and sometimes students asking if “real Muslims get mental illness.”

I summarise my answer by saying that everyone is susceptible to mental illness regardless of their faith. Sometimes our religious beliefs help us process trauma and accept misfortune events but some trauma is difficult to handle for the person experiencing mental health problems.

Such people need help without being judged.

Despite the challenges, I think it's time to address the issue of suicide and improve the existing services.

The oven won't talk to the fridge: 'smart' homes struggle

JULIE JAMMOT

Tech firms have spent years hawking the idea of a connected home filled with “smart” devices that help smooth daily domestic lives — and this year's CES gadget show in Las Vegas is no different.

The world's biggest tech trade show features everything from televisions that ping when your clothes dryer is done, to mirrors that fire up your coffee machine in the morning.

But the vision on display at CES remains far from reality as the devices are pricey and they do not yet talk to each other with any fluency.

French company Baracoda is at CES, which runs from January 5 to 8, to show off a prototype connected mirror that can interact with bathroom scales, the toilet or a toothbrush.

“You can see immediately if you’ve brushed your teeth properly or if you need to put on sunscreen, for example,” says the firm's Baptiste Quiniou.

But it can only work to its full capacity with devices developed by Baracoda or its partners. For start-ups and multinationals, making these products work with other brands is becoming crucial. “Sometimes they can do incredibly useful things, but if they’re not connected to the wider info system, information dies alone,” said analyst Avi Greengart. Big players from Amazon and Apple to Google and Samsung have built entire ecosystems for their devices, often around a voice assistant like Alexa or Siri.

Greengart said each company thought its ecosystem would draw in enough people and devices to dominate the others.

“What ended up happening is that nobody grew,” he said, and the industry “to an extent stagnated”.

The biggest firms have spent years trying to tackle the “interoperability” problem, finally agreeing a protocol last year called “Matter” that sets a standard for connected home products.

“You can think about it as the USB of the smart home,” said Mark Benson of Smart Things, Samsung's connected home subsidiary.

Just as USB ports allowed all devices to plug into all machines, so the Matter protocol means all connected devices will work with each other, he said, and users will no longer need to download a different app for each device.

But Matter will not kill off Alexa, Siri and their friends just yet.

Jeff Wang of Accenture said making the devices work with each other was the easier part.

“The hard part is the app model, the data model, the sharing of this, because the human nature of companies is to be very selfish about this,” he said. — AFP

What Ukraine teaches us about power



Paul Krugman

The write is a NYT opinion columnist

Credit where credit is due: Make America Great Again was a brilliant slogan, precisely because nobody knew what it meant. Was it about bringing back jobs in manufacturing? Was it about restoring straight, white, Christian men to what some of them thought was their natural position of social dominance? MAGA became all-purpose code for reversing whatever was bugging you about 21st-century America.

And one important strain of MAGAism was and is the belief that wokeness is making America militarily weak.

Back in 2021, Sen Ted Cruz famously shared a video comparing Russian military ads, which feature manly men doing manly things, with a US ad telling the story of a female recruit raised by two mothers. “Perhaps a weak, emasculated military is not the best idea,” Cruz declared.

Remarkably, the idea that wokeness makes us weak has persisted despite the failures of the decidedly un-woke Russian military in Ukraine.

Sen Tom Cotton, who has published a book titled *Only the Strong: Reversing the Left's Plot to Sabotage American Power*, recently declared that “soldiers join the army to kill the bad guys — not to learn to speak like they’re in a faculty lounge.”

OK, there are so many things wrong with this worldview that it's hard to know where to begin. National power in the modern world has far more to do with economic strength than it does with military might and also reflects “soft power” — the influence of a country's values and culture.

Even when it comes to military prowess, modern wars don't involve much hand-to-hand combat among guys with bulging muscles. What they involve, mainly, are strategic duels using long-range weapons, aided by a lot of technology. And winning such duels surely depends in part on having leadership that is smart and well-informed — that is, an officer corps that has indeed learned to speak as if it's in a faculty lounge.

I'm not saying that modern war is like a video game. If you need evidence both of that and of the importance of a smart, dedicated military, I'd recommend a recent depiction by Illia Ponomarenko of The Kyiv



Ukrainian service members work to salvage equipment and parts from a broken T-72 tank in the Donetsk region of Ukraine.

RUSSIA'S PERFORMANCE WAS CRIPPLED BY WHAT APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A TOTAL FAILURE TO THINK THINGS THROUGH, TO APPRECIATE HOW VULNERABLE STRUNG-OUT COLUMNS OF VEHICLES WOULD BE TO HIT-AND-RUN ATTACKS BY DEFENDERS ARMED WITH MODERN ANTITANK MISSILES

Independent of the brutal, terrifying fighting currently underway for Bakhmut. Courage and stamina are as important as they ever were. But bicep-flexing and bombast, not so much.

In that case, however, what does determine military power? Obviously, I'm not a defence expert. But I do know something about applied math — and contemporary wars are, to a large extent, about arithmetic.

Even before Putin's war of Ukraine, I was a fan of military historian Phillips O'Brien, whose 2015 book about World War II, *How the War Was Won*, has a memorable opening sentence: “There were no decisive battles in World War II.” What he meant was that the conflict was mainly a war of attrition in which no single battle did much to shift the balance of power,

especially given the rate at which all the main players were producing new weapons until late in the game.

O'Brien was, as it happens, one of the few commentators to reject the idea that Russia could overrun Ukraine in a few days. He predicted, instead, that Russia-Ukraine would turn into a war of attrition — and that Ukraine stood a good chance of winning such a war.

If you compare Russian and Ukrainian military budgets on the eve of the war, it's not hard to see why many analysts expected a quick Russian victory. But quick, decisive victories are harder to achieve than armchair generals imagine.

Russia's performance was crippled by what appears to have been a total failure to think things through, to appreciate how vulnerable strung-out columns of vehicles would be to hit-and-run attacks by defenders armed with modern antitank missiles. Maybe Putin's generals should have spent more time in faculty lounges.

And here's the thing: Once Ukraine had beaten off the initial attack and the invasion became a war of attrition, it also ceased to be a simple war between Russia and Ukraine. It's true that on the Ukrainian side, Ukrainians are doing all the fighting and dying. But they haven't had to rely on their own military-industrial base.

— New York Times

Look how far we’ve come... or not!

Looking forward to this newest of years, 2023, ensures that our reflections upon ’22 leave us hesitant, fearsome in many respects, but most of all, uncertain. Ironically, it’s exactly half a century ago that similar uncertainties left many of us bereft of confidence, looking ahead with understandable reservations, much like today...

The Paris Peace Accord finally saw North Vietnam, South Vietnam, the United States, and the Viet Cong, all sign a peace agreement that was to end one of the bloodiest wars ever known to man. The formally titled “Agreement Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam,” was signed on January 27, but it is a little-known fact that there were two separate documents to the treaty, as South Vietnam refused to recognise the Viet Cong, and it took some shrewd diplomacy by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, to rescue a peace that had appeared forlorn.

International hostility was never far away, and 1973 saw the Yom Kippur War, as Egypt and Israel came to blows yet again, not happy with their 1967 war. This conflict eventually deteriorated into a Russia versus American event, with the superpowers airlifting billions of dollars’ worth of armaments in support of the protagonists. This was, I’m sure, when we tired of this super-posturing and antagonism and when peace movements became global, spanning societies, not just campuses.

The world was to awaken on October 19 to a new weapon, as the oil producers announced an oil embargo. The upshot was a 300% rise in the price of oil in the ensuing months, as the price rose from \$3 per barrel, to \$12, and oil pricing has been politicised ever since. Again, in my opinion, we deserved that shake-up, because



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whether it was naivety or what, the commodity had been undervalued for decades, a resource that many in the West felt the Middle East had an obligation to share with everyone, for a pittance. Well, we sure got our hubris handed to us bigtime, and to excuse the pun, have been paying ever since.

The UK was busy with its own dramas at the time, with a ‘Cod War’ breaking out between Icelandic and British fishermen. However, worse was to follow with the National Union of Mineworkers’ strike led by the intractable and dishevelled Joe Gormley, paralysing the country’s energy production, at the same time as a ‘cold snap’ was forecast. Anxiety levels sky-rocketed, the Bank of England interest rate reached an unprecedented 13%, and even three-day working weeks were implemented. Prime Minister, the immaculate and gormless Tory Ted Heath, was ridiculed for his leadership and was voted out the following year.

Across the Atlantic, ‘Tricky Dick’ Nixon may have overseen America’s exit from Vietnam, but he was lying his way through a scandal, Watergate, that would see him impeached by the Senate and lose the presidency the following year. During ’73 though, his Vice-President, Spiro T Agnew, resigned following allegations of bribery, corruption, and tax fraud. Bobby Riggs and Billie-Jean King played out the ‘battle of the sexes’ in tennis, Secretariat won horse racing’s Triple Crown, the Sydney Opera House was opened, and Roe v Wade made abortions legal in the States.

Take a good look at today’s news... The Ukraine War, gun control, gender issues, ‘royal’ petulance, rail, road and NHS strikes, hackers, fraudsters, and an intransigent China. We haven’t come very far, have we?

TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT TODAY’S NEWS... THE UKRAINE WAR, GUN CONTROL, GENDER ISSUES, ‘ROYAL’ PETULANCE, RAIL, ROAD AND NHS STRIKES, HACKERS, FRAUDSTERS, AND AN INTRANSIGENT CHINA. WE HAVEN’T COME VERY FAR, HAVE WE?

IN SHORT SUPPLY



An employee poses with a package of Augmentin tablets at the GSK pharmaceutical laboratory in Mayenne, western France. To cope with shortages of some major antibiotics, the British laboratory GSK is pulling out all the stops at its factory in the western French town of Mayenne, as the problem has reached global proportions. – AFP

Annual check-up for climate movement

Last year was a tumultuous one in many ways. While climate-related shocks became even more prevalent and severe, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine triggered a global energy crisis that continues to affect millions of peoples’ lives and livelihoods. Following that shock, unprecedented heatwaves across Europe, Asia, and North America, and then devastating flooding in Pakistan, highlighted the urgency of reducing our fossil-fuel dependency and reshaping our energy systems.

Fortunately, other big developments in 2022 offered grounds for hope. The passage of the US Inflation Reduction Act — the largest emissions-reduction investment in the country’s history — is a landmark achievement. Historically, the United States has been the world’s biggest carbon polluter and one of the biggest laggards in international fora. But now, the IRA should put it on a course to reduce its own emissions sharply, which will help drive down prices of renewable energy around the world. Many emerging markets and developing countries will have a chance to leapfrog past coal-fired power plants.

Yes, fossil-fuel lobbyists are pushing governments in Africa and elsewhere to invest in natural-gas development in response to the energy crisis. Many newly planned projects would be “carbon bombs” that would emit more than one billion tonnes of carbon



May Boeve

The writer is an executive director of 350.org

WHILE THE WORLD MADE SOME ADDITIONAL PROGRESS IN 2022 TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE AND PROTECT NATURE, MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE TO OVERCOME ENTRENCHED INTERESTS

dioxide over their lifetimes. But the climate movement has wasted no time in calling out these efforts, and in denouncing the “dash for gas” in Africa.

As a result, the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP) has suffered setback after setback. With 22 commercial banks and insurers pulling out of the project, the StopEACOP campaign was gaining momentum ahead of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) in November, where it drove the message home.

COP27 was a major moment for the climate movement in 2022. Although the host country, Egypt, offered little civic space to mobilise, organisations adapted by working through existing global networks and coalitions to push for more meaningful decarbonisation commitments, human-rights protections, and financing.

In the end, the conference produced an agreement to establish a separate global fund to compensate vulnerable countries for climate-related “loss and damage.” Given that advanced economies had long refused even to discuss the issue, this is a huge win — one driven by frontline activists and spokespeople from across the Global South. But the summit’s final agreement did not

include any specific language about the need to phase out fossil fuels.

Finally, other positive climate-policy developments in 2022 included the launch of Just Energy Transition Partnerships in Indonesia, South Africa, and Vietnam. With the goal of helping countries leapfrog past fossil fuels, JETPs — if done right — could be game changers in the global transition to renewable energy.

The international community also did more to protect nature in 2022. As the year drew to a close, governments at the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) adopted the Kunming-Montreal Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework — a deal that many observers are likening to the landmark 2015 Paris climate agreement. With a commitment

to protect 30% of all land and sea areas by 2030, the framework opens a new chapter, following the collective failure to meet any of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets for 2020.

Governments and other stakeholders are finally recognising that climate change and biodiversity loss are inextricably linked. Rainforests and mangroves are not just habitats for millions of species. They are also crucial for slowing the pace of global heating, because they absorb and store vast amounts of CO2. Scientists have shown that conservation, ecosystem restoration, and better management of natural areas could contribute over one-third of the emissions reductions that we need by 2030. More to the point, there simply is no way to keep

temperatures within 1.5° Celsius without reversing the decline of nature.

The COP15 deal also explicitly recognises that indigenous peoples are central to protecting nature, and it calls on rich countries to mobilise \$30 billion per year in biodiversity financing for developing countries by 2030.

But setting targets is merely the first step. We must move at an unprecedented pace to restore biodiversity and halt global warming. That means remaining alert to vested interests’ efforts to block progress and pushing back against false solutions — such as carbon offsetting, nuclear energy, and hydraulic fracking. Restoring nature must not come at the expense of local communities. To create and nurture a healthier relationship with the environment, we should take our cues from indigenous peoples.

Outside of UN conferences and corporate boardrooms, a quiet revolution is gathering speed. Those demanding more financing for locally owned renewable-energy systems are piercing through the longstanding barriers and refusing to be marginalised. They are building a new consensus, and making clear that matters of climate justice are non-negotiable.

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sport

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Bahrain's Kamil al Aswad celebrates scoring their first goal with team-mates. – Reuters

Holders Bahrain thump UAE

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 7

Title-holders Bahrain began their Gulf Cup defence in nice fashion after beating United Arab Emirates 2-1 in the first Group B match of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup at the Al Minaa Olympic Stadium in Iraq on Saturday.

Bahrain dominated the match and could have scored more goals unless for their lack of finish against an unimpressive UAE team.

Kamil al Aswad (60th minute)

and Jassim al Shaikh (77th) found the target for Bahrain while Sebastian Tagliabue netted one goal for the UAE in the injury time.

After a well-contested first-half, Bahrain got the upper hand in the second-half.

Consistent pressure by the Bahraini players bore fruit in the 60th minute.

UAE's Khaled Ebraheim conceded a free kick near their penalty box after a foul on Ali Madan, who threatened to break through.

Kamil al Aswad's left-footed

shot brushed past the UAE wall to land in the top right corner to put Bahrain ahead 1-0.

In the 77th minute, Bahrain struck again after a good move. Hard-working Jassim al Shaikh advanced to the UAE penalty box after an assist from Mahdi al Humaidan and hit a strong right-footed shot, which gave no chance for UAE goalkeeper Khalid Eisa.

After the second goal, UAE saw the red alert but it was too late.

However, in the injury time, Sebastian Tagliabue pulled one back for the UAE with a well-

timed header.

Tagliabue latched onto a cross from Harib Abdalla Suhail to place his header past Bahrain goalkeeper Sayed Jaafar into the bottom right corner of the net.

Just before the final whistle, Tagliabue threatened Bahrain with an equaliser attempt, but his header from the centre of the box was just a bit too high after an assist by Yahya al Ghassani.

The second-half began with Bahrain's Sayed Reda Issa getting a yellow card for a tackle on Ali Saleh of UAE.

In the 34th minute, Ali Haram of Bahrain was booked for a foul on Abdalla Ramadan of UAE.

Though Bahrain (47%) had a lesser possession compared to UAE (52%) they managed four shots on target as opponents had three shots on target.

SAUDI BLANK YEMEN

In the late match on Friday, Saudi Arabia blanked Yemen 2-0 to take full points from their opening match of Group A.

First half goals from debutants Sumayhan al Nabit and Musab

al Juwayr sealed the victory for the three-time winners at Basra International Stadium.

Saudi Arabia are on top of Group A with three points from the win. Iraq and Oman, who made a goalless draw in the tournament opener, are second and third. Yemen are at the bottom with no points.

On Monday, Saudi will take on Iraq in a key match of the group. Oman will need to win against Yemen also on the same day to improve their chances of qualifying to the semifinals.



Amro Abdelfatah celebrates after scoring the first goal for Qatar against Kuwait.

Qatar top Group B with win

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 7

World Cup 2022 hosts Qatar started with a 2-0 win in the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup in a Group B clash against Kuwait at the Al Minaa Olympic Stadium in Iraq on Saturday night.

Amro Abdelfatah Ali Surag (23rd minute) and Ahmed Alaa (38th minute — penalty) were the scorers for new-look Qatar team from the World Cup.

After an attack from Qatar, the ball fell for Amro who smashed a right-footed shot from the left side of the penalty box. The ball landed in the bottom right corner of the Kuwait net past a helpless goalkeeper Sulaiman

Abdulghafoor to put Qatar in 1-0 lead. In the 38th minute, Kuwaiti defender Meshari Ghanam had to stop Ahmed Alaa who rushed for a free ball in front of the goal.

Alaa made no mistake from the penalty with a right-footed shot to the bottom right corner.

GOOD ATTEMPT

Kuwait goalkeeper Sulaiman saved a good attempt from Qatar in the 36th minute. Ali Asad sent Mohammed Waad with a through ball and Waad's left-footed shot from the centre of the box was saved by the keeper in the bottom right corner.

Kuwait's Abdullah Ghanem was shown a yellow card in the 75th minute after a foul on Ali Asad of Qatar.

Qatar substituted goal-scorer Ahmed Alaa with Yusuf Abdurisag in the next minute. Mostafa Meshaal replaced Ali Asad for a double change by Qatar head coach Bruno Pinheiro.

Another twin substitution was made in the 85th minute by Qatar.

Khalid Muneer replaced goal-scorer Amro Abdelfatah Ali Surag while Ahmed Fadel substituted Mohammed Waad.

Qatar dominated the proceedings after a two-goal advantage too as Kuwait failed to organise attacks past a vigilant Qatar midfield.

With the win, Qatar moved to top of Group B with three points and a better goal average compared to Bahrain, who earlier defeated UAE 2-1.

1,600 participants from 69 nations to take part in World Veteran TT 2023



Abdullah Bamakhlef

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 7

As many as 1,600 participants representing 69 nations will take part in the 2023 ITTF World Veteran Championship in Muscat which will take place at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre during January 15 to 21. The organisers Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) in coordination with International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) and under supervision of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth completed all the technical and logistics preparations for the world-class TT event in Muscat.

His Highness Sayyid Fahar bin Fatik al Said will be the chief guest of the opening ceremony which is scheduled to be held on Sunday, January 15 at the Al Arfan auditorium in Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre. The opening ceremony will feature attendance of the ITTF President Petra Sorling who will take part in the competitions as well.



Basil bin Ahmed al Rowas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth and chairman of organising committee affirmed that hosting of the 2023 ITTF World Veteran Championship in Muscat is part of the ministry's roles to attract world top sporting events in Oman. "Hosting of such mega international sporting events in the Sultanate of Oman is inline to Oman Vision 2040 towards having best sporting environment in the country," he said.

The chief of the organising committee added that World

Veteran Championship is classified as one of the top sporting events that feature attendance of huge participants. "This edition of the tournament will see presence of 1,600 participants from 69 countries across the world. Beside the technical competitions, all delegations will get the right chance to explore Oman during this event."

"I would like to thank ITTF for their trust and confidence on Oman's infrastructure and facilities to organise such huge event. Their support and continuous assistance towards organising this event in

Muscat is much appreciated and we will work hard for the success of the championship," he ended.

Abdullah bin Mohammed Bamakhlef, president of OTTA and vice-chairman of the organising committee, pointed that organising of World Veteran Championship in Oman is a historic moment for table tennis in Oman. "It is considered as one of the world-class event to be held in Muscat with participation of more than 1,500 participants including players, accompanying people, umpires and volunteers. This event put Oman's as one of the key

destinations in the world sporting map," he said.

"We have maintained our smooth relationship with ITTF and WTT as Oman represented by OTTA managed to organise successful TT events during the past years. This support Oman's bid to organise this championship in Muscat city and a dedicated thanks to ITTF on their top trust on our logistics and human capabilities to organise this mega tournament," he concluded.

DELEGATIONS ARRIVAL
The delegation arrivals to Muscat



Basil al Rowas

will begin on Sunday and will continue during the forthcoming days until the tournament start. The players will get suitable time for warm-up training in the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centres halls ahead of the tournament start. Besides that, the players and participants will get better time to explore Oman and discover the tourists' attractions places as a set programme is prepared for them.

The technical meeting of the championship will take place on Saturday as the final list and competition schedule will be released. The competitions will be in daily basis starting at 8 am to 9 pm from Sunday until closing ceremony on Saturday.

Players will range from the age of 40 to over 85 and will compete in different age categories with 44 world titles to be won.

The championships will be staged throughout OCEC, utilising the three exhibition halls for more than 150 competition spaces.



Sania to retire after WTA 1000 event in Dubai

BENGALURU: Sania Mirza, India's former doubles world number one, said she will call time on her career aged 36 after next month's Dubai Tennis Championships, after her 2022 retirement plans were delayed due to injury.

Mirza, regarded as her country's greatest women's tennis player, has won six Grand Slam doubles titles and will compete in her final major this month at the Australian Open, where she bagged the women's doubles crown in 2016.

"I was going to stop right after the WTA Finals because we were going to make the WTA Finals, but I tore my tendon in my elbow right before US Open, so I had to pull out of everything," Mirza told the WTA Tour's website in an interview published on Friday.

Mirza, who has been dealing

with a lingering calf injury, had planned to retire at the end of the 2022 season but an elbow injury in August ruled her out of the US Open.

"Honestly, the person that I am, I like to do things on my own terms. So I don't want to be forced out by injury. So I've been training," she added.

Mirza became the first Indian to win a WTA singles title, when she won her hometown Hyderabad event in 2005. She broke into the top 30 by 2007 and reached her career-high ranking of world number 27.

After being plagued by a recurring, career-threatening wrist injury, Mirza forged a doubles partnership with Swiss great Martina Hingis. The self-styled 'Santina' team won 14 titles, including Wimbledon and the US and Australian Opens. — Reuters

Cummins bowls Australia into contention for series whitewash

SYDNEY: Skipper Pat Cummins bowled Australia into contention to pull off a stunning victory with a fiery spell against South Africa in an absorbing third Sydney Test on Saturday.

Cummins captured three for 29 in a hostile 14 overs to set up the Australians for a dramatic final day charge for victory to complete a series clean sweep against the hapless Proteas.

At the close on day four, South Africa were batting for survival at 149 for six in reply to Australia's 475 for four declared first innings with Marco Jansen on 10 and Simon Harmer six.

The outgunned South Africans have only passed 200 once so far in this series.

The Australians need 14 more wickets to pull off an astonishing victory despite so much time lost and cannot be counted out after rocking the tourists in Saturday's two compelling sessions of the rain-marred Test.

"I'm pretty excited about tomorrow," said spinner Nathan Lyon. "It's going to be an exciting day's cricket, we know what we have to do."

Josh Hazlewood made the initial breakthrough, removing Dean Elgar for 15 continuing the Proteas' skipper's wretched series of low scores.

Hazlewood, bowling a lively opening spell, got Elgar with a brutal short-pitched delivery



which clipped his glove for a catch by wicketkeeper Alex Carey.

Lyon stunned Sarel Elwee who did not play a shot and was bowled top of off-stump for 18 leaving the tourists 37-2 in the 18th over.

Four balls later Cummins claimed his first victim with Heinrich Klaasen, caught off a vicious lifter leg-side by Carey for two.

Hazlewood broke through again after tea with an inswinger that kissed the edge of Temba Bavuma's bat for Carey to do the rest.

Bavuma clouted two sixes off Lyon in his 35 off 74 balls but was a big wicket for the Aussies to leave the visitors 85-4 in the 39th over.

"Reverse swing is in play, with a little bit of variable bounce, the short ball is difficult to play because of how slow it is coming off the wicket," Hazlewood said.

"I think Ash (Agar) and Gazza (Lyon), it's a big day tomorrow for them with the ball spinning with lefties and righties for them both to work with, there will be plenty happening tomorrow."

Cummins removed Khaya

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA 1ST INNINGS	
U Khawaja not out	195
D Warner c Jansen b Nortje	10
M Labuschagne c Verreynne b Nortje	79
S Smith c and b Maharaj	104
T Head c sub b Rabada	70
M Renshaw not out	5
Extras (lb5, nb6, w1)	12
Total (4 wickets declared, 131 overs)	475
Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-147, 3-356, 4-468	
Bowling: Rabada 28-3-119-1, Nortje 22-5-55-2, Jansen 25-4-79-0, Maharaj 25-1-108-1, Harmer 31-3-109-0	
SOUTH AFRICA 1ST INNINGS	
D Elgar c Carey b Hazlewood	15
S Erwee b Lyon	18
H Klaasen c Carey b Cummins	2
T Bavuma c Carey b Hazlewood	35
K Zondo lbw Cummins	39
K Verreynne c Smith b Cummins	19
M Jansen not out	10
S Harmer not out	6
Extras (b1, nb4)	5
Total (6 wickets, 59 overs)	149
Fall of wickets: 1-22, 2-37, 3-37, 4-85, 5-130, 6-137	
Bowling: Hazlewood 12-3-29-2, Cummins 14-5-29-3, Lyon 25-8-65-1, Agar 7-1-19-0, Head 1-0-6-0	

Zondo with a superb yorker that trapped him leg before wicket for 39 and South Africa's fifth wicket.

Theskipper charged into lead the Australian bowling assault with two fearsome deliveries thudding into Marco Jansen's upper body.

Cummins quickly got another wicket, with Kyle Verreynne edging to Steve Smith at slip for 19 for Smith's 151st Test catch. "We've just got to stick to our basics, that's what we've done over the last 10 years or so .. thrilling day tomorrow, do the basics well and see how we go," Lyon said. — AFP

Oman start Junior AHF Cup on bright note

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 7

Oman thrashed Chinese Taipei 9-1 to begin their men's junior AHF Cup Muscat 2023 on a promising note at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Friday night.

Hosts Oman, who had won the tournament once and reached final two other times, as expected started the last match of the opening day in a brisk fashion.

Chinese Taipei, who won the first edition of the tournament and finished third three times, were also not behind in organising counter moves.

Oman went ahead in the sixth minute through a penalty corner converted by Asama Barazahan. Two minutes later, Hassan al Balushi made it 2-0 for the hosts through a field goal. Oman led 2-0 in the first quarter.

In the second quarter, Oman hit another goal from a penalty corner as Asama netted his second just before the half-time whistle.

After the break, Aliyas al Noufali gave a great start to Oman with a field goal in the first minute itself to move ahead by 4-0.

Aiman Madit made it 5-0 in the 40th minute from a penalty corner.

The Omani players continued their onslaught on Chinese Taipei and Hussam Bait put the lead 6-0 from another penalty corner in the 48th minute.



Oman and Chinese Taipei players fight for the ball during the Junior AHF Cup in Muscat. – Khalfan al Ruziaqi

In the 50th minute, Chinese Taipei found their lone moment of the match when Chun-Yu Chang scored from a penalty corner to make it 6-1.

However, the Omani players were not finished their business yet as Hussam struck from a penalty corner in the 54th minute to regain six-goal lead at 7-1.

Aliyas al Noufali added the eighth goal for Oman in the 56th

minute.

Hussam completed the 9-1 scoreline with another strike from a penalty corner in the next minute.

In Pool A matches on January 8, Chinese Taipei will play against Indonesia, while Oman will take on Thailand.

BANGLADESH START WELL

In the opening match of the sixth

edition of the Men's Junior Cup 2023, Bangladesh blanked Hong Kong 4-0 in Pool B.

Bangladesh, the top ranked team in the tournament, went ahead in the second minute with a field goal by Mohammed Ali. Mohammed Hasan made it 2-0 in the 14th minute with another field goal.

In the 21st minute, Amirul Islam increased the lead to 3-0

from a penalty corner.

Three minutes to end the match, 19-year-old Mohammed Ali struck his second field goal as Bangladesh completed proceedings with a 4-0 score.

Bangladesh team, led by Mamun Rashed, are making their third appearance while the Hong Kong team, led by Kulwant Dillon, are making their fourth appearance in the tournament.

Mohammed Hasan was selected as the player of the match.

THAILAND EDGE PAST INDONESIA, UZBEKS WIN

In second match of the day, Thailand come from behind to edge Indonesia 2-1 in Pool A.

Indonesia struck in the 16th minute as Arthur Wibowo netted a field goal. Indonesia led 1-0 at the half-time.

Thailand came back in the second half when Kritsana Phumee hit the target from a penalty corner in the 35th minute.

Four minutes to end the game, Chanachol Rungrniyom struck the winner for Thailand from a penalty corner.

Thailand's Worawut Kaeochianghwang, 17, was the player of the match.

The Pool B match between Uzbekistan and Sri Lanka was a goal fest as 10 goals were scored and Uzbekistan winning it 7-3.

For Uzbekistan, 18-year-old captain Amur Ismoilov netted four times (5-pc, 21, 26, 34 minutes), while Omadbek Khamitov (11-pc), Shokhrukh Khamitov (30-pc) and Abdusalom Madaminov (51-penalty) scored one each.

Sri Lanka were on the scoresheet courtesy Alisandarage Hewawasam (29-pc), Sandaruwan Batuvita (40-pc) and Pramod Bandara (60th).

Ismoilov was selected as the player of the match for his four goals.



Italy's Lucia Bronzetti celebrates after winning her semifinal against Greece's Valentini Grammatikopoulou. – Reuters

Italy book United Cup final against USA

SYDNEY: Stefanos Tsitsipas battled from a set down to topple Matteo Berrettini on Saturday but it was in vain as an unstoppable Lucia Bronzetti powered Italy into the final of the inaugural United Cup against a dominant United States.

World number four Tsitsipas came through a do-or-die clash in Sydney 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 to earn a crucial point for his country and boost his confidence ahead of the Australian Open.

But it wasn't enough with Bronzetti pummelling Greece's Valentini Grammatikopoulou 6-2, 6-3 in the following match to give Italy an unassailable 3-1 lead.

They meet the United States in Sunday's final after the red-hot Americans swept past Poland 5-0.

Italy went into day two of the semifinals with a 2-0 advantage after a gutsy Martina Trevisan upset world number six Maria Sakkari 6-3, 6-7 (4/7), 7-5 in a gripping encounter on Friday.

Trevisan's team-mate Lorenzo Musetti then crushed Greek teenager Stefanos Sakellaridis 6-1, 6-1.

With Tsitsipas winning, the pressure was on Grammatikopoulou, a late replacement for Despina Papamichail.

But she was outgunned by Bronzetti and reduced to tears in the first set.

"It's a special moment to bring such an important point to Italy. We are a great team, great friends and I'm so excited and so happy right now," said Bronzetti.

Berrettini, ranked 16, took a grip on his high-quality match with an unanswered break in game seven of the first set.

They went toe-to-toe in set two before the pumped-up Tsitsipas prevailed in a tiebreaker to take it to a third set where he ground down his tiring opponent.

"I hung in there and was just waiting for my chances, he's a big server," said Tsitsipas. "I was able to play with a lot of intensity."

FRITZ EDGES HURKACZ

Earlier, a composed Taylor Fritz beat Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in a battle of top 10 players to power the United States into the final.

The world number nine was too good for his big-serving opponent, ranked one place behind him, winning 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/5).

Fritz came into the match with the United States already 2-0 up after Jessica Pegula stunned world number one Iga Swiatek 6-2, 6-2 on Friday and Frances Tiafoe swept past Kacper Zuk 6-3, 6-3.

His victory gave them an insurmountable lead before Madison Keys made it 4-0 by beating Magda Linette 6-4, 6-2.

"I think the difference in the tiebreakers was I just served well and I put some returns in the court, played some really solid points and didn't give him anything," said Fritz. "I'm super excited going into the finals and I think we have been the favourites all week," he said. — AFP

Djokovic beats Medvedev to make Adelaide final

ADELAIDE: An intense Novak Djokovic brushed aside Daniil Medvedev on Saturday to set up an Adelaide International final against Sebastian Korda and played down injury concerns after appearing to tweak his hamstring.

The top seed, who has an ominous 22-1 record since September, was breathtaking at times as he cruised past the former world number one Russian 6-3, 6-4 in preparation for the Australian Open, where he is a nine-time champion.

In the women's draw, unheralded Czech teenager Linda Noskova stunned world number two Ons Jabeur 6-3, 1-6, 6-3, with the qualifier into her first-ever final against second seed Aryna Sabalenka.

World number five Djokovic broke in both sets on Medvedev double-faults before lifting his intensity to storm home.

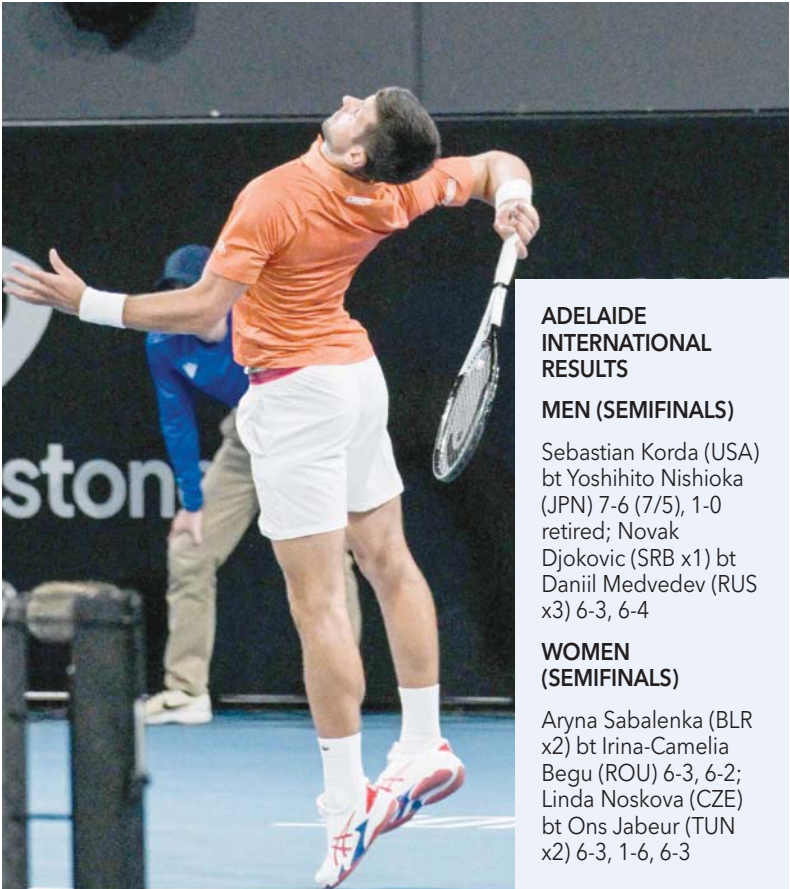
But he had a scare in the first set, clutching his left hamstring as he attempted to reach for a Medvedev cross-court forehand. He continued but then took a medical timeout.

"Thankfully nothing too serious, if it was I wouldn't be able to continue," he said.

"I just tried with some anti-inflammatories and it kind of settled in after a few games.

"I was just trying to keep the momentum going and don't allow him to break my serve. The longer the match went my hamstring was warmer, I guess, and bothering me less.

"Hopefully for tomorrow it will be all fine," he added.



ADELAIDE INTERNATIONAL RESULTS

MEN (SEMIFINALS)

Sebastian Korda (USA) bt Yoshihito Nishioka (JPN) 7-6 (7/5), 1-0 retired; Novak Djokovic (SRB x1) bt Daniil Medvedev (RUS x3) 6-3, 6-4

WOMEN (SEMIFINALS)

Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x2) bt Irina-Camelia Begu (ROU) 6-3, 6-2; Linda Noskova (CZE) bt Ons Jabeur (TUN x2) 6-3, 1-6, 6-3

Unseeded Korda, son of former world number two Petr Korda, was in charge 7-6 (7/5), 1-0 of his match when Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka called for a medical timeout for treatment in his upper right leg before pulling out of the match. "Very excited for the way I'm playing and a lot of confidence leading into the big one (final)," said Korda, 22, who won his first and only title on clay in Parma in 2021, while making two finals last year.

'100 PER CENT'

Noskova, 18, had already upset two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka en

route to the semis and carried that into her clash with Jabeur in only her sixth tour-level event.

"I don't think either of us played 100 per cent and I'm glad I got that last point to win, just really glad to play like this," said the world number 102.

"I'm just going for it 100 per cent all the time, just trying to push through."

Sabalenka surged into the final by crushing Romanian veteran Irina-Camelia Begu 6-3, 6-2.

"I'm happy with the level I played today," said the Belarusian, who is targeting an 11th career title and a first since Abu Dhabi and Madrid in 2021. — AFP

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Fast Track programme nets \$2.8bn in phase 1 investments: MoCIIP

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 7

The first phase of the government's Fast Track programme, aimed at accelerating investments in key economic sectors, has so far pulled in \$2.779 billion in new project investments, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

The programme is part of a raft of initiatives launched by the ministry in recent years, in collaboration with fellow government agencies, in a bid to strengthen the Sultanate of Oman's global investment appeal.

The Fast Track Initiative aims at supporting investment projects under implementation or development that face challenges in their implementation, in order to assess their status and the reasons for obstruction, and to

Invest Easy

Simple, Easy & Fast Online Business e-Services

Invest Easy portal (One Stop Shop) provides fast and easy e-services to register & manage companies in Oman

take quick and effective decisions to end outstanding issues with the relevant authorities so as to implement the project, and ensure the continuity of business implementation, the ministry said.

Phase 1 of the programme targeted 39 investment projects, of which 27 ventures worth \$2.779 billion have been fully implemented. They related to the renewable energy, industry, mining, tourism, logistics and food security sectors.

Also notable is the establishment of the National Negotiation

Team, a high-powered panel that represents the government of the Sultanate of Oman in negotiations involving large-scale investments and economic initiatives.

The team relies on a matrix that was built internally in accordance with several criteria, including the compatibility of the project with the strategic investment direction of the sector, the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, the economic impact, the realities of the project and the local content, and then to grant incentives to companies with a focus on the extent to

which Oman benefits from these projects.

Further, to help attract foreign investors to live and operate in the Oman, the ministry has launched the Investor Residency Initiative. It seeks to attract qualitative foreign investments and stimulate various economic sectors, including linking residency with investment by facilitating the granting of residency to investors and their family members, who are interested to invest in Oman over periods ranging from 5 to 10 years, subject to further extension.

Since the launch of the programme, as many as 1,219 investors of various nationalities have been issued residency cards under the initiative. They 725 investor residency cards for the 10-year category, and 489 cards for the 5-year category, as well as 5 Retirement cards.

Landmark measures to strengthen Oman's global investment appeal



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 7

The Sultanate of Oman is exerting unrelenting efforts to promote and attract foreign investments by updating many laws and regulations related to investment, creating a suitable environment for starting businesses, enhancing digital transformation in all services provided to investors, providing incentives to those who are interesting to invest in Oman and strengthening the global competitive position of the Sultanate of Oman.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) stated that the government is working in integration and partnership with the private sector to increase the number of investments in the targeted sectors and to attract more foreign investments to the Sultanate of Oman.

In its meeting last week, The Council of Ministers reviewed the executive position of initiatives, programmes and efforts undertaken by the competent to attract more local and foreign investments develop sources of economic diversification and augment the share of non-oil investments in the gross domestic product (GDP).

The meeting also reviewed the necessity of follow-up to consolidate investment and diversify its sources, streamline related procedures and address challenges in a way that reflects positively on investor confidence and enhances Oman's competitive indices.

Oman a fertile environment for business

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, emphasised that the wise directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and his keen interest in facilitating and developing the business environment has made the Sultanate of Oman a fertile environment for business growth and investment, and a leading attractive destination for investors and entrepreneurs,

while efforts are integrated between the concerned authorities to put these generous directives into practice.

Accordingly, a number of legislations and regulations were issued to improve the business environment, including the amendment of some provisions of the executive regulations of the Foreign Capital Investment Law, the issuance of the Commercial Companies Regulations, and the issuance of the executive regulations to the Competition Protection and Monopoly Prevention Law. In addition to the facilitation by reducing fees for a number of government services, and launching a number of electronic services, include automatic and investment licences.

Al Yousef added: "These royal directives resulted in the launch of a number of national initiatives and programmes, such as the National Programme for Investment and Export Development "Nazdaher", the investor residency programme, the fast track initiative, and the Invest in Oman lounge project, which is a one-stop shop for providing all services investment opportunities to investors, in cooperation with the relevant government authorities and private companies in accordance with the best international practices.

"Nazdaher" programme:
Khalid bin Said al Shuaibi, head of the National Programme for Investment and Export Development "Nazdaher", explained that the programme aims at enhancing and empowering the private sector in leading economic development by creating an attractive investment environment and improving the business environment in the Sultanate of Oman by simplifying and digitising investor procedures, and developing investment and legislation tools, in order to develop investment partnerships between Oman and the international and local business community.

Sultanate of Oman's maiden satellite set for launch from UK spaceport

New milestone: After delays linked to technical and regulatory issues, Virgin Orbit's rocket system integrated with an Airbus 747 transport vehicle, is prepped for take-off from Cornwall

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 7

A roughly weeklong window of opportunities opens up at Britain's Cornwall spaceport tomorrow, January 9, 2023 for the launch of Virgin Orbit's air-launched rocket carrying a payload of satellites that includes the Sultanate of Oman's first satellite, dubbed 'Aman'.

It follows the successful completion on Thursday of an end-to-end launch rehearsal by Virgin Orbit's Launcher One rocket strapped to a repurposed Boeing 747 jet that has been prepped for take-off from Cornwall's Newquay spaceport.

Earlier efforts to launch the rocket were stymied by a combination of technical and regulatory issues. Weather permitting, the Launcher One rocket, integrated with its 747 transporter, is scheduled to take off from the UK spaceport on Monday morning. However, should that launch



fail to go ahead for any reason, then a number of backup launch opportunities are lined up over the ensuing week through January 15, 2023, it is learnt.

Oman's Aman satellite — the successful launch of which will kick off the nation's ambitious space programme — has been described as a single earth observation satellite that aims to prove the future feasibility of a larger constellation.

The CubeSat type satellite is the product of international collaboration between the Sultanate of Oman, the United States, and Poland. Spearheading the project is Omani technology innovator ETCO, which has

been working alongside Polish nano-satellite manufacturer SatRev, and cognitive technology solutions provider Tuatara.

The project seeks to fulfil a key objective of Oman Vision 2040 aimed at igniting the growth of a space-centric industry in Oman.

It underlines the importance of a national programme aimed at fostering economic competitiveness and social well-being, stimulating growth and building confidence in all economic, social and developmental relations.

Oman's space programme will enable groundbreaking scientific research and capture high-resolution satellite images, which

will be further analysed digitally using Computer Vision, Machine Learning, and AI solutions developed by TUATARA in strategic partnership with ETCO.

The Omani space project intends to provide long-lasting benefits and unlock new horizons for the next generation of world space explorers and innovators in the space sector, while investing in national talent that will build a promising future for Oman.

Looking forward to delivering added value up and down the country, the project will encourage and support companies in Oman to accelerate its transformation into a space-related economy.

LANDMARK MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN OMAN'S GLOBAL INVESTMENT APPEAL

FROM PAGE 13

The programme focuses on several investment sectors, including manufacturing, communications, information technology, transportation, energy, mining, food security, aviation, and tourism.

The head of the National Programme for Investment and Export Development “Nazdaha” added: The programme has identified anchors for all sectors concerned with investment, projects, investment opportunities and the empowering projects in the targeted sectors, as well as identified projects and investment opportunities across the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

He pointed out that the total number of initiatives included in the programme's indicator dashboard to ensure the readiness of the investment system reached 167 initiatives, including 57 empowering initiatives, 57 in investment projects, and 32 initiatives in investment opportunities.

It should be noted here that “Nazdaha” programme is under the supervision of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in cooperation with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and the Ministry of Economy, while there is a supervisory committee for the programme headed by the Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and a number of under-secretaries concerned with the targeted sectors.

Invest in Oman lounge project

Shaikh Hilal bin Abdullah al Hinai, manager of the Invest in Oman lounge project, confirmed that the lounge was launched to embody the concept of complementary roles of government and private agencies concerned with investment, thus providing a unique model in serving investors during all practising investment stages extending from the stage of discovering investment opportunities, stage of establishing and localising the project and till the end of the implementation stage.

The complementary roles of the lounge and the way it operates make it the first stop for investors who are interested to invest in Oman, where they will be able to get acquainted with the investment environment, incentives, and the industrial, free and economic zones in Oman.

The lounge will also contribute to enabling the concerned authorities to overcome all their facing challenges.

The lounge includes 14 government entities and 6 private bodies to ensure the complementarity of roles and the provision of comprehensive services.

And also to ensure the smoothness and speed of procedures in accordance with a clear mechanism, the lounge will provide an “account manager for each investor”, which is the service through which the investor will deal with only one person who manages all his procedures with the concerned parties.

Al Hinai added that in light of the digital transformation that the government seeks, the lounge project took into account the importance of having an electronic platform to serve investors, where visitors to the platform will be able to see the investment opportunities offered from different sectors in a way that uses an interactive map.

The platform will also provide the information that investors, including the investment incentives, laws and guides, in addition to showing various communication channels that enable the lounge to interact with investors, meet their needs and respond to their inquiries.

Strong growth in investments

The Royal Directives in this regard and the efforts exerted by Oman were reflected in a noticeable increase in the volume of investments. According to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and

MINISTER OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND INVESTMENT PROMOTION (MOCIIP): PRAISE AND GRATITUDE TO HIS MAJESTY FOR THE WISE DIRECTIVES AND KEEN INTEREST IN FACILITATING AND DEVELOPING THE INVESTMENT ENVIRONMENT TO ENHANCE THE COMPETITIVENESS OF OMAN.

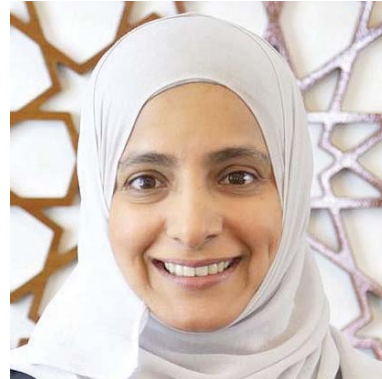
THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS REVIEWS THE EXECUTIVE POSITION OF INITIATIVES, PROGRAMMES AND EFFORTS UNDERTAKEN BY THE COMPETENT TO ATTRACT MORE LOCAL AND FOREIGN INVESTMENTS INTO THE SULTANATE OF OMAN.



Khalid bin Said al Shuaibi



Shaikh Hilal bin Abdullah al Hinai



Lamia bint Sultan al Habsiya

Investment Promotion, 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,

The statistics show that, the volume of trade exchange between Oman and the countries of the world till September 2022, reached RO 30,421.4 million, with an increase of 46.18 per cent. The value of direct foreign investments in the manufacturing sector, till the end of the third quarter of 2022, reached RO 1,717.1 million, compared to RO 1,512.0 million in the same period in 2021.

Strengthened investment environment

The ministry issued during the period from 2020-2022 a total of 35 regulations to enhance and improve the business environment, including the executive regulations of the Foreign Capital Investment Law, specifying the list of activities that stimulate the practice of foreign investment in them, the regulations of the Commercial Companies Law and the executive regulations of the Law Protecting competition and combating monopoly, and issuing a regulation for the conformity system and a regulation for organising and managing exhibitions.

To enable investors to complete their transactions, MoCIIP has launched many new electronic services through the Invest Easy portal as part of the comprehensive digital transformation initiative. In contrast, a visual documentation service was launched to transfer ownership of the commercial registry. The service of issuance of certificates of origin for Arab, Singaporean and AFTA countries has launched too.

Also, the service of updating investor data and registering patents, inventions and industrial models was launched, in addition to launching the service of issuing licences to invest in the Salalah Free Zone, establishing the electronic linking in the service of commitments with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and the linking with the Ministry of Labour in the service of cancelling the commercial registration.

The Invest Easy portal is also linked to 32 government entities in data exchange and 14 government entities in licensing procedures.

The statistics issued by MoCIIP showed that the number of transactions completed through the “Invest Easy” portal during the year 2022, reached 989,495 transactions, compared to 804,330 transactions in 2021, an increase of 23 per cent.

It also showed that the number of applications for investment licences through the Invest Easy portal since the launch of the service and till January 5, 2023 reached 23,780 approved licences.

The number of automatic licences granted during the past year of 2022 reached 181,048 licences, compared to 113,218 licences in 2021, while the total number of automatic licences since the launch of the service, till the end of 2022, reached 338,629.

Through the beneficiary service improvement system project, MoCIIP has focused on accelerating the completion of transactions and developing the call centre. It is worth noting that the ministry, as part of its efforts to develop the Invest Easy portal, has obtained a satisfaction rate of 79 per cent) in the public opinion poll on the evaluation of government services for November 2022, which was issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

Governmental integration

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion confirmed that a lot of efforts have been made to improve and develop the investment and business environment during the period (2020-2022), where MoCIIP in cooperation with the Follow-up Unit for the Implementation of Oman Vision 2040, carried out a study on best practices in attracting investment.

In accordance with that study, The National Programme for Investment and Export Development “Nazdaha” was launched, which actually started its work in November 2021.

A number of initiatives have also been launched in the programme to create an attractive environment for investment and to address the challenges faced by investors, which were prepared in accordance with the best practices in force globally.

National Investment Strategy

The ministry indicated that one of the most important initiatives achieved by the government is the unified national investment strategy initiative, which aims at setting an integrated strategy for investment in the Sultanate of Oman that unifies all investment efforts in the same strategy.

In this context, an international company has been contracted to work on developing strategies to attract foreign direct investment, and on new promotional mechanisms based on targeting companies and sectors in countries in accordance with the priority of the Sultanate of Oman.

National Negotiation Team

The initiative National Negotiation Team is a unified team that represents the government of the Sultanate of Oman in negotiations with a high economic dimension, aiming at shortening and unifying the negotiation process.

The team relies on a matrix that was built internally in accordance with several criteria, including the compatibility of the project with the strategic investment direction of the sector, the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, the economic

NAZDAHER PROGRAMME AIMS AT ENHANCING AND EMPOWERING THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN LEADING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CREATING AN ATTRACTIVE INVESTMENT ENVIRONMENT.

INVEST IN OMAN LOUNGE PROJECT INCLUDES 14 GOVERNMENT ENTITIES AND 6 PRIVATE BODIES TO ENSURE THE COMPLEMENTARITY OF ROLES AND THE PROVISION OF COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES.

FDI REACHES RO 18.14 BILLION.

impact, the realities of the project and the local content, and then to grant incentives to companies with a focus on the extent to which the Sultanate of Oman benefits from these projects.

Investor Residency Programme

The investor residency initiative, is a tool and a competitive advantage to attract qualitative foreign investments and stimulate various economic sectors, including linking 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.

The total number of investors who obtained investor residency from the beginning of the programme till January 1, 2023 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.

Fast Track Initiative

The Fast Track Initiative aims at supporting investment projects under implementation or development that face challenges in their implementation, in order to assess their status and the reasons for obstruction, and to take quick and effective decisions to end outstanding issues with the relevant authorities so as to implement the project, and ensure the continuity of business implementation. The first phase of the Fast Track Initiative targeted 39 investment projects, while the implementation position of 27 investment projects was completed by 100 per cent, with total value of \$2.779 billion, including renewable energy, industry, mining, tourism, logistics and food security sectors.

Investment Incentives Guide

MoCIIP has initiated the preparation of the investment incentives guide, an integrated guide that includes the current investment incentives in Oman, as well as it is a proposal to add other new incentives during the next stage. The guide is published in both Arabic and English languages, and several other languages are added.

Automatic Licences

In order to ensure the ease and speed of the licensing system, the automatic licensing initiative was launched and implemented, which is considered a quantum leap in the field of facilitating and simplifying procedures in doing business in Oman.

The service was launched for more than 1,833 economic activities, which represents 88 per cent of the total economic activities, 12 per cent are high-risk activities, while coordination is underway with the relevant authorities to include them in the automatic licensing service.

Visual Documentation Service

The Visual Documentation Service initiative to transfer ownership of the commercial registry is an electronic service through the Invest Easy portal, and it is an important and advanced step in the field of facilitating business, investment and facilitation for institutions and commercial companies which are interesting to sell their shares or transfer ownership of a commercial registry to another investor, or to enter a partner in the commercial registry electronically, through visual communication, that allows the buyer and seller to sign these contracts from anywhere in the world through the Invest Easy portal without the need for the investors to come to the ministry or its affiliated directorates or departments.

Ministry's guidebook

The guidebook service of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, aims at creating a guiding reference for the beneficiaries of the ministry's services, achieving best practices in the government field and facilitating the business environment for investors.

The guidebook provides comprehensive details about all the services provided by the ministry, it covers a number of 180 services, which fall collectively under 17 departments in the various sectors of the ministry.

The guidebook includes 8 basic criteria for each service, which are the requirements and controls, the required documents, the service workflow chart, the average time to complete the service, in addition to the service fees and payment mechanism, the channels that provide the same service, working hours and contact points.

Various investment opportunities

Lamia bint Sultan al Habsiya, Assistant Director General of Investment Promotion at the Ministry, clarified that the ministry within its initiatives is seeking investment opportunities for various sectors, in aims at promoting economic diversification, empowering the private sector to contribute to raising the local added value, developing national industries, providing products to partners in the private sector, enhancing diversification of industrial facilities in the various governorates Oman, which in turn will contribute to raising the contribution of the industrial sector to the Sultanate of Oman's gross product.

She added that the number of investment opportunities available in the “Invest in Oman” platform reached 90 investment opportunities, while its first package includes 50 investment opportunities in the industrial sector in the chemical and food industries, accurate size, metal, mining, construction and building materials.

And the second package includes providing 22 an investment opportunity for pre-purchase contracts in cooperation with Petroleum Development Company in the oil and gas industries, Nama Group advanced electrical industries and Mazoon Dairy in the food packaging industry.

The third package includes 18 investment opportunities in the tourism sector and the circular economy sector for waste management in cooperation be'ah, ASAAS, Omran Group Jabal Bausher Heights Company.

Al Habsiya said: “The Invest In Oman platform contributes to providing communication with investors and promoting the Sultanate of Oman remotely. The platform provides offers investment opportunities available in the Sultanate of Oman and the details related to each project. It also displays the procedures of licences related to the practice of business, in addition to providing an introductory file for each investor who would like to invest in the Sultanate of Oman.”

10 tips to stay away from crypto scams (Part 1)



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Cryptocurrencies are a polarising topic. Some love them while others totally hate them.

Undoubtedly the number of users has grown significantly in 2021, but also the number of scams out there. In this 2 parts column we will see how to avoid the most common scams in crypto.

1. Do your research:

Before investing in any cryptocurrency, it is important to thoroughly research the company or project behind it. Look for information about the team, the product, and the market it is targeting.

This will help you to get a better understanding of the potential risks and rewards of investing in the

cryptocurrency.

Some things to consider when doing your research include:

- The team: Who is behind the project? What is their track record and expertise? Are they transparent about their operations?
- The product: What is the cryptocurrency being used for? Is it solving a real problem or filling a need in the market?
- The market: Is the cryptocurrency targeting a niche market or a more mainstream audience? Is there a strong demand for the product or service being offered?

Be wary of any company or project that is not transparent about its operations or does not have a solid track record. This could be a red flag that the project is not

legitimate.

2. Avoid investing in too-good-to-be-true opportunities:

It can be tempting to invest in opportunities that promise high returns with little or no risk.

However, these types of investments are often scams. In the world of cryptocurrency, there is no such thing as a risk-free investment. It is important to be realistic about the potential returns of any investment and to carefully consider the risks involved.

If an investment opportunity seems too good to be true, it is best to proceed with caution. Take the time to do your research and be sure to verify any claims made by the company or project.

3. Look out for red flags:

There are several red flags that

can indicate a crypto scam. It is important to be aware of these and to be cautious if you encounter any of them. Some common red flags include:

- Guaranteed returns: No investment is ever guaranteed, and any company or project that claims otherwise is likely to be a scam.
- Pressure to invest quickly: Scammers often try to pressure people into investing quickly by claiming that the opportunity is limited or that the price will increase soon.

Don't fall for this tactic – take the time to do your research and make a well-informed decision.

- Lack of transparency: A legitimate company or project should be transparent about its operations and should be able to

provide information about its team, product and market. Be wary of any company or project that is not transparent or that refuses to provide this information.

4. Use a reputable exchange:

If you are looking to buy or sell cryptocurrency, it is important to use a reputable exchange. Look for exchanges that have a good reputation and a long history of operation. Avoid using any exchange that has a history of security breaches or fraudulent activity.

This is particularly sensitive topic as recently one of the top 3 crypto exchanges went bankrupt almost overnight.

Next we will look at 5 more ways to avoid crypto scams. *(To be continued)*

Green surge is circuit breaker on nuclear revival

Nuclear power received what seem like two plum gifts for 2023. High energy prices and the desire to decarbonise have spurred renewed interest in the technology that provides about 10 per cent of the world's electricity supply. Yet a surging supply of green power is likely to limit any renaissance.

There are 425 active reactors worldwide, according to the World Nuclear Association, about the same as three decades ago.

Plants have opened in places like China and closed in Western countries. Nuclear plants are expensive to build, and their complexity often causes projects to go way over budget. Plant Vogtle in the state of Georgia will be America's first since the 1990s when finished in 2023. The \$30 billion price tag is twice the initial estimate.

Reactor opening delays in Finland and China show difficulties transcend borders.

The cost of a new nuclear power station is around \$168 per megawatt hour according to Lazard. An efficient gas plant costs about a third as much, and solar and wind about one-fifth as much. So there's little incentive to build. Running existing nuclear plants makes sense. A depreciated plant costs around \$29 per MWh, reckons Lazard. And power is available rain or shine, day or night.

This reliability is the big reason there are 55 plants under construction, despite the cost, as wind and solar power currently need backup. Yet that appeal is limited. Over the past decade, green power production, excluding hydropower, has grown 15 per cent annually worldwide according to BP's Statistical Review of World Energy. Nuclear production was unchanged. China has 22 nuclear reactors under construction, but built renewables about twice as fast.

The price discrepancy keeps widening as wind and solar get cheaper, while nuclear hasn't budged. Moreover, the cost of storing power in batteries is plummeting. NextEra Energy, America's biggest deployer of green energy, estimates that by the late 2020s, wind and solar tied to batteries will be about as reliable as other sources during peak hours, but for roughly half the cost of depreciated nuclear or gas plants, and about one-seventh that of a new, small nuclear plant.

Shareholders may yet get some juice from nuclear players like \$10 billion uranium producer and wannabe reactor service Cameco. But wind and solar power's burgeoning advantages have \$172 billion NextEra and its rivals looking more plugged in. — Reuters

Can China save its economic miracle?



SHANG-JIN WEI

The author, a former chief economist at the Asian Development Bank, is Professor of Finance and Economics at Columbia Business School and Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs.

China's recent decision to abandon its strict zero-Covid policy has led many to believe that its economy will bounce back. The Economist Intelligence Unit, for example, has revised its forecast for Chinese GDP growth in 2023 upward, to 5.2 per cent.

But growth recovery is not automatic, and China must contend with several challenges, including declining confidence among firms and households about their future incomes in the short run, insufficient productivity growth in the medium run, and an unfavourable demographic transition in the long run.

Restoring confidence may be more important than expanding credit in the short run. Following a sustained period of repeated lockdowns, many small entrepreneurs and workers in

traditional service sectors who have feared for their jobs and incomes are reluctant to make purchases. Likewise, many firms are wary of investing, after recent revenue disruptions and tighter regulatory scrutiny in education, tech, and other sectors.

In a recent survey of domestic and foreign firms operating in China, the Shanghai-based China Europe International Business School found that Chinese business confidence has sunk to a new low. Pessimism can be self-fulfilling. If enough businesses and households lose confidence and cut their spending, there will be lower demand for products and services by other firms.

But lower revenues would eventually hurt these firms' own upstream suppliers. To break the cycle of pessimism, Chinese policymakers must restore confidence in the short term. But their options are constrained. Making future policies more predictable would be very useful to enhance confidence, but policy predictability cannot be achieved by a simple government proclamation.

While credit expansion would boost aggregate demand, it could have the undesirable effect of driving up inflation. Meanwhile, costly Covid-19 testing and quarantines have strained China's fiscal capacity.

One policy to consider is a time-limited reduction in sales and corporate income taxes. By reducing these taxes only temporarily, China could reduce its government debt

burden and stimulate household consumption. Similarly, a limited-term corporate income-tax cut could encourage more private-sector investment than an equivalent permanent reduction would.

To increase the pace of productivity growth over the medium term, the Chinese economy needs more than additional patents and software. It needs better allocation of resources across individuals, firms and sectors. For example, by reforming the hukou household registration system, China could deploy the same amount of human resources more efficiently while improving social equity.

Another step that could help boost productivity is levelling the playing field between state-owned and private-sector firms in obtaining bank credit and government licences. To improve medium-term growth, China must heed the lessons of its own history and focus on removing barriers to market entry and entrepreneurship.

An economy's growth rate comes from a combination of an increase in the average size of existing firms (intensive-margin growth) and an increase in the number of firms (extensive-margin growth). A study of the Chinese manufacturing sector that I co-authored with Xiaobo Zhang suggests that during the last few decades, extensive-margin growth accounted for about 70 per cent of overall GDP expansion.

In the long run, the biggest economic challenge facing China is

the country's shrinking workforce. In contrast to economic competitors like Vietnam and India, China's working-age population has been declining for almost a decade.

Even if productivity growth remains constant, this demographic shift would lead to ever-declining GDP growth. Some policy measures, such as importing foreign labour en masse, might work but will likely lead to social or political complications.

Others, such as attempts at increasing the birth rate, raising the retirement age, or boosting female participation in the labour force, do not look very promising. Increasing the quality of the labour force, however, is a more realistic goal. For example, China could increase the average education level of its workforce by enhancing the retention and completion rates in high schools and vocational schools in rural areas.

The ubiquity of smartphones and tablets offers a new potential avenue to improve workers' skills. But, after a period of tightening regulations on online education services, this may require a more permissive policy environment that encourages entrepreneurship in this area.

Finally, China should not be too obsessed with rapid GDP growth. It must instead focus on increasing per capita income and improving the quality of life. These intrinsically matter more to the Chinese people than GDP growth and do not depend as much on population size.

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A man checks phone at Lujiazui financial district in Pudong, Shanghai, China. — Reuters

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Traditional markets ready for winter tourism

Winter tourism begins in October until the end of April every year. A number of tourists from different nationalities, including European, American and Asian, stressed on the unique status of the Sultanate of Oman and its importance ...**P20**

Ukraine's young circus artists wow Budapest after training in bomb shelters at home

YOUNG ACROBATS From circus schools across Ukraine dazzled audiences in Budapest this week when the city hosted a Ukrainian youth circus festival to showcase the talents of children forced by the war to train underground or without electricity. After months of practice in their home cities of Kharkiv, Kyiv, Dnipro, Odesa and Donetsk, the children aged between 6 and 17 gave more than 30 performances alongside competitors from Hungary,

Switzerland, Mexico and Italy at Budapest's Capital Circus. "As these children are training in air raid shelters by candlelight from morning to night, [we thought] there must be a place where they can show their talent and knowledge," Budapest Circus director Peter Fekete said. "We must give them faith that it is worth doing the work, it is worth the training, so we stopped our regular programme for two days this January and ... handed over the

circus to our Ukrainian friends." Circus artist Mariia Kravchenko, aged 13, from the eastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro, had trained for the circus festival in unheated shelters amid the Russian attacks. "I trained in the circus in Dnipro but we have the war in Ukraine and I was training with air raid sirens and it was hard," she said with a faint smile, as she prepared to perform her hula hoop show dressed in Ukrainian colours with flowers in her hair.

The Yaskrava Arena Dnipro international children's circus festival was launched in 2010 by an NGO called Bright Country (Ukraine). Before the war, it was held every year in December at the Dnipro State Circus. Since it began, more than 1,000 young artists from all over Ukraine, as well as Lithuania, Hungary, Germany, Moldova and Poland, have participated in the festival. Winners regularly advance to international festivals in France, Spain and Italy. — **Reuters**



READ

THE STOLEN HEIR

BY HOLLY BLACK

Suren, child queen of the Court of Teeth, and the one person with power over her mother, fled to the human world. There, she lives feral in the woods.



LIFESTYLE

Women walk past a decoration made of reflective balls outside a shopping mall in Bangkok on January 4, 2023

— **AFP**



SPECIES

A fur seal pup, in the Amsterdam Island, part of the five administrative districts of the French Southern and Antarctic Territories

— **AFP**





Blood, Guts and Dinner

IN THE BEFORE TIMES, a classic whip-up-three-courses-in-a-pastoral-location type of cooking class was enough.

No longer. Courses that involve getting your hands down and dirty with ingredients are becoming more popular with travellers who are looking for culinary experiences that feel more primal — less sautéing in the foothills of Florence and more grinding farce for sausages. Part of the allure is a deeper connection with food: They are looking for transparency about where and when products are harvested and how to source them so that they consume fewer plastic-wrapped foodstuffs of unknown origin.

While there are no hard numbers on the trend, Emily Fitzroy, the owner of Bellini Travel, which specialises in Italy, has seen a spike in requests to learn a culinary skill while on vacation. “Clients want to return home with newfound knowledge,” she said. Among the trips she has recently booked: a deep dive into the world of offal.

Another tour operator, Black Tomato, is creating hands-on “culinary moments” that deliver a greater understanding of the origins of food by going directly to the source. One possibility is an afternoon on a traditional 40-foot schooner in the Lofoten Islands of Norway, where participants catch, clean and prepare cod, a vital source of revenue for the area.

And Hank Shaw, a James Beard Award-winning chef, cookbook author and outdoorsman, offers three-day culinary hunts in Oklahoma, through his company, Hunter, Angler, Gardener, Cook, and in partnership with Larry Robinson of Coastal Wings Guide Service. In addition to hunting, the experience includes learning skinning, plucking and other aspects of prepping game, including waterfowl, so that participants no longer need to rely on commercial processors. The \$2,000 hunts (which include lodging, hunting and chef-prepared meals) are announced in Shaw’s newsletter and, these days, sell out in 48 hours.

My quest for a deeper food experience led me to Nick Weston, whose cooking courses in rural Sussex, England, involve game

butchery and other adventures with wild food.

A modern-day hunter-gatherer, Weston, 41, studied Mesolithic cultures and archaeology in college, worked as a freelance chef, did a three-month stint in the South Pacific as a “survivalist expert” for the British reality show “Shipwrecked” (a UK iteration of “Survivor”) and then retreated to his hometown of Sussex to live off the grid in a treehouse that he built from recycled materials and to survive on what he could hunt, fish and forage.

Weston’s brand of bushcraft (chronicled in his blog-turned-book,

life beyond the scampering weasels. We crossed the threshold into environs that mixed elements of Soho House hygge (exposed brick walls peppered with vintage signs, a potbelly stove and snuggly blankets) with supper club edge (leather apron-clad helpers; a dining table tricked out with wax-clumped candelabra and plucked-from-the-earth artichokes) and a pinch of Grimms’ Fairy Tales (displays of knives, axes and taxidermy). The Metallica-rich playlist augmented the atmosphere.

British wood pigeons were the first order of business.

Standing at a prep table set with

when the feathers began to fly. The plucking was easy. You yank upward (against the grain) about as hard as you would on a loose thread dangling from a T-shirt. Next, we made a tiny incision in the chest and “released the skin” with our fingers until the breasts were exposed. Still, no nausea. I found the exercise fascinating. Once we snapped off the legs, excised the head and removed the wings, the remaining meat resembled something you’d see at the butcher shop.

The removal of the entrails was a bit more gnarly. But once it was done, we plunked the clean birds onto fresh cutting boards to inspect our handiwork and ensure that there was no damage, such as broken bones or trauma from the gunshots that had killed them. The meat was then handed over to the chefs.

Curiosity had trumped squeamishness, and I felt flushed with exhilaration. On to the rabbits. De-limbing a bunny is not for the faint of heart. I dismissed thoughts of Beatrix Potter as I removed the feet, tail and head before skinning the animal by making an incision at the belly and loosening the hide with my hands and tugging it off. The area from the shoulders to the hind legs is the saddle and contains the most tender pieces of meat, so from there we trimmed out these fillets and meat from the back haunches that would become part of our meal.

With the butchery complete, we swapped knives for wicker trugs and headed out to forage for yarrow, nettles, wood sorrel



“The Treehouse Diaries: How to Live Wild in the Woods”) struck a chord with people looking to connect with nature. So, in 2011, he created a cooking school, Hunter Gather Cook, and began running full-day courses on butchery, foraging and fire-making from a new, middle-of-nowhere treehouse.

By the time my husband and I signed on for a course last summer (a private one, since our schedule did not align with the group offering), Weston’s headquarters had relocated to a 19th-century threshing barn in an equally remote spot. The morning kicked off with us trudging up a gravelly path shouting “Hello?” as we searched for signs of

the essentials — cutting boards, knives, buckets — a member of Weston’s crew, who introduced himself as Chops, told us where and when the birds, which were far more attractive than the specimens in Chicago, my hometown, were shot and how the meat would be cooked (deep-fried legs and pan-roasted breast) since preparation informs butchery style. “Bone structure will be your guide,” he said, explaining that we would mostly use our hands to break down the bird.

We lifted the gray-blue plumage to get a sense of the anatomy: wings, breasts, breastbone, spine, legs and tail. This all felt fine. Still, I located an exit path in case my guts rebelled

and meadowsweet, some of which would also be infused into our meal. Southern England is a mushroom paradise, but, sadly, we were too early to score the region’s celebrated truffles and chanterelles.

About three hours had passed, and a pick-me-up was in order. Back in the garden behind the threshing barn, snacks were brought out along with a “wild” cocktail: foraged nettle gin gimlets that we sipped through a borage stem straw.

“This is where the magic happens,” Weston said, pointing to a hay-strewn fire pit that was flanked by a jumbo wood-fired oven and a homemade clay oven. — **NYT**

TECHNOLOGY

War-themed video game fuels wave of misinformation



TROOPS BATTLE through burning streets. Missiles take down fighter jets. Drones pulverize tanks. The dramatic visuals have the trappings of real-life combat, but they are clips from video games fuelling misinformation.

Footage from the war-themed Arma 3 video game, often marked “live” or “breaking news” to make it appear genuine, has been used repeatedly in recent months in fake videos about the Russian offensive in Ukraine.

The frequency and ease with which gaming footage is mistaken as real, even by some media broadcasters, and shared as authentic news on social media highlight what researchers call its serious potential to spread misinformation.

“The fact that it keeps happening is a reminder of how easy it is to fool people,” Claire Wardle, co-director of the Information Futures Lab at Brown University, said.

“As video game visuals get more sophisticated, CGI (computer-generated imagery) can, at a quick glance, look real. People need to know how to verify imagery, including looking at metadata so that these mistakes don’t get made, especially by newsrooms.”

Arma 3, whose Czech-based developers promise “true combat game play in a massive military sandbox,” allows players to create various battlefield scenarios using aircraft, tanks and a host of weapons.

Players often upload hours of gaming footage on platforms such as YouTube and researchers blame its easy availability for its misuse.

In the comments under one Arma 3 video titled “Ukraine’s counteroffensive!” — which simulated a missile strike on a column of tanks — a user, who apparently took it as real, wrote: “We must ask Ukraine after this war to train NATO forces how to fight.”

FIRST TIKTOK WAR

“While it’s flattering that Arma 3 simulates modern war conflicts in such a realistic way, we are certainly not pleased that it can be mistaken for real-life combat footage and used as war propaganda,” a representative of Bohemia Interactive, the game’s creator, said in a statement.

“We’ve been trying to fight against such content by flagging these videos to platform providers, but it’s very ineffective. With every video taken down, ten more are uploaded each day.”

In recent years, Arma 3 videos have been used in false depictions of other conflicts, including Syria, Afghanistan and Palestine, with the clips often debunked by global fact checkers.

That includes AFP, which has debunked several videos using Arma 3 content, including one in November that also claimed to show Russian tanks being struck by US-made Javelin missiles. The clip had been viewed tens of thousands of times on social media.

Bohemia Interactive said the misleading videos have recently “gained traction” in regard to the conflict in Ukraine.

Dubbed by observers as the “first TikTok war,” it is a conflict like no other as a steady stream of visuals from the frontlines — some of it misleading or false — pour onto social media platforms.

Given the unsophisticated nature of the Arma 3 misinformation, researchers say it is unlikely to be the work of state actors.

“I suspect that the people posting this content are just trolls doing it to see how many people they can fool,” Nick Waters, from the digital forensics firm Bellingcat, said.

“Secondary disseminators will be gullible people who pick up this content and circulate it in an attempt to garner fake Internet points.”

Bohemia Interactive said the false videos were “massively shared” by social media users, many of whom seek what researchers call engagement bait — eye-catching posts that generate more interaction through likes, shares and comments.

DIFFERENT FROM REALITY

The Arma 3 videos, which its creator acknowledged are “quite capable of spreading fake news,” were also shared by various mainstream media and government institutions worldwide, Bohemia Interactive said.

In a live broadcast in November, Romania TV wrongly presented an old Arma 3 video as battle footage from Ukraine, and a former Romanian defence minister and former intelligence chief offered their analysis of the footage as if it were real.

This occurred after another Romanian news channel, Antena 3, made the same error in February — among the experts invited by the broadcaster to analyse its video taken from Arma 3 was the spokesman of the Romanian defence ministry.

Bohemia Interactive has urged users to use gaming footage responsibly, refrain from using clickbait video titles and clearly state that it was derived from a video game.

Researchers say their videos are relatively easier to debunk compared to “deepfakes” — fabricated images, audio and videos created using technology that experts warn is frighteningly sophisticated and gaining ground in the criminal underworld. — **AFP**



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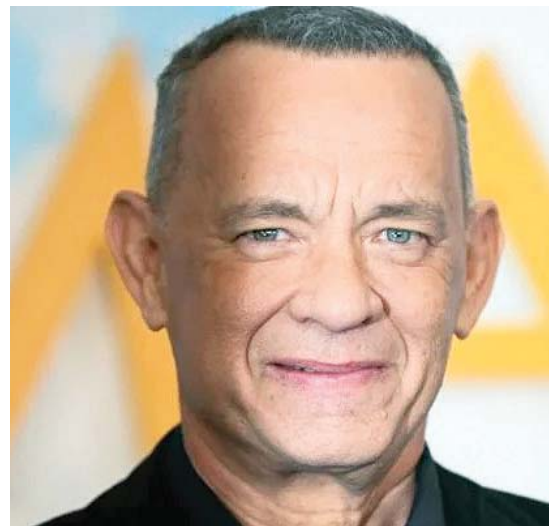
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AROUND THE WORLD

MOVIES

'Look, I'm selfish': Tom Hanks gets grumpy in 'A Man Called Otto'



HOLLYWOOD NICE guy Tom Hanks is breaking the mold by playing a grump in "A Man Called Otto."

His character, Otto Anderson, is a 60-year-old man who plans to end his life following the death of his wife and forced retirement, but instead befriends his lively neighbours and begins viewing life through a positive lens.

The comedy-drama is adapted from the 2012 Swedish novel "A Man Called Ove" by Fredrik Backman that became the 2015 Oscar-nominated film.

"A Man Called Otto", directed by Marc Forster, arrives in select theaters on Friday.

Hanks, who won Academy Awards for best actor for "Forrest Gump" and "Philadelphia", told Reuters that zero auditions were required for his role, as he and his wife Rita Wilson bought the rights to adapt the novel and film for American audiences.



"Look, I'm selfish. I'm a selfish actor and I'm competitive and I know a good role when I see one and don't think anybody else was considered for the role," said Hanks. "Because I selfishly said, 'I know exactly what I want to do here, I know exactly how to be not just cranky but also always correct.'"

When audiences meet Otto, he judges his neighbours for various reasons ranging from dogs peeing on his front lawn to postal vans parking in the street.

Enjoying his stubborn character, Hanks said "If there's anybody in this movie that is right one hundred per cent of the time, it's Otto and I like playing the guy who's always right."

Unleashing his rude side was cathartic for Hanks.

"What is freeing is being able to use the body language that says the same thing. A good, frustrated sigh is almost as good as one of those yoga breaths, you know where you're supposed to just clear everything out," the actor said. — Reuters

CULTURE

Elgin marbles may be returned to Greece, part of 'cultural exchange'



The so-called Elgin Marbles could soon be returned to Greece as the British Museum reportedly closes in on a landmark deal.

George Osborne, chairman of the British Museum and former Tory chancellor, is understood to have drawn up an agreement with Athens as part of a "cultural exchange," according to *The Daily Telegraph*.

The paper also cited unnamed sources as saying that the statues could be moved from London to Athens "sooner rather than later."

It comes after the British government rejected Tory peer Lord Vaizey of Didcot's call for a law change to make it easier for UK museums to deal with restitution requests.

Current legislation prevents treasures from being legally given away by the museum, but Osborne, its chairman, is reportedly seeking to repatriate the antiquities as part of a long-term "cultural exchange."

However, according to the *Telegraph*, the loan deal will not end the long-running dispute over the 17 sculptures

and part of a frieze that decorated the 2,500-year-old Parthenon temple at the Acropolis.

The 2,500-year-old marbles were taken by Lord Elgin in the early 19th century when he was the British ambassador.



dor to the Ottoman Empire, and have been the subject of controversy over where they should be displayed.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has called for the marbles to be returned to Greece on many occasions, even offering to loan some of his country's other treasures to the British Museum in exchange.

A Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) spokesperson told the PA news agency: "The Parthenon Sculptures in the British Museum are legally owned by the Trustees of the British Museum, which is operationally independent of Government. Decisions relating to the care and management of its collections are a matter for the trustees."

Last month the museum said in a statement it had "publicly called for a new Parthenon Partnership with Greece" and would "talk to anyone, including the Greek government about how to take that forward."

It added: "We operate within the law and we're not going to dismantle our great collection as it tells a unique story of our common humanity."

"But we are seeking new positive, long term partnerships with countries and communities around the world, and that of course includes Greece."

— dpa

SPECIES

Changes in insect populations in Finland due to global warming



INSECT POPULATIONS in Finland are showing signs of serious change resulting from global warming, possibly leading to less effective pollination of plants, German researchers at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) reported on Tuesday.

The team, which included researchers from Halle Wittenberg University and the Halle-Jena-Leipzig Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research, counted insects on blossoms in the thinly populated region of Kittilä in Lapland.

They then compared their results with data collected by foresters more than 120 years ago.

The same species of insects and plants were involved in only 7% of the observations conducted. The figure was surprisingly low, they said.

Hover flies and moths in particular were seen on the blossoms much more rarely. This is problematic, as these groups include highly effective pollinators, they wrote.



Another disturbing trend, according to the researchers, is the far lower number of insects specialised in particular types of blossom.

They had been replaced by certain flies that visit many different plant species, but these so-called generalists are possibly not as effective as pollinators.

"Thus far, the pollinator network in our research area appears nevertheless to work well," Leana Zoller of Halle Wittenberg University said. "So far, there are no indications that the plants are getting too little pollen and are then less able to propagate."

But this could change if more changes took place in the insect population. At some point, the plants would not be able to make up for declines in their pollinator network, she said.

— DPA



art & life

Local Scene

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SUNDAY | JANUARY 8 | 2023

Traditional markets ready for winter tourism



Many tourist attractions, traditional markets, castles, forts and archaeological sites in the various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman are witnessing an active tourist movement by foreign tourists. winter tourism begins in October until the end of April every year. A number of tourists from different nationalities, including European, American and Asian, stressed on the unique status of the Sultanate of Oman and its importance, noting that the castles, forts, popular markets and Omani customs have a different character from the rest of the neighbouring countries.

Muhannad Abd Rabbo from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan said "This is my first visit to the Sultanate of Oman. I visited many sites in the Governorate of Muscat. I was fascinated by the combination of ancient and modern architecture. I

was also drawn by the beauty of Muttrah Souq which was developed and preserved in a beautiful traditional way, it tells the heritage of an ancient and contemporary country. it has a different character that merges the present and the past. the Omani heritage, ornaments, and perfumes that are manufactured using local Omani methods caught his attention the most. He stressed that the Omani perfume, incense, and frankincense industry that spreads throughout the market have a special status in the country.

Kevin from the United States of America said "This is my second visit to the Sultanate of Oman, and what made me visit it again is the tranquility and safety that I touched in the previous visit. The Omani hospitality has a great role in attracting the attention of tourists from different countries of the world. "My previous visit was in 2017 to Al Dakhiliyah Governorate, where I visited Al Jabal Al Akhdhar with its cold

weather in the winter season. I felt the difference there when I saw the antiquities, old houses and methods of architecture.

During which, Kevin said that he got the chance to monitor the lifestyle of people, their source of income and their huge dependence in agriculture. He even helped in irrigation. He also visited Misfat Al Abriyeen in the Wilayat of al Hamra, where he was drawn to the beautiful scenery and the mud buildings that are distinguished by a different engineering system.

Conley, a German national, confirmed that this beautiful country deserves to be visited many times. respect and good treatment always make the visitors feel safe and reassured and encourage them to return to visit the Sultanate of Oman several times. She pointed out that among the things that encourage tourists to visit the Sultanate of Oman are the components, the ancient tourism and heritage diversity, and the beautiful popular markets in the various

governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, which are unique to the rest of the neighbouring countries.

Sai Bavan from India indicated that Oman is a beautiful and hospitable country. "I have visited many places in the Sultanate of Oman as castles, forts. my visit to Nizwa market, the ancient and traditional design of the place attracted me greatly. the market has shops that were built in a beautiful way and they are run by locals who deal and talk in a respectful manner. these stores offer many products, especially local ones such as traditional daggers and swords, and Omani sweets that have a special flavour.

I also visited the Sharqiya Sands, and tere I met with a large number of tourists due to the presence of tourist camps that tell about Bedouin life, and the tourist adventures in the desert have a beautiful and distinctive character, which attracts many tourists to these beautiful golden sands.