

Citizens can choose land plots online

Citizens can now choose their desired residential plot online. The Ministry of Housing has given the applicants an option to indicate their choice of land. Completely digital and geographically mapped, nationals awaiting their turn to receive a land plot can log on to the service online after receiving a notification from the ministry. **DETAILS ON P5**


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P10

INDIA GRAB U19 WORLD CUP FOR FIFTH TIME



P13

SAMAYIL INDUSTRIAL CITY ATTRACTS 19 PROJECTS IN 2021



P20

THE HIGH PRICE OF COLLECTING ANTIQUES AND OLD COINS



MUSCAT

INDUSTRIAL PROJECTS AT SOHAR UNIVERSITY

Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, on Sunday visited Sohar University to inspect projects linking the university with the industrial and entrepreneurship sectors. The visit comes within the framework of the ministry's efforts to link the academic sector with the industrial sector and the labour market as well as strengthening partnership with relevant authorities with the aim of reaching tangible results.

DETAILS ON P3

HOUSE AMBULANCE SERVICE LAUNCHED

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) has launched house ambulance service in a number of governorates, on Sunday. The service provides emergency medical care at home for patients with critical medical conditions and transfers them to health institutions. During the first phase the service will be available in the governorates with higher densities.

DETAILS ON P5



SLEEPING ENOUGH?

omanobserver.om/podcast

INSIDE



TUNISIAN PRESIDENT DISSOLVES WATCHDOG

P6



INDIA BIDS EMOTIONAL FAREWELL TO LEGENDARY SINGER

P7

COVID CASES RISE AMID FEARS OF TOUGH RESTRICTIONS

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The number of Covid-19 cases in the Sultanate of Oman continues to rise as the Ministry of Health reported 6,146 new infections and 14 deaths during the past three days.

It stated that the number of admissions during the past 24 hours stood at 87, taking the total admitted patients in health institutions to 373, while the number of Covid-19 patients in intensive care units reached 60.

The total number of Covid-19 cases registered in the Sultanate of Oman stood at 346,041, and the total deaths amounted to 4,172. The total number of people re-

covered from the disease reached 325,860.

The ministry, in a statement, called upon everyone to strictly adhere to the isolation procedures in a separate room and a separate toilet for those affected with the virus, and that the person in isolation should be served from outside the room, said the statement.

SOCIAL DISTANCE

It also called upon citizens and residents to constantly clean hands with soap and water, avoid touching the face, nose, mouth and eyes, follow healthy habits when sneezing, coughing and strictly adhere to instructions on social and physical distancing issued by the Supreme Committee and the



24 HOURS

87 HOSPITALISED

373 INPATIENTS

60 IN ICUS

Ministry of Health, including not to leave home unless necessary.

Commenting on the rise in cases, Ibrahim al Maimani, a statistical analyst, said that there is an increase in the number of people admitted in hospitals to 28, and an increase in the number of intensive care cases by 4, describing the daily figures of patients and deaths reported by the ministry as "high".

He said: "We detected Omicron mutant two months ago. At first, the infections were few, but they started increasing by hundreds, then to thousands. We reached the highest number of infections on February 1, which was 2,828 cases in 24 hours, but there was optimism last week as numbers decreased. Unfortunately, statis-

tics on Sunday showed daily report of cases at a rate of 2,000 to 2,500 everyday during the last three days."

About the peak, he said: "According to infections curve, we can identify the peak when we start to gradually descend. This week, the picture will become clear and that will be figured out."

"There is a rise and decrease in cases in the Gulf countries, and we are part of the Gulf. So we have the same fluctuation. We have a fluctuating situation, especially in the last two weeks. But we are still in a worrying situation when we look at deaths, as we have recorded 26 deaths in the last six days compared to the last whole month, during which 30 deaths were recorded."

New rules issued for compensation in road accident cases

VINOD NAIR
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A new decision has been issued regarding the Assured Fund for the assistance of persons who suffer physical injuries, heirs of the deceased and to compensate for material damages in road accidents.

The decision was published in the official gazette on Sunday.

Sultan bin Salem al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), issued a decision to amend some provisions of the system of the Assured Fund.

The amendments stipulate that the fund will offer assistance to those with physical

injuries, heirs of the deceased, compensation for material damages in the wake of road accidents. The conditions include that there should be a contact or relation between the vehicles causing the accident and the injured.

In case of material damages, the value of the claim should be not less than RO 500, and in the case of treatment or first aid expenses, the total value should be not less than RO 500.

The decision states that the heirs of the deceased or injured or their agents must submit a request for assistance or compensation to the committee as per a specific form prepared, provided that the request includes all data and information related to the claim.

TURN TO P5



Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team to join Tour of Oman

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkuttyvp](#)

Mark Cavendish will make his first appearance of the year at the 11th edition of the Tour of Oman, which will be held from February 10 to 15.

"Our stint in the Middle East continues between February 10-15 with the Tour of Oman, which is back on the calendar after a two-year hiatus", said Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Sports Director Klaas Lodewyck. The most successful active rider in the peloton, with 156 wins to his name, Mark Cavendish of Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team 2022, a cycling

team from Belgium, will start his fifth season with the Wolfpack at the Tour of Oman.

SPECTACULAR RACING

The Sultanate of Oman and its unique landscape have offered spectacular racing since cycling icon Fabian Cancellara became the first overall winner in 2010.

For its much-anticipated return following two years of cancellation, 18 teams from four continents will be heading to the Sultanate of Oman, including seven WorldTeams, nine ProTeams and one Continental Team. Also, for the first time in the history of the race, the Oman

National Team will participate, granting a select team of local riders the opportunity to race against some of the strongest squads in the world.

Tour de France winners Christopher Froome and Vincenzo Nibali also feature in a star-studded list of winners, and the Kazakh star Alexey Lutsenko took the last two editions.

Joining him for the team's second outing of the year in the Middle East will be the experienced Iljo Keisse, Il Lombardia runner-up Fausto Masnada, Mauro Schmid, Stijn Steels, as well as neo-pros Stan Van Tricht and Ethan Vernon.

TURN TO P5



More integrated service stations along highways

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As part of adding more value to roads, more integrated state-of-the-art service stations will be opened along the Al Batinah Expressway during the current year.

According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, four such facilities will be completed in the North Al Batinah Governorate, on areas ranging from 15,000 to 30,000 square metres.

“These projects represent an added value to the future roads that the government intends to implement, in order to support vital investments in the governorates, as part of the strategic plans”, the ministry said in a statement.

While two of the sites will be opened at Al Hoor area to the right and left of the main street in the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq, one will be in the Wilayat of Saham’s Al Rowdha area and another in the New Liwa area, Wilayat of Liwa area to the right and left of the main street.

Al Batinah Expressway is considered one of the most important national milestones. The ministry periodically follows up the progress of the

ACCORDING TO THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND URBAN PLANNING, FOUR SUCH FACILITIES WILL BE COMPLETED IN THE NORTH AL BATINAH GOVERNORATE, ON AREAS RANGING FROM 15,000 TO 30,000 SQUARE METRES



implementation of integrated service stations on highways, the statement posted on the ministry website said.

“By bidding on large areas of investment land to implement this type of project, the ministry aims to provide the necessary services

in integrated service stations, provide investment opportunities for citizens and the private sector,” it said.

In addition, this will create a long-term contractual relationship with the system of utilisation for optimal investment

of government lands, as well as achieving sustainability and maximising financial aspect returns, the ministry said.

For road users, it stimulates the economic and tourist movement along highway tracks.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has developed a working mechanism concerning integrated service stations on highways, starting from the selection stage to the implementation stage. It includes determining the site and studying its planning based on its importance and the extent of the region’s need for it.

This is followed by preparing the necessary technical requirements when designing each of the integrated service station sites, then presenting the site to the relevant authorities to obtain the required approvals for completion.

The integrated stations include a fuel filling station, an air-conditioned main building that includes restaurants and various shops, as well as a hotel restroom, a park, separate prayer rooms for men and women, ATM outlets, a maintenance and car service centre, separate parking for buses and trucks and public parking to provide basic services.

NDC launches programme on national security



MUSCAT: The third parallel programme themed ‘Pillars of National Security’ was launched at the National Defence College (NDC) on Sunday.

The programme, running

through till February 10, targets honing the skills and leadership abilities of under-secretaries, as well as senior officers from the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF) and other military and security

departments.

The programme addresses the pillars of Omani national security and developing the standards of joint action in tackling challenges. It also covers the policies of

comprehensive macroeconomics, as well as enhancing the skills of the participants in dealing with various media channels in different circumstances.

— ONA

Noted poet Hilal al Amri passes away

MUSCAT: Renowned Omani poet Hilal bin Mohammed al Amri passed away on Saturday after a prolonged illness. He was 70.

Born in 1953 in the Wilayat of Samayil, Al Amri received his pre-university education in the United Arab Emirates. He graduated from the American University of Denver in the US in 1978 in administration and economics and obtained a diploma in university management from the University of North Carolina, and a diploma in Television Management from the University of Manchester, UK.

Al Amri was awarded the



Sultan Qaboos Order for Culture, Science, Arts and Literature in 2006; the Medal of Appreciation for Excellent Civil Service in 2009 and the Medal for Literary and Cultural Participations from the GCC Secretariat-General in 2013.

A centre for the youth to hone traditional craft skills



SALALAH: The Craft Training Centre of the Royal Court Affairs in the Wilayat of Salalah, Dhofar Governorate, has been set up as an institution that spreads awareness about traditional crafts.

The centre preserves craft industries peculiar to the governorate and trains instructors to transfer knowledge about making such articles to future generations.

The centre was established as per the royal directives of late Sultan Qaboos.

The centre was established in 1985 in the area that was at that time called Al Rabat School.

The centre seeks ways to provide necessary skills to students to prepare them to practise as artisans and earn income on their own. — ONA





PAKISTANI ARMY CHIEF ARRIVES



MUSCAT: Lt Gen Nadeem Raza, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJSC) of Pakistan, arrived here on Sunday on a several-day official visit to the Sultanate of Oman. The guest was received upon arrival at Seeb Air Base by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces, senior officers, the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the military attaché at the Pakistani Embassy in Muscat. — ONA

OMSB, SQU sign pact to start fellowship programmes



MUSCAT: Oman Medical Speciality Board (OMSB) and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) signed on Sunday an agreement of cooperation to start fellowship programmes in various medical specialties.

The agreement was signed by Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, CEO of OMSB and HH Sayyid Dr Fahad al Julanda al Said, Vice Chancellor of SQU.

The fellowship programmes will be developed at the SQU Hospital based on specific standards set by the OMSB.

This cooperation aims to strengthen and develop cooperation in the field of training Omani physicians and

grooming their skills.

SQU Hospital is one of the most important training centres approved by the OMSB to provide advanced medical training.

OMSB started subspecialty training programmes (fellowships) for specialised physicians as part of its endeavours in developing and expanding advanced medical education.

Moreover, the OMSB offered its first fellowship programmes in 2016 in the fields of adult general cardiology, medical genetics, otology and paediatrics haematology oncology.

— ONA



MHERI minister reviews projects at Sohar University

MUSCAT: Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, on Sunday visited Sohar University to inspect projects linking the university with the industrial and entrepreneurship sectors.

The visit comes within the framework of the ministry's efforts to link the academic sector with the industrial sector and the labour market as well as strengthening partnership with relevant authorities with the aim of reaching tangible results.

The minister was accompanied during the visit by Shaikh Saif bin Hamyar al Shehi, Governor of North Al Batinah, Engineer Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO, Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) and a number of CEOs of companies operating within Sohar Port and Sohar Industrial Estate as well as

officials from Oman Investment Authority (OIA), PDO, Oman Technology Fund (OTF) and directors-general at the ministry.

During the meeting, the minister stressed the importance of building trust between the academic and industrial sectors, strengthening partnership to achieve a coherent economic structure, and realising rapid growth through concerted efforts of all relevant parties. She pointed out the importance of sustainability of higher education, scientific research and innovation by seeking to find various sources of funding pointing to the role of the Education Endowment Foundation (Siraj).

The minister called for the importance of concerted efforts between the university, Madayn and Sohar Port. She called for the establishment of a joint team to create a participatory

The visit comes within the framework of the ministry's efforts to link the academic sector with the industrial sector and the labour market

environment with the industrial and entrepreneurship sectors through the localisation of incubators, and the transformation of ideas into value-added projects.

The minister and her accompanying delegation visited the Sohar Production Project, which is implemented by Sohar University in collaboration with the Ministry

of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and the University of Sheffield Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre (AMRC). The project includes a leading plant for manufacturing and designing molds and production tools.

The project also includes the Manufacturing Research Centre, which is concerned with industrial research to design, manufacture and test high-value products and parts to serve the industrial sector.

Both projects utilise modern manufacturing technologies and state-of-the-art equipment.

The minister also toured the Materials Characterisation Laboratory (MCL) project, which was implemented in cooperation between Sohar University and OQ as part of the technology localisation and value-added enhancement programmes.

Cycling enthusiasts have a reason to rejoice!

MUNICIPALITY EXPLORING NEW CYCLING VENUES IN MUSCAT

KABEER YOUSUF

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Muscat Municipality is exploring possibilities to introduce new venues for cycling apart from synthetic cycling tracks in Al Amerat and Ruwi and cycle-friendly tracks in Muttrah Sea Road. The idea is to give a boost to cycling activities in the municipal area.

The civic authority has started placing signage indicating cycling tracks on many public roads to help the cyclists and motorists and ensure safe cycling for the riders.

Implemented in cooperation with the Omani Cycling Federation, these posts are considered the first steps to make Muscat a bicycle-friendly city and pave the way for dedicated cycling tracks in the country.

"Muscat Municipality's initiative to place signage and directions for the commuters is a great support for cyclists and it will not be too late before it



becomes a hobby of the masses," Rigel Sidhique, an avid cyclist, told the *Observer*.

Local enthusiasts have enough opportunities to hone their cycling skills in a country that has an event like "Tour of Oman."

Rightly, there has been demand to support cycling and extend more facilities for the same.

Tour of Oman attracts cycling enthusiasts and spectators from all over the world. It has succeeded in generating interest in cycling

among the young generation.

Cycling and mountain biking has gained popularity in the Sultanate of Oman. With professional cyclists' praise for the country's stunningly diverse landscapes and the new riding

challenges, cycling becomes an exciting sporting activity in the country.

Recently, a French study has selected the Sultanate of Oman as the best adventure tourism destination in the region for its

diverse terrain dominated by the vast ranges of rugged mountains.

The French pro-athletes' team had explored the country for several weeks and biked across various mountain sites.

This recognition is beside the recent appraisal by the 'Lonely Planet', which selected the country among the countries for leisure tourism and included it in the first seven countries to visit the region.

Besides taking cycling as a pastime, health experts call upon people to lead an active lifestyle and recommend cycling as one of the best outdoor activities.

According to lifestyle experts, doing some form of physical activity like 30 minutes brisk walk five times a week or 20 minutes jogging help in reducing weight and keeping people fit to fight diseases like Covid-19. Cycling, according to them, is one of the best exercises. Since awareness for a healthy lifestyle is increasing, cycle lovers are eagerly waiting for dedicated tracks along the major roads in the country.



A CITY MADE GREAT BY ITS PEOPLE

NUMBEO, THE LARGEST COST OF LIVING DATABASE WHICH ALSO PROVIDES INFORMATION

ON THE QUALITY OF LIFE, GIVES TOP RANKING TO MUSCAT WHEN IT COMES TO SAFETY

VINOD NAIR

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It takes combined efforts of all stakeholders to make a city not only for the people who reside there but also for both short and long stay visitors.

These stakeholders involve not only the civic administrations and law enforcement agencies, but also people who stay there and extend hands to welcome any guests from anywhere in the world.

According to Numbeo, the Sultanate of Oman's capital Muscat offers total immunity from being mugged or robbed, being assaulted, or attacked by armed robbers.

Numbeo gives top ranking when it comes to safety while walking alone during daylight (90.55 very high) and while walking alone during the night (76.40 high).

The country is also ranked very high for the quality of air, drinking water and accessibility, garbage disposal satisfaction, clean and tidy, night lights, comfortable to spend time in the city, greenery and parks.

The city has also been rated highly for the average distance taken to work or school (20.8 km).

The *Observer* recently spoke to some visitors in the capital for the first time, though they have been

MUSCAT
IS RANKED
HIGH IN



Quality of air



Drinking water



Garbage disposal
satisfaction



Clean and tidy



Night lights



Comfortable to spend time
in the city, greenery
and parks

to several neighbouring cities on a few occasions.

Abdul Bhatti, a mediaperson from Pakistan, said, "I had a very limited knowledge about the Sultanate of Oman and Muscat in particular, even though it is a next-door country and many expatriates from different parts of Pakistan stay and work here. It has a lovely infrastructure, especially roads built by cutting mountains, and above all gives the freedom to walk on the streets safely at night, day and anytime."

Pankaj Sharma, a technician from the events industry, echoed similar feelings. "This place gives a personal touch compared to other metro cities as one does not get the feeling of getting lost in the crowd. I get a feeling that the country is slowly but steadily getting back to normal in the post-Covid scenario."

Not just visitors, even the long-time residents feel the same when they have to say a few words about the city. "As we all know, the city and country are also going through generational changes. It will never be the same as it was a few years or a decade back, but what is important is that the basic spirit of the people remains the same."

All these results are due to tireless efforts of all sections of society that include men and women, government and non-government authorities.





Choose land plots online

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Citizens can now choose their desired residential land online. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has given the applicants an option to indicate their choice of land.

Completely digital and geographically mapped, Omani nationals awaiting their turn to receive land can log on to the service online after receiving a notification from the Ministry. Accordingly, eligible citizen has the right to three attempts and five days to finish choosing the land.

“The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has launched the service ‘Choose Your Land’, a new mechanism for granting government residential lands to the citizens which is the platform to express your choices,” said Ahmed bin Saud al Kamyani, Director General of Lands at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning.

All the citizens who are allotted lands will be receiving text messages to enter the system through the “Choose Your Land” service and start the electronic selection process, and the list of recipients will be



published later, he said.

There Council of Ministers has instructed the Ministry to distribute 23,000 residential lands as part of the ministry’s plan for 2022 in the country to the applicants this year and they will be distributed through the Choose Your Land service.

This distribution will be based on specific criteria represented in the social status, age, date of submission of the application and the status of housing represented in the ab-

Completely digital and geographically mapped, Omani nationals awaiting their turn to receive land can log on to the service online after receiving a notification from the Ministry

sence of a house or land suitable for housing, and the highest priority will be for families who do not own housing or land. The largest number of applicants, 123,000 citizens, preferred Muscat Governorate which has a serious shortage of land. On the other hand, the ministry aims to distribute 3,000 land plots in the governorate. Al Kamyani further said that the names of the target group in the first batch will be announced through social media on Monday.

More paid parking zones in Muscat from March 6

VINOD NAIR
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More areas in the Governorate of Muscat will be included in paid parking zones from March 6.

The areas to be covered included some of the busiest areas commercial areas of the capital such as the parking spaces around the new Al-Khouth Market, behind Ooredoo Store, Sultan Mosque in Ruwi, Sultan Qaboos Street in Al Khuwair South — the service road opposite commercial buildings.

“The decision was taken in view of the increase in the number of vehicles, and to eliminate the problem of abandoning private vehicles in free parking slots in and around the city, which causes disruption traffic confusion and distortion of the public landscape,” Muscat Municipality said.

“There should be a system to find solutions against people who park vehicles for a long period in busy places rather than imposing fines on people who park for short stay or some genuine reasons,” said a road user who complained about lack of adequate parking near the mosque in Ruwi.

Another vehicle owner said, “The monthly or annual subscription

should be launched for the local residents or frequent visitors to the neighbourhood stores to avoid hassles during short visits.”

Some people said that businesses are already suffering from a lack of demand, and they should be exempted from paid parking because it will deter customers from coming to them.

The parking fees will be charged between 8 am and 1 pm and from 4 pm to 9 pm — except for Fridays, Saturdays and official holidays that are announced by the concerned authorities.

Muscat Municipality urged the users to depend on the mobile parking reservation service.

The users can reserve the vehicle parking via SMS by sending the number and code of the vehicle and the number of minutes required (between 30 minutes and a maximum of 300 minutes) to 90091.

If the user wants to extend the time, he has to send another message to the number 90091 and follow the same previous steps to inquire about the remaining time. The beneficiary can type the word ‘time’ to 90091.

The cost of each parking via text message is 110 Bz for 30 minutes.

CDAA launches house ambulance service

MUSCAT: The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority (CDAA) on Sunday launched house ambulance service in a number of governorates.

The service provides emergency medical care at home for patients with critical medical conditions and transfers them to health institutions. During the first phase the service will be available in the governorates with higher densities.

Qualified and specialised health professionals will perform emergency medical interventions for critical medical cases that need immediate response. The service can be requested by contacting the Royal Oman Police Opera-



tions Centre on the emergency number 9999 or the CDAA Operations Centre on the number 24343666.

During the first phase, the house ambulance service targets the following medical conditions: critical respiratory

diseases, critical heart diseases, fractures and severe injuries, sudden loss of consciousness, sudden general and partial paralysis, severe bleeding, severe pain, critical nervous system diseases, severe electrocution, severe poisoning, emergency

mental disorders, drowning, obstructed labour and severe burns.

Colonel Dr Hamed bin Abdullah al Hammadi, Director-General of Ambulance, said the service provides patients and critically injured people with emergency medical care and transfers them in a correct scientific manner to health institutions in accordance with the medical protocols approved by the medical governance system for the ambulance service at CDAA. The house ambulance service has advanced ambulances with medical devices and medicines necessary for emergency medical interventions. — ONA

New rules for compensation in accident cases

FROM P1

Documents to be attached with the application form include a copy of the final report issued by the Royal Oman Police (ROP) of the accident, a copy of the medical report issued by the Ministry of Health (MoH), a copy of the bills for treatment and first aid expenses from a hospital in the country, a copy of the death certificate for the deceased as a result of the acci-

dent, a copy of the legal agency representing the heirs, a copy of a power of attorney in case the request is submitted through an agent.

Applications submitted two years from the date of the accident shall not be accepted with regard to death and physical injuries.

As for the material damage, the application shall not be accepted unless submitted within six months from the date of accident.

هيئة تنظيم الخدمات العامة
Authority for Public Services Regulation

NOTICE

The Authority for Public Services Regulation, Oman (The Authority) in exercise of the powers conferred upon it by Article (109) of the Law for the Regulation and Privatisation of the Electricity and Related Water Sector promulgated Royal Decree(No.78/2004) (the Sector Law), proposes a modification to the Schedule Charge Restriction Conditions (the “SCRC”) of the Rural Areas Electricity Company licence granted to the Rural Areas Electricity Company SAOC (“Licensee”).

The modification of the SCRC is required to facilitate implementation of new price controls (effective from 1 January 2022) for the Licensee.

The draft Licences Modification is available for review at the Authority’s office or the Authority’s website at the addresses mentioned below.

Any person who has any objection to the grant of the Proposed Licence modification shall submit details of their objection to the Authority within 28 days from the date of publication of this Notice.

Any objection submitted after the period stipulated in this Notice will not be considered.

Objections shall be submitted to the following address:

The Authority for Public Services Regulation
Ominvest Business Center | Muscat Hills | Airport Heights | Block No 9993 | Building No. 95 | First Floor.

Sultanate of Oman, Muscat, Al Khuwair | P.O. Box 954, Postal Code 133

Website: www.apsr.om
Email: enquiries@apsr.om
Tel: +968 24609700
Fax: +968 24609701

Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl Team to join Tour of Oman

FROM P1

The Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl rider is part of the seven-man squad for the multi-day cycle tour in the Middle East. “The Tour of Oman has a beautiful course. In the bunch of sprints, we try to do something with Mark. And if possible, we want to compete with Fausto for a good classification. We are going to the Sultanate of Oman with a solid team”, says Lodewyck.

The 36-year-old Cavendish has recovered sufficiently from his injuries sustained during the Six Days of Ghent. Last year he had a serious crash in November during the closing team race of the Six Days of Ghent. He suffered two broken ribs and a punctured lung. After a good rehabilitation, the British sprinter is now ready to race again.

In the Tour of Oman, Cavendish hopes to get back to sprinting. His employer is also counting on Iljo Keisse, Fausto Masnada, newcomer Mauro Schmid, Stijn Steels and neopros Stan Van Tricht and Ethan Vernon in the six-day round.

“We will try to be in the mix with Mark in the bunch sprints, and if possible, do something with Fausto in the general classification. He has just returned from a training camp and is motivated to kick off his season. Overall, we go there with a solid team, capable of getting some good results”, said Lodewyck.



Sultanate of Oman
The Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary
Tender Announcement

The Administrative Affairs Council of the Judiciary announces its desire to re-submit the following tender:

Tender No	Tender Title	Tender Document Sales End Date	Bid Submission Closing	Vendor Grade	Tender Document Fee
08/2022	Maintenance and Operation MEP Works in Head Quarter Building at AL Khuwair and all Court Complexes Buildings all appendixes	16/02/2022	13/03/2022	Excellent	RO. 25/-
09/2022	Maintenance and Operation HVAC Works in Head Quarter Building at AL Khuwair and all Court Complexes Buildings and all appendixes	16/02/2022	13/03/2022	Excellent	RO. 25/-

Where you can buy the tender documents electronically via the link below website:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Bidders shall submit their bids electronically via the aforementioned website. An electronic bank guarantee certified by one of the banks operating in the country shall be delivered at a rate of (1%) of the bid value with each bid, valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission of bids and addressed in the name of the Chairman of the Internal Committee of Tenders in the Council of Administrative Affairs for the Judiciary, based on directives from the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, and the latest updates to the electronic tender system.

1- For inquiries and clarifications on the tender:
Submit inquiries related to the project electronically through the website of the electronic tender system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

2- For inquiries and clarifications on the electronic bidding system:
Submit inquiries regarding technical support for the electronic bidding system via e-mail and the phone number shown below:

Phone: +968 24402200
Email: etenderhd@ita.gov.om



Elizabeth II endorses Camilla for Queen Consort

LONDON: Prince Charles on Sunday thanked his mother Queen Elizabeth for publicly stating her desire that his wife Camilla becomes Queen Consort when he becomes king, acknowledging the honour on the 70-year anniversary of her accession to the British throne.

The request — a blessing that will likely remove the need for any discussion about future titles — follows an earlier era when Camilla was vilified by the tabloid press for the breakdown of Charles’ marriage to his first wife, Princess Diana.

The 95-year-old queen had made her thoughts known on Saturday, saying it was her “sincere wish” that when the day comes, Camilla would be known as Queen Consort.

Charles made the comments on Sunday when he led tributes to the 95-year-old monarch as she passed a milestone never reached by any of her predecessors in 1,000 years.

“We are deeply conscious of the honour represented by my mother’s wish,” Charles said in a statement. “As we have sought together to serve and support Her Majesty and the people of our communities, my darling wife has

Elizabeth says she wished to renew the pledge that her life would be one of devotion to the country

been my own steadfast support throughout.”

Charles and Camilla, long-time lovers, were married in 2005, enabling her to gradually take on a more prominent role. With a current title of Duchess of Cornwall, Camilla is now a popular member of the family and regularly appears at official duties, alongside Charles and the queen.

The statement on the future of the monarchy comes as the country celebrates the queen’s role over the last 70 years.

Charles was joined by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, politicians, churches and members of the public in praising the queen for her dedication to public service.

“The year of this unprecedented Platinum Jubilee brings an opportunity for us all to come together in celebrating the service of the queen, by whose example we



Images of Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II are displayed on the big digital screens at Piccadilly Circus in central London to mark the start of Her Majesty’s Platinum Jubilee Year. — AFP

will continue to be led in the years to come,” Charles said.

The country will hold national events in June.

During her seven decades on the throne, the queen has overseen

huge social, economic and political change including the end of the British Empire.

Elizabeth became the queen of Britain and more than a dozen other realms including Canada,

Australia and New Zealand on the death of her father King George VI on February 6, 1952, while she was in Kenya on an international tour.

The news was broken to her by her husband Prince Philip, who

died last year aged 99 after more than 70 years by her side.

Elizabeth said on Saturday that she wished to renew the pledge she had made in 1947, when she turned 21, that her life would be one of devotion to the country.

Prime Minister Johnson said he paid tribute to her many years of service and “look forward to coming together as a country to celebrate her historic reign in the summer”.

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison hailed “a truly remarkable milestone in a remarkable life”.

The queen has continued to carry out official duties well into her 90s, but has been seen much less regularly of late after she spent a night in hospital last October for an unspecified ailment and was then instructed by doctors to rest.

On Sunday the palace released a new photo of the queen, smiling broadly near a red despatch box that contains official government paperwork. On Saturday she was filmed meeting local community groups and joking with officials. “I think I might just put a knife in it,” she said when presented with a large cake. “Somebody else can do the rest.” — Reuters

Tunisian president dissolves top judicial watchdog

TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied on Sunday dissolved a top independent judicial watchdog accusing it of bias, the latest controversial move since he sacked the government last year. Saied has broadened his grip on power since July 25, when he sacked the government and froze parliament before moving to rule by decree in Tunisia — the cradle of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings that ousted a series of autocratic leaders.

Many in the North African nation welcomed his moves against a political system described as corrupt and ineffective, in the only democracy to have emerged from the revolts. But political figures and rights groups have warned of a slide towards authoritarianism, and world leaders have expressed deep concern.

In a move sparking further unease, Saied early on Sunday announced he was dissolving the Supreme Judicial Council (CSM) during a meeting with government ministers.

The council “is a thing of the past”, he said according to video footage released by the Tunisian



Supporters of Tunisian President Kais Saied carry national flags and banners during a protest against the Supreme Judicial Council in Tunis. — Reuters

presidency. He accused the CSM, an independent constitutional body set up in 2016 to guarantee the good functioning and independence of the judiciary, of serving political interests.

“In this council, positions and appointments are sold and made according to affiliations,” said the head of state.

“You cannot imagine the money that certain judges have been able to receive, billions and billions,” he added.

Observers say the government

is seeking to clamp down on the Ennahdha party, which has controlled parliament and the various governments since the 2011 revolution toppled veteran leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.

The International Commission of Jurists said the president’s corruption accusations were “unfounded”, saying the CSM council “has defended the independence of the judiciary” and that “any decree to dissolve it is illegal and unconstitutional.”

— AFP

Morocco mourns ‘little Rayan’ after well rescue bid fails

IGHRANE, Morocco: Morocco was in shock on Sunday after emergency crews found a five-year-old boy dead at the bottom of a well in a tragic end to a five-day rescue operation that gripped the nation and the world.

The ordeal of “little Rayan” since he fell down the 32-metre well on Tuesday gained global attention and sparked an outpouring of sympathy online, with the Arabic Twitter hashtag #SaveRayan trending.

“The fall of a child who reminded the whole world of the values of humanity,” read one Moroccan newspaper headline, while others bemoaned the “tragic epilogue” that had brought “sadness and shock”.

The boy’s father said he had been repairing the well when the boy fell in, close to the family home in the village of Ighrane in the Rif mountains of northern Morocco. “Little angel, you fought until the end, a hero”, said one Twitter user called Anouar, while another said “he has brought people together around him”.

Throughout the major digging operation to extricate him from the



A member of the Moroccan security forces gestures to move back as the ambulance carrying the body of Rayan Oram leaves the scene in the remote village of Ighrane in the rural northern province of Chefchaouen. — AFP

We all of us had been holding out hope that little Rayan would make it. This is all so tragic

LAILA LALAMI
Moroccan-American novelist on Twitter

bottom of the well shaft, authorities had cautioned that they did not know whether he was alive.

The shaft, just 45 centimetres across, was too narrow for the boy to be reached directly, and widening it was deemed too risky — so earth-movers dug a wide slope into the hill to reach him from the side. The operation made the landscape resemble a construction site, and red-helmeted civil defence personnel had at times been suspended by rope, as if on a cliff face. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

RAMALLAH

PLO meets to choose top Palestinian negotiator

The embattled leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization held a rare meeting to fill key roles that could hint at a favoured successor for 86-year-old Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas.

The PLO, tasked since its creation in 1964 with leading the struggle against Israel for Palestinian statehood, has faced growing questions over its relevance in recent years and criticism for failing to hold regular elections to fill leadership



roles. Sunday’s meeting of the PLO’s 124-member Central Committee was expected to fill several executive committee vacancies, including that held by ex-chief negotiator. — AFP

BAGHDAD

Court suspends Hoshyar from presidential race

Iraq’s Supreme Court said it had temporarily suspended Hoshyar Zebari, a frontrunner for the presidency, on the eve of parliament’s vote on the position, citing years-old corruption charges against him.

The court said it had received a complaint from lawmakers that Zebari’s candidacy was “unconstitutional” because of the graft claims, adding that his suspension was ‘temporary’ while the court considers the case.



Zebari was one of two main contenders for the largely ceremonial post of president, which the 329-member parliament was to vote on Monday. — AFP

TEHRAN

Iran says Vienna talks ‘far from commitments’

Iran’s top security official said that Washington and Tehran had so far failed to produce “balance” in their commitments during the Vienna talks aimed at restoring the nuclear deal. “We are still far from achieving the necessary balance in the commitments of the parties,” Supreme National Security Council secretary Ali Shamkhani said in a Twitter post.

“Political decisions in #Washington are requirements for balance of commitments to



reach a good agreement.” Iran is engaged in negotiations with Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia directly and with the US indirectly to revive the 2015 deal. — AFP



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MONDAY | FEBRUARY 7 | 2022

7

In brief

■ MAHANORO



SIX DEAD AFTER CYCLONE BATSIRAI HITS MADAGASCAR

Cyclone Batsirai killed at least six people and displaced nearly 48,000 when it struck Madagascar overnight, the national disaster management agency said. Cyclone Batsirai weakened overnight but not before wreaking havoc in the poor Indian Ocean island nation which is still reeling from a deadly tropical storm earlier this year. The eastern district of Mananjary was lashed with heavy rains and wind before the cyclone made landfall, forcing local residents to weigh down flimsy corrugated iron roofs.

The rain will cause flooding across parts of the country, Madagascar's meteorological office said on Sunday. — AFP

■ LONDON



JOHNSON PROMISES NEW FACES AT NO 10

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has moved to shore up his operation at Number 10 Downing Street by announcing two new appointments to senior Downing Street roles. The Prime Minister said Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Steve Barclay will become his chief of staff, while journalist Guto Harri will become director of communications. It comes after Johnson lost five of his Downing Street aides in the space of 24 hours on Thursday and Friday, as more MPs sent letters in calling for a vote of no confidence in their leader. The most painful departure was that of Munira Mirza, who had worked for Johnson for more than a decade. — dpa

■ CANBERRA



AUSTRALIAN PM SIGNALS REOPENING BORDERS TO TOURISTS

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on Sunday that the reopening of the country's borders to international tourists may not be far away, adding that the parliament will debate the matter this week. Australia, which shut its borders in March of 2020, has been going through a staggered reopening in recent months, allowing in only its citizens and residents, skilled migrants, international students and certain seasonal workers. In January, Morrison said he hoped borders could fully reopen before Easter. — Reuters

Hundreds protest in Athens against migrant pushbacks

ATHENS: Hundreds protested against migrant pushbacks and border violence in Athens on Sunday, after Turkish allegations that Greece's border policy led 19 migrants to freeze to death last week.

According to Greek police, around 700 people marched from Omonia Square at the centre of Athens to Syntagma Square in front of the Greek parliament.

They carried a life raft resembling the ones allegedly used by Greek authorities to push back asylum seekers from Greek territory, an AFP photographer said.

Protesters, who gathered after a call of leftist and anti-racist groups, shouted slogans against "the assassination of migrants at the border" and held banners reading "Stop pushbacks and border violence".

In Syntagma Square they observed a minute of silence for the migrants who lost their lives.

Last week, Turkey said it found 19 frozen bodies close to the Greek border, accusing Greece of allowing the migrants to die in the winter cold after stripping them of their clothes and forcing them back across the border.

Human rights groups believe such actions, reported by migrants in different parts of the world, are designed to discourage fleeing people from trying to enter a particular country, and to look for a different route.

Greece's Migration Minister Notis Mitarachi did not dispute the deaths but dismissed Turkey's version of events as "false propaganda".

"These migrants never made it to the border. Any suggestion they did, or indeed were pushed back into Turkey is utter nonsense", Mitarachi said.

Turkey regularly accuses Greek officials of illegally pushing back migrants into its territory, but Athens denies the claims.

Greece in turn claims Turkey is turning a blind eye to people trying to reach Europe via its border in violation of a 2016 deal between Ankara and the EU.

The agreement, which has been extended, sees the bloc provide billions of euros in aid to Ankara in exchange for Turkey agreeing to host millions of Syrian and other refugees. — AFP



A protester speaks as part of a demonstration in central Athens against migrant pushbacks and border violence. — AFP

Ukraine plays down Russian invasion fears



US Military vehicles are parked outside the G2A Arena near the Rzeszow-Jasionka Airport, Poland. — Reuters

WASHINGTON: Russia could invade Ukraine within days or weeks but could still opt for a diplomatic path forward, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said on Sunday.

"We are in the window. Any day now, Russia could take military action against Ukraine, or it could be a couple of weeks from now, or Russia could choose to take the diplomatic path instead", Sullivan, who gave a round of television interviews, told the "Fox News Sunday" programme.

Any possible Russian action could include annexing Ukraine's Donbass region, cyberattacks or a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Sullivan NBC News' "Meet the Press" programme, adding that Russia could act as soon as on Monday though it could also be weeks.

Russia has in place about 70 per cent of the combat power it believes it would need for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine and is sending more battalion tactical groups to the border with its neighbour, two US officials said on Saturday.

As Russia masses more than 100,000 troops near the border, Moscow has said it is not planning an invasion but could



US National security adviser Jake Sullivan

Moscow has said it is not planning an invasion but could take unspecified military action if its security demands are not met

take unspecified military action if its security demands are not met. Those include a promise that Nato will never admit Ukraine, a demand the United States and Nato have called unacceptable.

Meanwhile, the US said on Sunday it was not sending troops to start a war with Russia after deploying 3,000 additional soldiers to Germany and Eastern Europe over the Ukraine standoff with Moscow.

President Joe Biden "has been clear for months now that the US is not sending forces to start a war or fight a war with Russia in Ukraine", Jake Sullivan said. "We have sent forces to Europe to defend Nato territory."

Sullivan said that "a military escalation and invasion of Ukraine could happen at any time. "We believe that the Russians have put in place the capabilities to mount a significant military operation into Ukraine, and we have been working hard to prepare a response", he said.

"President Biden has rallied our allies. He's reinforced and reassured our partners on the eastern flank, he's provided material support to the Ukrainians, and he's offered the Russians a diplomatic path." Ukraine on Sunday insisted the chance of resolving the soaring tensions with Russia through diplomacy remained greater than that of an attack.

US officials have warned that the Kremlin has assembled 110,000 troops along the border with its pro-Western neighbour but intelligence assessments have not determined if President Vladimir Putin has actually decided to invade. — Reuters/ AFP

India bids emotional farewell to legendary singer

NEW DELHI: Large crowds of mourners lined the streets in Mumbai to pay homage to legendary Bollywood singer Lata Mangeshkar, who died earlier on Sunday. The singer, popularly known as the "Nightingale of India" and one of the country's biggest cultural icons, was cremated with full state honours at the city's Shivaji Park.

The funeral was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well as high-profile personalities including cricket great Sachin Tendulkar and Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan.

The 92-year-old, passed away on Sunday morning at a Mumbai's Breach Candy Hospital where she was admitted in early January after testing positive for Covid-19, her doctor Pratit Samdani told reporters. Her condition had deteriorated in recent days and she died of multiple organ failure, Samdani said.

"I am anguished beyond words", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Twitter. "The kind and caring Lata Didi has left us. She leaves a void in our nation that cannot be filled. The coming generations will remember her

The coming generations will remember her as a stalwart of Indian culture, whose melodious voice had an unparalleled ability to mesmerise people

NARENDRA MODI

Prime Minister

as a stalwart of Indian culture, whose melodious voice had an unparalleled ability to mesmerise people."

Born on September 28, 1929, Lata Mangeshkar was a revered and internationally known artist who inspired generations of singers.

She began singing in her teenage years and in a career spanning over seven decades, recorded an estimated 30,000 songs in 36 languages.

However, it was her work in Bollywood, where she lent her voice in over a thousand Hindi

LATA MANGESHKAR (1929-2022)



People pay tribute in front of a portrait of Bollywood singer Lata Mangeshkar in Kolkata after she died at the age of 92. — AFP

films, that made her a national icon.

She was popular not only in India but in neighbouring South

Asia as well as countries where Bollywood films are followed.

She received several prestigious awards including the country's

highest civilian honour, the Bharat Ratna, in 2001.

Mangeshkar, who belonged to a prominent musical family from the western state of Maharashtra, also composed music and produced a handful of films.

The government announced two days of national mourning in memory of the legendary singer during which the national flag will be flown at half-mast as a mark of respect.

Tributes poured in from across India as well its entertainment industry in Mumbai, following news of her death.

"She has left us...The voice of a million centuries has left us", iconic Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan wrote on his blog. "Her voice resounds now in the Heavens!"

Born in 1929 in pre-independence India, Mangeshkar began singing in her teens, and in a career spanning 73 years sang more than an estimated 15,000 songs in 36 languages. She enthralled music-mad Indians with her lilting voice and sheer range, singing everything from patriotic songs to romantic numbers, both in films and albums. — dpa

The basic rules of intermittent fasting



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Staying hydrated during the fasting hours is essential

No doubt healthy eating transforms your lifestyle but when to eat your food is equally noteworthy. And here is why Intermittent Fasting (IF) has gained much popularity these days.

The term IF refers to not just fasting but regulating your meal timings when it comes to weight management and staying healthy.

Fasting is the phase when you are not giving your body to eat so that it can tap on its fat reserves and start burning it. The major objective of IF is to eliminate snacking which is an undercover issue and is the chief reason for faulty eating habits. When it comes to the health benefits of IF there are many worth practicing.

A detailed review of the science

of Intermittent Fasting published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* mentions; “Flipping the switch from a fed to fasting state does more than help us burn calories and lose weight.

Researchers combed through dozens of animal and human studies to explain how simple fasting improves metabolism, lowers blood sugar levels; lessens inflammation, which improves a range of health issues from arthritic pain to asthma; and even helps clear out toxins and damaged cells, which lowers risk for cancer and enhances brain function.”

What are the most common modes of intermittent fasting in practice?

There are various ways to do IF, the most common and easier to practice is the ‘12:12 method’ where

THE GOAL IS TO GIVE YOUR BODY NUTRITIOUS FOOD AT PROPERLY SPACED INTERVALS

you sleep for most of the time. Let’s say you have dinner by 7:30 pm and you will have breakfast by 7:30 am the next morning.

In between, you won’t be eating anything other than drinking water. Then we have the ‘16:8 method’, where you fast for 16 hours and have an 8-hour eating window.

Next is the ‘5:2 approach’, when you go on your regular healthy meals for 5 days and fast for 2 days a week. Here fasting is done on alternate days and not consecutively. We also have ‘meal skipping’ as one of the IF methods where you skip a meal when not

hungry.

For some, meal skipping is more natural and convenient to practice. There are other IF modes too but they are rather extreme forms and not recommended. Moreover, they lack scientific evidence backing their efficacy.

What is worthwhile to note here is that fasting doesn’t mean starving. It is all about giving certain periods of non-eating to your body. Even if you are not snacking between meals, it is also considered fasting.

The goal is to give your body nutritious food at properly spaced intervals. Moreover, staying hydrated during the fasting hours is essential. Many times, you are just thirsty and it is perceived as hungry. The brain deciphers both as same. So, have a glassful or two of water, wait for some time, and

see for yourself whether you are really hungry or it was your body’s call to drink water.

What to eat when doing IF?

Eat anything healthy and wholesome. IF is certainly not that you fast and during the eating window, you can binge on energy-dense foods (high-calorie foods). Indulging in nutrient-rich foodstuffs such as fruits, vegetables, meats and fish, legumes and nuts is the ultimate goal of IF.

If you are starting for the first time, it is advisable to begin under the provision of a healthcare professional. IF is not recommended for children, pregnant or lactating women, diabetics, or people with eating disorders. For the rest, let the goodness of IF happen and your health takes a new and better stride.

French luxury houses give unsold goods a second chance

KATELL PRIGENT

In the extravagant world of the French luxury industry, brands used to prefer destroying their unsold goods rather than offering their high-priced products at a discount.

But gone are the days of binning the coats, handbags and shoes pooh-poohed by shoppers after a new anti-waste law came into force at the start of the year.

Now luxury houses are managing their stocks more carefully, offering deals to staff, making donations and recycling goods.

“It’s a subject that has become important today,” said Julie El Ghouzzi, a luxury goods expert at the Cultz consulting agency.

She pointed to the scandal that engulfed Burberry in 2018 after the British luxury brand disclosed that it had destroyed £28 million (\$38 million at current exchange rates) of unsold goods in 2017 — the equivalent of 20,000 of its trench coats. Following the firestorm the revelation triggered, Burberry announced it would halt the practice from the following year.

Markdowns to move goods are not an option in the luxury business as lower prices can undermine the attractiveness of their labels, which thrive on their elite status. “In the luxury sector, if the price tag is lower, so is the desire to buy it,” said El Ghouzzi.

Luxury houses are paying more attention to the subject now, said Arnaud Cadart, a portfolio manager at Paris-based asset manager Flornoy.

“Mentalities have changed, we’re no longer in an economy that values unbridled creation above all else,” he said.

Also gone is the mentality that “if it doesn’t work we’ll destroy it,” said Cadart.

Now luxury houses strive to fine-tune their stocks. The Kering group, which owns the Gucci, Saint Laurent, and Balenciaga labels among others, has invested in artificial intelligence in order to better manage its stock.

At its competitor LVMH, the world’s largest luxury group that includes Louis Vuitton, Dior, and Celine among many others, environmental development director Helene Valade said “the luxury business model is closely adjusted to demand” with low levels of stock being held by the firms.

Nevertheless, she acknowledged that the new law will push luxury houses to learn even more about their clients to better anticipate their purchases and thus reduce stocks to a minimum. — AFP

US warns of grim toll if Putin pursues invasion of Ukraine

HELENE COOPER & DAVID E SANGER

Senior Biden administration officials told lawmakers last week that they believed the Russian military had assembled 70 per cent of the forces it would need to mount a full invasion of Ukraine, painting the most ominous picture yet of the options that Russia’s president, Vladimir Putin, has created for himself in recent weeks.

During six hours of closed meetings with House and Senate lawmakers on Thursday, the officials warned that if Putin chose the most aggressive of his options, he could quickly surround or capture Kyiv, the capital, and remove the country’s democratically elected president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. They also warned that the invasion could prompt an enormous refugee crisis on the European continent, sending millions fleeing.

The officials stressed that US intelligence analysts still did not assess that Putin had made a final decision to invade.

But satellite imagery, communications among Russian forces and images of Russian equipment on the move show that he has assembled everything he would need to undertake what the officials said would constitute the largest military operation on land in Europe since 1945.

They also warned of enormous possible human costs if Putin went ahead with a full invasion, including the potential deaths of 25,000 to 50,000 civilians, 5,000 to 25,000 members of the Ukrainian military and 3,000 to 10,000 members of the Russian military. The invasion, they said, could also result in 1 million to 5 million refugees, with many of them pouring into Poland.

Should Putin decide to invade, US officials believe he is not likely to move until the second half of February. By that point, more ground will have frozen, making it easier to move heavy vehicles and equipment, and the Winter Olympics in Beijing will have ended or be winding down, which could help Putin avoid antagonising

President Xi Jinping of China, a critical ally for the Russian president.

The grim briefings were the latest salvo in weeks of grave messaging from the Biden administration about Putin’s plans. On the same day as the briefings, the administration also publicly warned that Russia may try to stage a false-flag operation suggesting that Russian-speaking populations are being attacked, which could create a pretext for an overt military operation.

The drumbeat of warnings is part of a concerted campaign by the administration to expose Putin’s manoeuvres in an attempt to build international pressure on him and make clear to him the risks to Russia of escalating the situation further.

Whether Putin decides to go through with a maximalist approach or a more scaled-down version is the question with which American, European and Ukrainian officials are all grappling.

For example, European officials, examining the same evidence, suggest that Putin could start smaller and test the reaction — with cyberattacks to paralyse Ukraine’s electric grid and communications, an invasion limited to the Russian-speaking territory in eastern Ukraine or an effort to cut the country in half, roughly along the Dnieper River.

US officials have acknowledged the possibility, especially if Putin wants to see if a smaller military action would create more divisions within Europe over whether to impose the most crushing economic sanctions.

Western intelligence officials also say they have picked up chatter suggesting Russian military leaders are confident they could take Ukraine in a blitzkrieg attack, but worry that they may not be able to hold on to the country, especially if the invasion sets off a significant insurgency. That has prompted speculation inside the Nato alliance that Putin might invade, seek to change the Ukrainian government and then partly withdraw his forces.

The briefings to Congress on Thursday were led by Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin; Secretary of State Antony Blinken; Avril Haines, director of national intelligence; and Gen Mark Milley, chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The US officials described to lawmakers five options that Putin could take, depending on the scope of his ambitions and his calculations about whether he would rather try to take the whole country quickly, no matter the human and economic cost to Russia, or attack it in pieces, in hopes of dividing Europe and Nato allies. — **The New York Times**



An instructor looks on at left as local residents practice cardiopulmonary resuscitation during a first aid class in Zaporizhzhia, eastern Ukraine.

Duqm empowers people and to boost economy



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An author, columnist, creative writer, translator and a communications professional

As Duqm is currently seeing several major infrastructure development projects unfolding, its rapidly growing future is really promising to the people and nation alike. All those remarkable projects, which are being developed there will undoubtedly enrich the national economy and promote the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. With all the different opportunities of investment and development on offer, the free zone will be totally

revamped to be another world-class unique attraction in the Sultanate of Oman. In fact, it marks a key investment and tourist destination, attracting local and international investors and tourists.

If truth is to be told, what is happening in Duqm is apparently reflecting the government's strategic development plans to make Duqm an unmatched worldwide investment destination, attracting foreign investments and businesses of different spheres. With its prime location open to the Arabian Sea and overlooking the Indian Ocean as well as on the way of international shipping lines, Duqm plays a significant role in thriving the national economy. To name a few of its outstanding projects are as the recently officially opened Port of Duqm, Drydock, Duqm Airport, Duqm Refinery, multi-purpose Fishing Port as well as the

upcoming oil storage park and hydrogen and green energy projects.

WITH ITS PRIME LOCATION OPEN TO THE ARABIAN SEA AND OVERLOOKING THE INDIAN OCEAN AS WELL AS ON THE WAY OF INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING LINES, DUQM PLAYS A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THRIVING THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

What is certainly thrilling in the different scenarios taking place in Duqm is the commendable contribution of young Omanis who are capable of playing a major role in leading and managing different

key projects there. Being in that part of the country, which is over 550 km from Muscat is by itself a challenge. Yet, the Omanis working there are sacrificing the luxurious life of the city just for the sake of taking part in the change happening in Duqm. This of course comes out of their unlimited thrill and interest to serve the nation and build the future for the generations to come. Salute to all Omanis working in Duqm who are rolling up their sleeves to help the government build the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. It is amazing how they are harmoniously complementing one another and working in different fields and positions as organs of the same body. All are competing towards achieving a common objective — serving the nation and people of Duqm.

They spare no effort to bring their best in delivering and achieving their missions. Therefore, Duqm, overall, is similarly mirroring the hard work and dedication of Omanis as well as their competence to lead promising development plans and some first-of-its-kind infrastructure projects. This proves how competent and reliable Omanis are whenever and wherever are placed.

In view of Omanis playing their role in the nation-building process, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik said: "Nation building and development are a public responsibility that requires the commitment of all, without exempting anyone from their role, in their respective specialties, and within their capabilities. The Sultanate of Oman has been founded, and its civilisation has been established through the sacrifices of its people who used their utmost in preserving its dignity and strength, exhibiting their loyalty in performing their national duties and advancing national interests to personal interests.

This is what we are resolved to consolidate and protect, so that we could attain the level of development that we aspire for, the prosperity, which we will work to realise and the decency that must prevail in all sectors and become firm grounds for all that we will do".

All what young Omanis need is to be given confidence so that they can show their excellence and commitment. Omanis should never be undervalued; evidences of Omani leaders are obviously many in the market, leading various government and private corporates and institutions. Thanks to His Majesty who accords his personal attention and trust on youth in particular since the early days of his reign as he called upon Omanis to shoulder the responsibility of the nation-building march with the government and contribute in shaping the renewed renaissance.



CHANGING OF THE GUARD

The Changing of the Guard takes place outside Buckingham Palace as Britain's Queen Elizabeth prepares to celebrate the 70th anniversary of her accession to the throne, in London, Britain, on Sunday. — Reuters

After eight years of war, Ukraine's army a tougher prospect

MAX DELANY

When he arrived at the front line as a volunteer to fight Russian-backed separatists in 2014, Pavlo Dolynskiy found Ukraine's army in a desperate state.

Kyiv had just lost the Crimean peninsula to Moscow without a shot being fired and its regular forces — eaten away by years of neglect and corruption — couldn't cope with the spiralling conflict in the east of the country.

"The army had reached the point where it couldn't stand up to the enemy," Dolynskiy, who now works at a veterans association, said. Soldiers struggled to get uniforms and boots, they had antiquated Soviet-era weapons, equipment often malfunctioned and the army relied on a ragtag mix of volunteers to plug the gaps. "It really was in a lamentable condition," he said.

But now, as tensions soar over a massive Russian military buildup on its border, Ukraine's armed forces present a far tougher prospect. Battle-hardened by nearly eight years of a simmering war that has claimed over 13,000 lives, the military has undergone reforms and been bolstered by Western arms and training.

"Eight years ago, the Ukrainian army did not exist. It was only on paper, and did not have the potential to fight," said Mykola Beleskov, a defence analyst at the National Institute for Strategic Studies in Kyiv.

"Now they are the best armed forces that Ukraine has had in thirty years of independence. The best prepared and the best trained."

The conflict has forced Ukraine's pro-Western leadership to try to turn their depleted Soviet legacy forces into a more modern military aligned closer to Nato standards.

Ukraine's defence budget has tripled over the past decade in US dollar terms to around \$4.2 billion in 2021 and reforms have looked to tackle rampant corruption and improve command and control.

The US has provided some \$2.5 billion in military aid since 2014 and training from Nato allies — including also Canada and Britain — has helped bolster battle readiness.

As part of the modernisation drive, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky this week signed a decree to add an extra 100,000 personnel to the armed forces over the next three years — taking its total to some 360,000.

The authorities have pledged to ramp up wages for those serving and professionalise the army by ending conscription by 2024.

A crucial addition has also been

the influx of foreign weaponry that has bolstered the military's Soviet-era stockpile.

Ukraine has purchased Turkish Bayraktar TB2 combat drones — which proved pivotal in the 2020 Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia — and received shipments of anti-tank missiles from the US and Britain.

"Its forces probably are stronger than they have been for a long time," said Sam Cranny-Evans, a research analyst at the RUSI think-tank in London. "Nonetheless, there are key deficiencies in Ukraine that have not been addressed."

He pointed to its limited air defence systems, lack of assets able to carry out long-range strikes and doubts over its reconnaissance capabilities.

Ukraine's airforce and navy also remain weak points.

Kyiv lost an estimated 70 per cent of its vessels when Russia seized the strategic Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea, a recent report from the US Congressional Research Service said.

British minesweepers are on their way but more ambitious plans to rebuild are hampered by severe budget constraints as the economy struggles. And graft remains a problem draining those tight resources.

"It is widely recognised that Ukraine's path forward regarding reforms and building appropriate military capabilities is predicated upon eliminating corruption in its defence sector," said an analysis from defence intelligence agency Janes.

Oleksandr Syrskyi, commander of Ukraine's ground forces, insisted to journalists on Thursday that the military "have taken a big step forward since 2014 — we increased our combat capacity and ability to repel an invasion".

But he still listed a raft of hardware his troops require: anti-sniper gear, anti-tank weapons, air defence systems, anti-drone systems, reconnaissance systems.

"We are working on this and we have agreements in place to try to improve all this," he said. After years of conflict, Ukraine's forces are combat-experienced and highly motivated.

There are also hundreds of thousands of people in the reserves and volunteer fighters have been brought under government control. Civilians too are preparing, with survival courses becoming increasingly popular among Ukrainians worried about a possible Russian attack.

Despite the improvements, Ukraine understands that its military remains massively outgunned and outmanned by Moscow's vastly superior armed forces.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has pumped vast sums into turning his own creaking military into a well-equipped modern outfit able to impose the Kremlin's goals in global hotspots like Syria.

Analysts said Ukraine would struggle if Moscow unleashed its missiles and aircraft in a major bombardment of critical infrastructure. "It is no secret that the Russian army is bigger and stronger," said analyst Beleskov.

But, he insisted, if there was a major invasion and Russia tried to hold territory then Ukraine's forces could still turn it into a costly "war of attrition" — especially if Western arms kept flowing in.

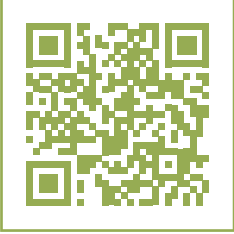
"Let's say it would be hard for us, very hard, but it would not be easy for the other side. It would not be easy for the Russians." —AFP



A service member of the Ukrainian armed forces walks in a trench at combat positions in the Donetsk region, Ukraine. — Reuters

sport

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India players pose with the ICC U19 Men's World Cup trophy following the ICC U19 Men's World Cup final against England at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua, Antigua and Barbuda. – ICC

India grab U19 World Cup for fifth time

NORTH SOUND, Antigua and Barbuda: India clinched a record-extending fifth Under-19 World Cup title on Saturday after a late partnership between Nishant Sindhu and Raj Bawa sealed a four-wicket win over England in a low-scoring game in Antigua.

Set 190 to win, India's run chase was dealt an early blow when opener Angkrish Raghuvanshi

was tamely caught behind off Joshua Boyden's second ball of the innings before Harnoor Singh and Shaik Rasheed settled in and saw off the new ball.

But England, looking to win only their second title, kept chapping away and reduced the opposition to 97-4 before a 67-run stand between Sindhu (50 not out) and Bawa (35) swung the

momentum back in India's favour. Wicketkeeper Dinesh Bana finished off the job in style, smashing consecutive sixes off James Sales to take India home.

"Proud moment for India, that we have managed to achieve this. It was difficult at the start to get the combination right," said India captain Yash Dhull.

"But as time went we became a

family and the team atmosphere was good. Great moment to be playing under this lot of support staff."

Earlier, England won the toss and opted to bat but India made a blistering start with the ball through medium pacer Ravi Kumar (4-34), with opener Jacob Bethell dismissed for two runs while skipper Tom Prest was

bowled for a duck.

England were reeling at 61-6 with Raj Bawa (5-31) tearing through the middle order but James Rew (95) and James Sales (34 not out) stitched together a 93-run stand to keep them in the hunt.

Rew fell five runs short of what would have been a heroic century when he pulled Ravi to deep

square leg where Kaushal Tambe juggled the catch before diving forward to pouch the ball one-handed.

"We would have liked to bat better... but the way James Rew batted was outstanding, deserved a hundred. We definitely got the bowling and we did believe we could defend this. But they batted well," said Prest. — **Reuters**

“Proud moment for India, that we have managed to achieve this. It was difficult at the start to get the combination right. But as time went we became a family and the team atmosphere was good. Great moment to be playing under this lot of support staff

YASH DHULL
India captain



Players of India pose with the ICC U19 Men's World Cup trophy after beating England by four wickets.

BRIEF SCORES
England U19 189 all out in 44.5 overs (James Rew 95, James Sales 34; Raj Bawa 5-31, Ravi Kumar 4-34) lost to India U19 195-6 in 47.4 overs (Shaik Rasheed 50, Nishant Sindhu 50, Raj Bawa 35; Joshua Boyden 2-24, Thomas Aspinwall 2-42, James Sales 2-51)



India's Nishant Sindhu plays a shot as England wicketkeeper Alex Horton watches during the ICC U19 World Cup final.



Raj Bawa of India celebrates with teammates Shaik Rasheed and Kaushal Tambe after dismissing George Bell of England at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium.



Everton's Mason Holgate in action with Brentford's Sergi Canos as Everton manager Frank Lampard looks on. – Reuters

LAMPARD

STARTS EVERTON REIGN WITH WIN

CHELSEA, WEST HAM SURVIVE SCARES AT FA CUP

LONDON: Frank Lampard made a winning start to his Everton reign as Brentford were beaten 4-1 in the FA Cup fourth round, while non-league Kidderminster were seconds away from causing a huge upset before West Ham escaped with a 2-1 victory on Saturday.

Lampard was hired on Monday to replace the sacked Rafael Benitez and Everton welcomed the former England star to Goodison Park by winning for just the second time in seven games.

Back in the dug-out for the first time since being dismissed by Chelsea in January 2021, Lampard watched as Yerry Mina headed Everton's opener in the 31st minute.

Richarlison doubled Everton's advantage from Allan's pass three minutes after half-time, with Brentford reducing the deficit through Ivan Toney's 54th-minute penalty.

Lampard was punching the air in delight eight minutes later

when Mason Holgate headed in Demarai Gray's corner.

Everton fans serenaded him with chants of "Super Frankie Lampard" before Andros Townsend bagged their fourth goal in stoppage-time.

The buoyant mood was a far cry from the toxic atmosphere during the unpopular Benitez's brief spell.

"I can only thank the fans for their support of me from the moment I walked out and of course at the end, seeing the team perform the way it did," Lampard said. "It's a day I'll never forget, it was very special, and I can't help but get caught up in the emotion of that for the moment."

Sixth-tier Kidderminster sit 113 places below West Ham, who are pushing for a place in next season's Champions League.

But the minnows were good value for Alex Penny's early goal at Aggborough, the defender smashing home after West Ham failed to deal with Omari Sterling's

free-kick. Moments away from a stunning exit, David Moyes' men were saved by Declan Rice as the England midfielder charged forward in the first minute of stoppage time, cut inside and fired into the roof of the net.

A penalty shootout was looming in extra time until Jarrod Bowen tapped home from close range with virtually the last kick to finally end Kidderminster's brave challenge.

CHELSEA ESCAPE

Chelsea also needed extra time to scrape past Plymouth as the League One team missed a late penalty in the Blues' 2-1 win at Stamford Bridge.

The European champions were without manager Thomas Tuchel, who tested positive for coronavirus, and Macaulay Gillesphey nodded Plymouth into a shock lead after just eight minutes.

Cesar Azpilicueta's inventive finish levelled just before half-

time, yet Chelsea had to wait until the end of the first half of extra time to go in front when Marcos Alonso slotted home.

Plymouth were awarded a penalty with seconds to go, but Kepa Arrizabalaga ensured there would not be a shoot-out as he saved Ryan Hardie's spot-kick.

In a clash between the leaders of the Premier League and the Championship, Manchester City recovered from Fulham's opening salvo to run out 4-1 winners.

Fabio Carvalho, linked with a move to Liverpool, put second-tier Fulham ahead in the fourth minute at the Etihad Stadium.

But that shock served to inspire City and they equalised immediately through Ilkay Gundogan before John Stones headed the hosts into the lead.

City's Algerian winger Riyad Mahrez converted a 53rd-minute penalty and netted again four minutes later to seal the victory.

— AFP

Spurs progress with Kane double

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, FEB 6

With two goals, one in each half, from Harry Kane, Tottenham Hotspur, moved into the fifth round of the FA Cup, beating Brighton 3-1. After an early season loss of form, perhaps with a distraction from his failure in his attempt to move to Manchester City, the Spurs striker looks settled again as his second goal of the match took his tally this season to 15 for Spurs and 25 for club and country.

Apart from a short period of about ten minutes toward the end of the first half, Tottenham dominated the opposition and led 2-0 at half time. Spurs should have taken an early lead when in the 12th minute, Brighton goalkeeper, Robert Sanchez fluffed a clearance but Kane, unmarked, was unable to control the ball.

His disappointment, however, did not last long as a minute later he put his side in the lead with a 20-yard drive after Son Heung-Min and Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg had combined to put the ball in Kane's path.

Tottenham's lead was doubled in the 24th minute when Emerson Royal picked up the ball in his half and ran down the right, deep into the Brighton half for a fine cross which took a deflection from Solly March and went over Sanchez high into the net. It was credited as an own goal although Royal, after his fine work would liked to have claimed it.

Five minutes after the second

goal, Kane should have scored again but decided to chip the ball to the left where Son was off side. Shortly before the break Sanchez was forced to make a fine save from Kane. Brighton too wasted chances through Neal Maupay in front of goal and Jakub Moder who shot over the bar from the 18-yard line when he was under no pressure.

After the break Moder again had a fine chance but lifted his shot over the bar. Spurs goalkeeper, Hugo Lloris, who had little to do in the first half, made an excellent one-handed save from a shot by Yves Bissouma which had taken a deflection from Cristian Romero.

Brighton were more on the attack in the second half and just after Spurs had missed a chance with Son shooting straight at Sanchez,

Lloris did well to punch away a corner taken by Pascal Gross. But he was beaten in the 63rd minute when a firm drive from Bissouma went into the net with a deflection off the back of Hojbjerg, giving no chance to the Tottenham captain.

Before the visitors could look for the equaliser, Spurs made it 3-1 within three minutes of the Brighton goal. Son made a fine run from the halfway line, passing Joel Veltman, but was tackled by Lewis Dunk at the six-yard box and as the ball went to Adam Webster who tried to pass back towards his goal, Kane slid in to put the ball over the line. There was little else to come from Brighton apart from a late miss by Maupay.



Tottenham Hotspur's Harry Kane celebrates scoring their third goal. – Reuters

■ 'AL ASEMA' CLAIMS GOLDEN SWORD



Al Asema camel's Omani coach Moosa bin Ali al Jahafi received the golden sword in the sixth King Abdulaziz Camel Festival in Saudi Arabia recently. The competitions concluded under the patronage of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The golden sword award was won by 'Al Asema' of Hajn Al Bashayer stables owned by HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said.

Al Kamil Wa'l Wafi edge Seeb in OVL

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 6

Al Kamil Wa'l Wafi edged Seeb in a five-setter to claim advantage ahead of their final meeting in the Oman Volleyball League at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Friday.

In the concluding second-round match, Al Kamil Wa'l Wafi prevailed 25-23, 31-29, 25-17, 25-14, 15-4 in a thrilling first division contest. With the win, Al Kamil Wa'l Wafi maintained their lead in the general standings, while Seeb remained in the second position.

They will meet in the final during March end.

Al Kamil Wa'l Wafi dominated the first two sets 25-23 and 31-29. After that, Seeb came back into match by claiming the third and fourth sets 25-17 and 25-14.

In the deciding set, Al Kamil Wa'l Wafi dominated to win it 15-4.



OMAN CLUB BLANK SOHAR

On Thursday, Oman Club beat Sohar in straight sets 25-13, 25-23, 29-27.

Oman Club will take on

Masirah to determine the third placed team in the OVL.

In another match, Saham also had a 3-0 win against Bahla 25-18, 25-21, 25-14.

India ease past Windies in 1,000th ODI

AHMEDABAD, India: Spinners Yuzvendra Chahal and Washington Sundar set up India's comfortable six-wicket victory over the West Indies for the hosts' landmark 1,000th one-day international on Sunday.

Rohit Sharma took to the field as India's new full-time ODI captain and his decision to bowl was vindicated by the two spinners as the hosts bowled out the West Indies for 176 in Ahmedabad.

The skipper's top-scoring 60 then helped India romp home in just 28 overs on the day they became the first team to pass the 1,000 ODI milestone.

The West Indies had slipped to 79-7 before Jason Holder hit 57 to salvage some dignity for the visitors. Leg-spinner Chahal returned figures of 4-49 — including the key wicket of skipper Kieron Pollard for nought — to rattle the West Indies batters.

Pace bowler Mohammed Siraj struck first in the third over to send back Shai Hope as an incoming delivery got the wicketkeeper-batsman's inside edge on to the stumps.

India introduced spin in the eighth over and off-spinner Sundar soon made it count, dispatching Brandon King for 13.

Chahal broke the West Indies' back with successive strikes but Holder avoided the hat-trick.

Holder put on 78 runs with



Fabien Allen, who made 29, to offer some resistance against India's onslaught.

He went past 2,000 ODI runs and then raised his 11th half-century in the 50-over format but finally fell to Krishna, who finished

with figures of 2-29.

Rohit came out attacking and dominated returning pace bowler Kemar Roach to smash two fours and one six in the 10th over.

He put on 84 runs with opening partner Ishan Kishan and made

his half-century in 42 balls before Alzarri Joseph trapped him lbw, also sending back former captain Virat Kohli in the same over.

Kohli announced his arrival with two successive boundaries but got caught out at long leg two

balls later.

Left-arm spinner Hosein got the wicket of Kishan for 28 and wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant was run out while backing up at the non-strikers end as India wobbled.

SCOREBOARD	
WEST INDIES	
S Hope b Siraj	8
B King c Yadav b Sundar	13
D Bravo lbw Sundar	18
S Brooks c Pant b Chahal	12
N Pooran lbw Chahal	18
K Pollard b Chahal	0
J Holder c Pant b Krishna	57
A Hosein c Pant b Krishna	0
F Allen c and b Sundar	29
A Joseph c Yadav b Chahal	13
K Roach not out	0
Extras: (lb4, w4)	8
Total: (all out, 43.5 overs)	176
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-44, 3-45, 4-71, 5-71, 6-78, 7-79, 8-157, 9-167	
Bowling: Siraj 8-2-26-1, Krishna 10-0-29-2, Sundar 9-1-30-3, Thakur 7-0-38-0, Chahal 9.5-0-49-4	
INDIA (TARGET 177)	
R Sharma lbw Joseph	60
I Kishan c Allen b Hosein	28
V Kohli c Roach b Joseph	8
R Pant run out (Joseph)	11
S Yadav not out	34
D Hooda not out	26
Extras: (b1, lb2, w8)	11
Total: (4 wickets, 28 overs)	178
Fall of wickets: 1-84, 2-93, 3-115, 4-116	
Bowling: Roach 5-0-41-0, Holder 5-0-29-0, Joseph 7-0-45-2, Hosein 9-0-46-1, Allen 2-0-14-0	

Suryakumar Yadav, who made 34, and debutant Deepak Hooda, who scored 26, saw the team home with their unbeaten stand of 62.

The hosts wore black armbands to pay their respects to superstar Bollywood singer Lata Mangehskar, known as the 'Nightingale of India', who died earlier Sunday at the age of 92.

The second ODI is on Wednesday, with all the three matches to be played at the same venue. — AFP

FEBRUARY

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Samayil Industrial City attracts 19 projects in 2021

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 6

Samayil Industrial City, administered by the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), added 19 new investments to its expanding portfolio last year.

Covering a total area of around 122,000 sq metres, the new projects relate to the manufacturing of metal products, doors and windows, tubes for ammunition, firefighting tools and equipment, marble and cement, and food industries such as meat products, dairy products, poultry, dates, in addition to medical and carton fabrication industries.

When fully operational, they will create more than 300 direct jobs. Meanwhile, Madayn is currently



undertaking the design and implementation of support infrastructure projects in Samayil Industrial City. This includes a dual-lane road spanning 1.4 km from the roundabout at the main



entrance of the Industrial City to the roundabout near Al Sharqiyah expressway.

The project also includes designing and executing sewage pipe linking phase 3 with phase 1 of Samayil Industrial City.

The completion rate of the project has reached 48 per cent and is expected to be completed in April 2022.

Samayil Industrial City is divided into several sectors including food industry, plastic materials industry, steel industry, marble industry, building materials industry, in addition to other industries such as furniture, petrochemicals, and supporting services such as warehousing.

China, Argentina pledge closer ties on currency, 'Belt and Road'

BEIJING: China and Argentina pledged on Sunday to deepen strategic cooperation on trade, currency and the infrastructure-focused Belt and Road Initiative, the government and state media said after a meeting of presidents Xi Jinping and Alberto Fernandez.

The leaders agreed on a five-year plan for agricultural cooperation and identified key areas to grow and diversify trade and investment in the sector.

China is a major buyer of Argentine soybeans and beef. It also has a major currency swap deal with the country, which helps to bolster its dwindling foreign reserves.

Fernandez is battling to revive the economy of Argentina, a major grains producer.

Argentina's government said in a statement that the two sides had highlighted the importance of the currency swap between their central banks and agreed to continue "strengthening cooperation" in this regard.

The two also signed a memorandum of understanding related to China's signature Belt and Road initiative, a platform for Chinese investment in railways, ports and highways worldwide.

"This strategic decision will allow the national government to sign different agreements that guarantee financing for investments and works for more than \$23.7 billion," Argentina's government said.

— Reuters

'Unifying body' key to strengthening the Sultanate of Oman's water-food-energy nexus

KEY FINDINGS: Gulf Intelligence issues whitepaper based on discussions with key stakeholders operating across the Sultanate of Oman's water-food-energy ecosystem

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

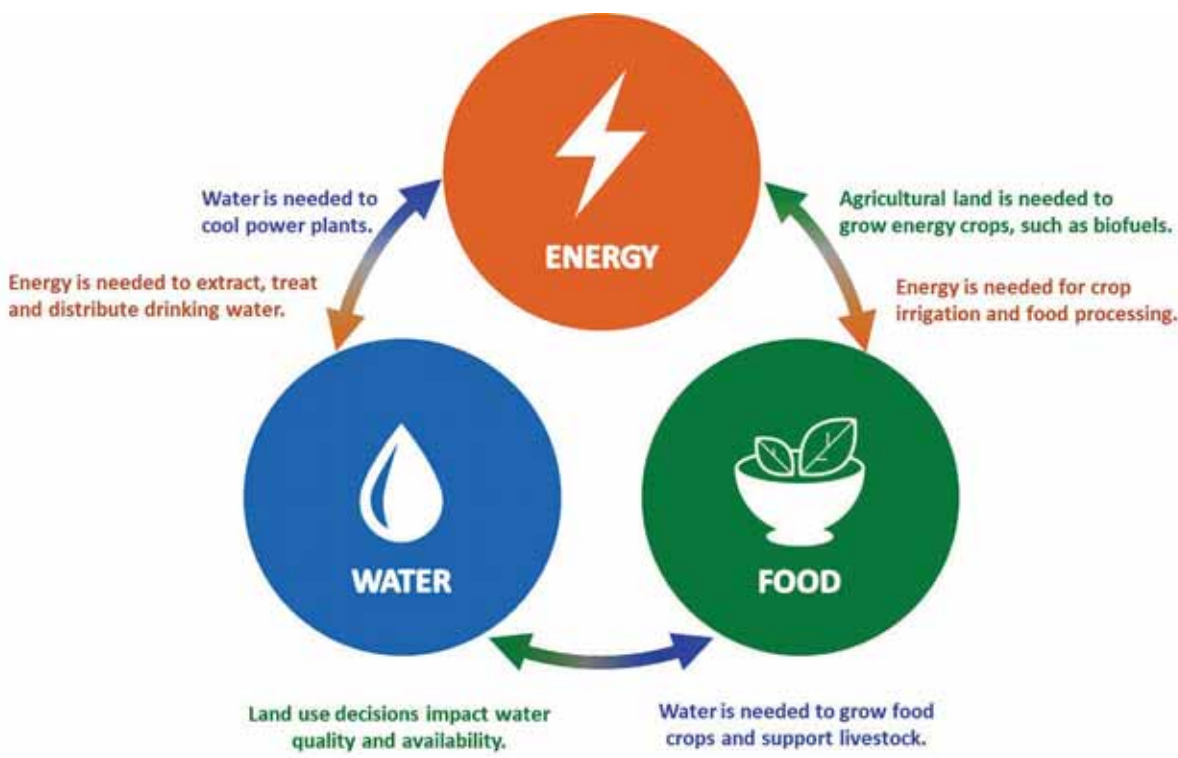
A whitepaper published by a leading regional strategic consultancy group has urged the Omani authorities to consider establishing a unifying body to help achieve a robust and sustainable water, energy and food nexus for the country.

The proposal is among 10 recommendations listed in the latest whitepaper of The Gulf Intelligence (GI), a Dubai-based think-tank, as part of a series of special reports focusing on different aspects of the Oman Energy Master Plan 2040.

The report, titled "The Water-Food-Energy Nexus: How to find Sustainable & Holistic Solutions for Oman?" is based on discussions held with key decision-makers representing stakeholder organisations operating across the water, food and energy ecosystem in the Sultanate of Oman.

The water-food-energy nexus is built around the premise that water security, food security and energy security — all imperatives of sustainable development — are interlinked.

Consequently, any actions taken in support of one goal will likely have an adverse impact on the others. Hence the need to



achieve a balanced nexus between the three imperatives.

According to GI's whitepaper, efforts to strengthen the water-food-energy nexus in the Sultanate of Oman are "siloed", with each aspect of the nexus managed by different ministries and public entities that fail to collaborate with each other

would help the Sultanate attract more international business".

Importantly, the report stresses the need for water, food and energy systems to be redesigned to support investment in local circularity.

"This must also promote local solutions: local production, local talent, and local off-takers. In part, this means gradually transitioning away from the dominant centralised system, where there is one supplier of power, one supplier of fuel, one supplier of water, and so on," it stated.

In this regard, the Gulf Intelligence report noted the

need for key stakeholder agencies, notably Oman Investment Authority, which has major investments in the food and fish processing sectors, and the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, to work more closely together to "develop joint policies that create a circular value chain".

Further, with a view to strengthening water security, the report calls for enhanced efforts to track and map the nation's groundwater reserves, while planning its water management processes.

In support of circularity, the report for waste to be re-labelled

as raw materials with the goal of encouraging recycling and reuse, and thereby creating new jobs, driving innovation and In-Country Value development, and job creation as well.

Among other recommendations, the report underlines the need for greater public awareness on strengthening the nexus.

"This is especially crucial for Oman's large youth population," the whitepaper explained.

"Crafting stronger ecosystems for training and job opportunities will help unleash more entrepreneurship and enable youngsters in classrooms and the workplace to "see" a career in supporting the nexus, which also feeds ICV back into the community."

Participating in the discussions that contributed to the whitepaper were, among others: Eng Saleh al Shanfari, Group CEO, Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC); Abdulrahman al Yahyai, CEO, Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL); Eng Zaher al Sulaimani, President, Oman Water Society; Steve Phimister, Managing Director, PDO; Walter Simpson, Managing Director, CC Energy Development (CCED); Steve Kelly, President & General Manager, Occidental of Oman; Dr Saif al Haddabi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation; Prof Saif bin Nasser al Bahri, Director, Oil and Gas Research Centre, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU); and Dr Syham Bentouati, Managing Director, NAFAS International.

Bank Muscat wins Best Private Bank in Oman Award from Global Finance

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat Private, the Sultanate’s premier banking service targeted at exclusive high net-worth individual customers, has once again won the prestigious “Best Private Bank in Oman” award from Global Finance for 2022. The accolade adds to a number of other international awards received in the past and is yet one more feather in its cap in delivering exceptional wealth management solutions to a highly-discerning client base over the past two decades.

Speaking on the occasion, Amjad bin Iqbal al Lawati (pictured), Deputy General Manager — Customer Segments, said: “Bank Muscat is delighted to win this prestigious award from Global Finance once again, and I

would like to take this opportunity to thank all our valued customers for their trust and strong confidence in the bank.

By repeatedly winning accolades, Bank Muscat has highlighted the highest standards of professionalism achieved by conforming to international norms, standards and practices. Going ahead, our customers can continue to expect outstanding customer-centric services and products that will take care of their financial and wealth management needs.”

Bank Muscat Private’s offerings are powered by its knowledgeable and well trained base of Relationship Managers (RMs), who work closely with each



client to offer highly customised financial and wealth management services and solutions.

Private banking clients have access to a complete suite of investment options in global asset classes through its wealth management platform and tie-ups with international counter parties.

The range of solutions offered to its clients includes stocks, bonds,

ETFs and mutual funds across global markets. Bank Muscat Private Banking also offers selective exposure to Private Equity Funds, Real Estate Funds and Commodity ETFs; Offshore Banking and Portfolio Management through globally reputed counterparties.

Private Banking clients also receive regular research reports and briefings covering investment ideas, global macroeconomic outlook and updates on key economic and geographic events impacting performance of various asset classes.

An exclusive Private banking Visa Infinite credit card, a Visa Platinum debit card, luxury car finance and yacht finance are available for Private banking

clients along with competitive rates for deposits, loans and foreign exchange.

Clients also enjoy 1 per cent cashback rewards on all transactions made through the Private Visa Infinite credit card.

The Infinite credit card also facilitates unlimited access to 1,000+ airport lounges globally, complimentary chauffeur service to and from Muscat International Airport, special offers at over 900 luxury hotels around the world, multi-trip travel insurance and access to a Global Concierge Service. With the innumerable features and benefits on offer, Bank Muscat Private clients can look forward to a highly personalised financial journey.

Ahli Islamic enhances customers’ experience through ‘ahliconnect’



MUSCAT: Reflecting its commitment towards providing secured and advanced banking solutions to its customers in line with the dynamic environment, Ahli Islamic announced the continued servicing of its customers through a new, technologically advanced call centre — ‘ahliconnect’.

Through the new centre, Ahli Islamic aims at enriching customers’ experience, upgrading the provided services, and addressing the challenges facing them.

Yousuf bin Salim al Rawahi, DGM — Head of Ahli Islamic said, “At Ahli Islamic, we are keen to keep up with the requirements of our customers and provide Sharia-compliant services, characterised by efficiency and speed. Reflecting our understanding of the importance of providing solutions commensurate with the lifestyle of customers, the bank has strengthened the level of its services in the call centre under ‘ahliconnect’ umbrella. We take into account the adoption of advanced solutions that serve all customer segments.”

Ruqaiya al Lawati, Head of Change Management, said, “ahliconnect is featured by a team dedicated to customer service, banking execution and a high degree of responsibility and professionalism. The team is also qualified to work effectively with various variables in the sector. It is also able to address the challenges that customers may face in completing their transactions.

This works through employing high-quality practices and technology that contributes to managing expectations and uplifting customer service excellence. Our primary objective is to make our customer life easy.”

Through ‘ahliconnect’, Ahli Islamic customers can request a new, lost or damaged Debit Card, increase debit/credit card limit, and update their personal information such as email address, passport details, and residence address. They can also request re-issue of PIN Debit/Credit Card, chequebook and many other Sharia-compliant banking services.

‘ahliconnect’ offers a range of services that facilitates customers with on-call access to their account with the bank. For customers with more than one Ahli Islamic account, ‘ahliconnect’ enables them to request that all accounts at the bank be linked to one automated Debit Card, so they can conduct their banking transactions faster and easier.

Enjoy all terrains with GAC Motor GS4 i-4WD SUV



MUSCAT: GAC Motor has introduced a special version of the GS4 i-4WD SUV that is purpose built for Oman. Considering the vast and varied terrains of Oman, the GS4 i-4WD SUV has been engineered for impressive performance on any terrain.

The GS4 i-4WD makes a bold and eye-catching statement with its sleek profile that is enhanced with the ‘Flying Dynamics’ grille design. The new improved design of the headlights, taillights and the alloy wheels makes its overall appeal, contemporary and elegant.

Making every journey outstanding with power-packed

moments is the 1.5L, 150 HP, turbo engine. This is paired to a 6-speed automatic transmission. The result is low fuel consumption and quieter transmission power.

In Oman, GAC Motor vehicles are distributed by New World Autos and backed by Saud Bahwan Group. For more information, please visit www.gacmotoroman.com or www.youtube.com/GAC_MotorOman or www.facebook.com/GAC_MotorOman or instagram.com/GAC_MotorOman/. For further details, & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit the GAC Motor showroom at Wattayah.

NBO, Muscat Bay sign customer mortgage financing agreement

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) has signed a strategic partnership with Muscat Bay to provide finance facilities for buyers interested in purchasing a property within the luxury integrated development.

Starting at just 4.55 per cent for three years and 4.99 per cent for longer, NBO’s mortgage and housing loans come with easy approvals, no maximum cap and special rates on life and property insurance.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, “Adding to a growing number of tie-ups with leading developers and real estate marketing agencies, we’re delighted to be partnering with Muscat Bay.

Offering a prime location and a range of highly sought-after properties, buyers are provided plenty of options to make their dream home a reality, while accessing the unbeatable benefits that come with our home loans.”

Paul Jessup, Senior Vice President at Muscat Bay, said, “We are pleased to partner with



the National Bank of Oman to facilitate attractive financing options for prospective buyers and residents looking to purchase their luxury home here at Oman’s unique resort village.

By offering favourable home loans to Omanis and Expats, NBO is the perfect complement to our growing sophisticated community, both from Oman, the GCC and beyond.”

Paul Jessup added, “Now is the perfect time to invest in Muscat Bay because the launch

of our 5 Star Jumeirah beach hotel will open our offer to a global market, creating more demand for the final few units to be sold in phase 1.

Muscat Bay’s residential offering will also benefit from the Jumeirah Residents Club, which will allow the community to receive a range of luxury services and promotions from the 5 Star operator; a unique concept in the market which will help consolidate Muscat Bay’s position as Oman’s truly world-class integrated resort.”

Own the sleek Camry with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Own a Toyota Camry and benefit with service 2 years/20,000 kms (Whichever is earlier), 1 year insurance or cash gift in lieu of insurance RO 250 to RO 275. The campaign is valid until March 9, 2022. (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply. Visit the showroom for exact details.

The Camry is available with a choice of three powertrain options, including a new 2.5-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine that produces 204 hp and 243 nm of torque and is paired with an eight-speed Direct-Shift automatic transmission; a 3.5-litre V6 engine with D-4S fuel injection system that produces 298 hp and 356 nm of torque



and is mated to an eight-speed automatic transmission; and an electrified hybrid system, which combines a petrol engine and two electric motors.

The combined power of the two power sources is 208 hp. It is also paired with an Electronically Controlled Continuously Variable Transmission (ECVT), delivering

heightened driving pleasure.

The Toyota Camry introduces a level of refinement that exceeds expectations. It provides a comfortable and stable ride with superior handling characteristics thanks to the Toyota New Global Architecture (TNGA).

A new front fascia incorporates a more defined lower-intake

area, with grille bars extending dynamically to the sides creating a refined look that is enhanced by chrome-plated ornamentation for a premium feel. The sportier grades wear a noticeably different body style than the premium grades, with a bold redesigned lower fascia shape featuring a powerfully expressive gloss black mesh grille and larger side vents.

This athletic look is further emphasised with new 18-inch bright machined-finish alloy wheels. A subtle rear spoiler lip is paired with a unique rear bumper with distinctive corner lines, as well as new-look combination lamps.

The Camry’s interior melds functionality, elegant styling, and impeccable craftsmanship. The dash design has a sporty, cockpit-like feel, while treating both the

driver and the front passenger to wider visibility.

The exciting interior’s distinctive design offers comfort and convenience with a layer of luxury and hosts a range of advanced features. These include a panoramic moonroof, a floating 7-inch or 9-inch multimedia touch screen that comes integrated with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto™, among others.

Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications. For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/. For any further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota Showroom.



GCC markets positive on multi-year high oil prices

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, FEB 6

The S&P GCC composite index rose by 7 per cent in January 2022, driven by a sustained increase in oil prices, the Kuwait Financial Centre (Markaz) stated in its Monthly Market Review report for the month.

All GCC markets gained for the month, according to the report. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait were the biggest gainers among GCC, rising 9.0 per cent, 7.5 per cent and 4.4 per cent respectively, while the Sultanate of Oman recorded a modest loss of 0.3 per cent. Abu Dhabi, Bahrain and Dubai gained 2.5 per cent, 0.7 per cent and 0.2 per cent respectively.

Among the GCC blue chip companies, the best performer was Riyadh Bank, which gained 25.5 per cent during the month, followed



by Saudi National Bank, which gained 14.6 per cent.

The anticipated multiple interest rate hikes are expected result in increased profit margins for banks,

thereby painting a positive outlook for the GCC banking sector.

Global equity markets had a volatile month, with major indices ending in negative territory.

Though concerns surrounding the spread of the new variant eased, geo political tensions and tapering of rates by the US Federal Reserve to curb high

inflation acted as headwinds. Post the FOMC meeting this month, analysts expect as much as five rate hikes in 2022.

Q4 earnings started with unsatisfactory results and outlook from JP Morgan and ended on a positive note with one of the world's most valuable company, Apple, reporting highest revenue in the company's history amid increase in iPhone sales.

Investors looked out for management commentary on and financial impact of high inflation & supply chain bottlenecks.

The MSCI World and S&P 500 (US) indices each lost 5.3 per cent for the month. Emerging market stocks also suffered losses as foreign asset managers were on a selling spree owing to rising US yields.

At a time when most major economies are looking to hike

interest rates, China had lowered its benchmark rates with a view to boost economic growth, especially in its property segment. The country's Q4 2021 GDP figures and retails sales growth for December reflected signs of weakness.

Oil continued its winning rally through January and reached multi-year highs on the back of rising geopolitical tensions and supply constraints against strong recovery in demand.

Majority of banks and other institutions have upgraded their estimates for the oil price and currently expect it to reach \$100 per barrel in the near future.

On the other hand, gold had a mixed month. Despite gold being considered as a safe bet against inflation, the strengthening of the US dollar towards the month end wiped off earlier gains in gold prices, Markaz added.

Oil hits seven year highs as rally extends to a 7th week

NEW YORK: Oil prices surged to seven-year highs on Friday, extending their rally into a seventh week on ongoing worries about supply disruptions fuelled by frigid US weather and ongoing political turmoil among major world producers.

Brent crude rose \$2.16, or 2.4 per cent, to settle at \$93.27 a barrel having earlier touched its highest since October 2014 at \$93.70. US West Texas Intermediate crude ended \$2.04, or 2.3 per cent, higher at \$92.31 a barrel after trading as high as \$93.17, its highest since September 2014.

Brent ended the week 3.6 per cent higher, while WTI posted a 6.3 per cent rise in their longest rally since October.

The market's surge accelerated in the last two days as buyers piled into crude contracts due to expectations that world suppliers will continue to struggle to meet demand. US jobs figures were surprisingly strong in January, despite the presence of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus.

Crude prices, which have already rallied about 20 per cent so far this year, are likely to surpass \$100 per barrel due to strong global demand, market strategists said this week. Reflecting that bullish view, money managers raised their net long US crude futures and options positions in the week to February 1 by 6,616 contracts to 304,013, the US Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) said. — **Reuters**



Crude oil storage tanks are seen from above at the Cushing oil hub, in Cushing, Oklahoma. — **Reuters**

Omantel inks agreement with A'Namaa Poultry

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, FEB 6

Omantel and A'Namaa Poultry, one of the subsidiaries of Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC), signed a key agreement to bring world class technology solutions that will enable A'Namaa Poultry to digitalise its processes for efficient operations and business management.

As per the agreement, which was signed by Eng Yaqoob bin Mansoor al Ruqaishi, CEO of A'Namaa Poultry Company, and Talal bin Said al Maamari, Omantel CEO, Omantel will provide end-to-end ICT solutions, meeting A'Namaa Poultry project's long term goals, to include unique state-of-the-art technology solutions that are implemented for the



first time in the region, through Omantel's technology partner SAP.

The work on project is being built in Al-Safa area in the Wilayat of Ibri at a total cost of RO 100 million, which is amongst the latest food security projects in the Sultanate of Oman.

The project aims to contribute

in achieving a self-sufficiency in poultry's industry, and it is considered to be one of the mega projects in the region aiming to produce 60,000 tonnes (per annum) of poultry meat, with the highest technical specifications and using the latest technologies.

Commenting on the signing

of the agreement, Talal bin Said al Maamari, CEO — Omantel, said, "The solutions that we will provide to this project includes new and first of its kind in this region ICT solutions for hatchery and meat management. At Omantel, we seek to capitalise on our experience, global and local partnerships, the latest technologies and communication solutions to meet the needs of our customers."

Eng Yaqoob bin Mansoor al Ruqaishi, CEO — A'Namaa Poultry Company, said: "The signing of this agreement reflects a key milestone in the progress of A'Namaa Poultry project, which is nearing completion. Through this agreement, we seek to utilise the latest technologies and ERP systems to ensure efficient and reliable commercial and technical operations."

US job growth beats expectations; unemployment rate at 4.0 per cent

WASHINGTON: The US economy created far more jobs than expected in January even as raging Covid-19 infections disrupted activity at consumer-facing businesses, pointing to underlying strength in the labour market.

The survey of establishments in the Labour Department's closely watched employment report on Friday showed non-farm payrolls increased by 467,000 jobs last month. Data for December was revised higher to show 510,000 jobs created instead of the previously reported 199,000.

Economists had forecast 150,000 jobs added in January. Estimates ranged from a decrease of 400,000 to a gain of 385,000 jobs.

The labour market resilience could alter expectations that economic growth would slow significantly in the first quarter after robust growth in the fourth quarter.

Economists had been bracing for a disappointment as the government surveyed businesses



Women walk by a 'Now Hiring' sign outside a store in Arlington, Virginia. — **Reuters**

for payrolls in mid-January, when Omicron infections were peaking.

Data from the Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, published in mid-January, showed 8.8 million people reported not being at work because of coronavirus-related reasons between December 29 and January 10.

Its survey of small businesses also showed an increase in establishments reporting large negative impacts from the pandemic between January 10-16.

Workers who are out sick or

in quarantine and do not get paid during the payrolls survey period are counted as unemployed in the establishment survey even if they still have a job with their companies.

Lower-paid hourly workers in industries like healthcare as well as leisure and hospitality, who typically do not have paid sick leave, bore the brunt of the winter wave. According to the latest government data, paid sick leave was available to 79 per cent of civilian workers in March 2021.

The labour market resilience could alter expectations that economic growth would slow significantly in the first quarter after robust growth in the fourth quarter

Employment could increase further, with coronavirus infections subsiding.

First-time applications for unemployment benefits dropped for a second straight week last week, retreating further from a three-month high touched in mid-January, the government reported on Thursday.

The unemployment rate was at 4.0 per cent in January. The government introduced new population assumptions, which caused a break in the series. January's jobless rate and other ratios from the household survey are not directly comparable to December. — **Reuters**

China says US tariff extension on solar products hurts new energy trade



Wind turbines and solar panels are seen at a wind and solar power plant by State Power Investment Corporation (SPIC) in Zhangjiakou, Hebei province, China. — **Reuters**

SHANGHAI: A US extension of tariffs on solar products distorts international trade and hinders the development of clean, low-emission energy.

President Joe Biden extended tariffs on imported solar energy equipment for four years, though he eased the terms to exclude bifacial panels that generate power on both sides, which are dominant among big US projects. Donald Trump imposed the tariffs on solar imports in 2018, using authority under section 201 of a 1974 trade law. The levies started at 30 per cent and declined to 15 per cent.

"The US government insisted on extending the section 201 measures despite strong opposition from related parties at home and abroad, and they not only do not help the healthy development of the domestic US industry, but also distort the normal order of international trade in photovoltaics as a new energy product", China's Ministry of Commerce said in a statement.

China expressed hope that the United States would take "concrete action" to facilitate free trade in new energy products and "contribute to the global development of a low greenhouse gas emission economy."

Driven by growing protectionism abroad as well as rising domestic demand, China's solar manufacturers have focused increasingly on the home market. — **Reuters**

Tech slump forces IPO hopefuls to consider Plan B

The window for technology companies to list their shares is closing. Falling stocks have depressed valuations and made investors pickier about new listings. Private firms will have to reluctantly consider Plan B. Many tech startups had hoped last year's record year for initial public offerings would persist in 2022. January's selloff has changed the mood.

Expectations of higher interest rates hurt highly valued companies, while disappointing results from Meta Platforms, Spotify Technology and PayPal added to the gloom. The Renaissance IPO index, which tracks companies that went public in the last two years including Uber Technologies and Airbnb, fell 20 per cent in January.



Unprofitable companies that listed in the US last year were down an average of 32 per cent from their IPO price at the end of January

Unprofitable companies that listed in the United States last year were down an average of 32 per cent from their IPO price at the end of January.

IPO hopefuls like US payroll startup Justworks and Amsterdam-based file sharing firm WeTransfer are therefore rethinking their plans. So far this year 27 companies have called off or postponed their listings.

The disappointed debutants have several options. Larger and more established groups with robust cash flow can afford to wait out the storm. These include fintech firm Klarna, which was most recently valued at \$46 billion and has been considering a direct listing.

Rapid grocery delivery company Gopuff, which has hired IPO advisers, topped up its reserves with a \$1.5 billion convertible debt issue in December.

Those that need cash can go back to venture capital investors, which are still sitting on record sums. However, pressure on valuations raises the risk of a dreaded "down round".

Others could seek a buyer. WeTransfer, which was aiming for an IPO valuation of \$700 million, could be acquired by the likes of Adobe. Larger companies, however, risk regulatory scrutiny if they sell to a competitor.

A last resort is to merge with a special purpose acquisition company, bypassing the IPO process. This could be an option for companies like Uber-backed scooter and bike sharing firm Lime and social network Reddit.

However, last year's SPAC mergers are on average trading more than 40 per cent below the price at which the blank-cheque firms initially sold their shares. Whatever option the IPO hopefuls choose, a valuation discount looks hard to avoid.

— Reuters



NO MORE CRUISIN'

The 342-metre long and almost finished cruise ship Global Dream is pictured in the main assembly hall of the shipbuilder MV Werften in Wismar, Germany. One of the world's largest cruise ships sits, unfinished, in a wind-swept dock in Wismar on Germany's Baltic coast after the its makers filed for bankruptcy in January. — AFP

Legitimate investors are financing environmental crime



SIMON ZADEK

The author is chair of Finance for Biodiversity (F4B)

WHEN IT COMES TO ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES, THE APPLICATION OF ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING RULES IS PARTICULARLY WEAK.

One of the most profitable global criminal enterprises is one you might not expect. It is crimes like illegal fishing and logging, waste trafficking and trade in wildlife. And the financial sector is reaping huge rewards from these assaults against the natural environment on which we depend.

It is difficult to overstate the damage environmental crimes cause. By destroying ecosystems and depleting natural assets, such crimes destroy livelihoods, undermine governing institutions and impede our ability to address climate change.

As a new report by Finance for Biodiversity (F4B) points out, such crimes generate up to \$280 billion each year, decreasing tax revenues by some \$30 billion per year, with poorer, environmentally rich countries losing the most.

Financial institutions sustain the incentive — often unwittingly — by investing in enterprises that benefit from such crimes. Through the profits made from these investments, these institutions effectively launder the proceeds of environmental crime.

Anti-money-laundering (AML) rules are supposed to prevent the conversion of

proceeds from illegal activities into clean money.

For example, tightened rules and strengthened enforcement in recent years have made it more difficult to finance terrorism. But inadequate information and technology shortfalls hamper such efforts, with regulators struggling to keep up with increasingly sophisticated approaches to obfuscating the sources of funds.

When it comes to environmental crimes, the application of AML rules is particularly weak. To its credit, the Financial Action Task Force — the inter-governmental agency charged with combating money laundering and financing of terrorism — has raised its profile in this area.

But significant action has remained largely confined to the illegal wildlife trade — a criminal enterprise that, despite affecting thousands of wildlife species and millions of people, is only a small part of the problem.

But even if existing AML rules were applied to more environmental crimes, it would not be enough. As the F4B report shows, the returns on investment derived from environmental crimes would also have to be subject to AML rules.

Financial institutions, including pension

funds, not only provide channels through which perpetrators of environmental crimes launder the profits; they also invest in nature-dependent sectors such as food, wood products and infrastructure, the profitability of which can be increased through environmental crime.

For example, illegal logging can make more land available for agricultural production, thereby lowering costs, increasing output and improving quality.

The result is higher profits for businesses — and bigger returns for their investors. While the investments may technically be legal, the returns are partly derived from criminal activity, thus amounting to illicit proceeds that must be regulated accordingly.

In theory, financial institutions already have an incentive not to support businesses that are benefitting from environmental crimes: Such firms face the threat of fines or even the forced suspension of some activities, making them a riskier bet for investors. But the risks are too small to be an effective deterrent to investors; in most cases, environmental laws are poorly enforced and, where fines are imposed, they are usually small.

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Wind powers change in England's industrial heartland

ROLAND JACKSON

THE NEED FOR CHEAPER SOURCES OF ENERGY BECAME INCREASINGLY URGENT THIS WEEK, AS THE GOVERNMENT SCRAMBLED TO HEAD OFF A COST OF LIVING CRISIS, FACED WITH RUNAWAY ELECTRICITY AND GAS COSTS THAT ARE FUELLING DECADES-HIGH INFLATION.

On the banks of the River Humber in northern England, the winds of change are blowing through Hull, where factory workers busily craft turbine blades in a green revolution.

Hull, known for a once-thriving fishing industry, the poet Philip Larkin, rugby league, and the city's eponymous football club recently bought by Turkish TV personality Acun Ilcali, is home to Britain's biggest wind turbine blade plant.

That has placed Hull at the centre of the UK government's long-term plan to slash carbon emissions, tackle climate change and cut rocketing household energy bills.

German-Spanish giant Siemens

Gamesa is rapidly expanding its facility to meet booming demand and keep the country's much-trumpeted 2050 net-zero target on track.

The need for cheaper sources of energy became increasingly urgent this week, as the government scrambled to head off a cost of living crisis, faced with runaway electricity and gas costs that are fuelling decades-high inflation.

Britain unveiled financial support for households after the UK energy regulator lifted prices to reflect the spiking natural gas market. "We are doing our bit to tidy the world up and get cheaper and cleaner energy for everybody," blade painter Carl Jackson, 56, said from the factory floor.

"I think wind power is a big part of the future. It's been a massive

boost to jobs and the economy in Hull," added Jackson, who joined when Siemens Gamesa opened six years ago. The hub has since manufactured 1,500 hand-made turbine blades and now employs more than 1,000 people.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson, host of last November's UN climate change summit in Glasgow, has vowed to "level up" economic opportunity in places like Hull, which voted overwhelmingly for Brexit.

Siemens Gamesa built the £310-million plant jointly with Associated British Ports in 2016, and it is now undergoing a major extension to build bigger blades.

The Hull factory manufactures about 300 turbine blades per year, with each measuring 81 metres in length — about the same as

the wingspan of an Airbus A380 aircraft.

A wind turbine, comprising three such blades, can power an average house for 24 hours with one single rotation. New, even longer 100-metre blades will provide enough power for up to two days.

In the cavernous Hull factory, staff assemble balsa wood, fibreglass and resin into vast blade moulds to start a journey that will eventually harness the ferocious winds of the North Sea.

That enables Britain to cut carbon emissions while curbing its dependency on imported energy and lowering prices in the long term, said plant director Andy Sykes.

"Over the course of last year, 25 per cent of the UK's (electricity) was

delivered from wind power," said Sykes.

"That will only continue to grow and help drive down the cost of energy by reducing the need for the import of energy." The group will open another factory in Le Havre, northern France, this year in a push for cleaner energy across Europe, where wind generated an average 16 per cent of electricity according to 2020 industry data.

Scotland recently awarded a string of vast offshore wind projects after Johnson vowed to make Britain the "Saudi Arabia of wind".

Hull is also expanding into the broader renewable sector, with plans for biofuels, green hydrogen, and carbon capture, as well as solar and tidal power generation under the city's "Green Port" initiative.

— AFP

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The high price of collecting antiques and old coins

Salim al Hattali is one of the well-known antique and coin collectors in the Sultanate of Oman. Since he was a child, he was very interested in collecting different items, from coins and trinkets to rare items worthy to be displayed in a museum....**P20**

TRAVEL TALES

READ

NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT THIS

BY PATRICIA LOCKWOOD

It is about an Extremely Online woman whose life changes forever when her niece is born with a serious illness — which sounds Hallmark-ready, but Lockwood pulls it off.

Archaeologists find ruins of ancient temple to Athena in Italy

ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN southern Italy have excavated the ruins of a 2,500-year-old temple, as well as artefacts from a major naval battle kept at the sacred site. The temple was dedicated to Athena, the goddess of wisdom, and was unearthed in the Paestum archaeological park south of the city of Salerno, according to a statement by the Culture Ministry on Tuesday. The structure, which was probably 18 metres long and 7 metres wide, provides



insight into the oldest phase of Paestum, once a major Greek city that was founded by settlers from Asia Minor, the statement said. Relics from the naval battle of Alalia, which is believed to have taken place some-

times between 540 BC and 535 BC, were inside the temple, said Massimo Osanna, the director general of Italian Museums. Among the finds were two helmets. According to Osanna, a laboratory examination should reveal whether inscriptions are hidden in them that may provide information about the identity of the soldiers who wore them. The researchers assume that the temple was built after the naval battle, which the ancient Greek historian Herodotus said took place on the east coast of the Mediterranean Island of Corsica. Italy's culture minister expressed his delight at the discoveries. "It is important to continue investing with conviction in archaeological research, which never stops bringing back important pieces of Mediterranean history," said Dario Franceschini — **dpa**



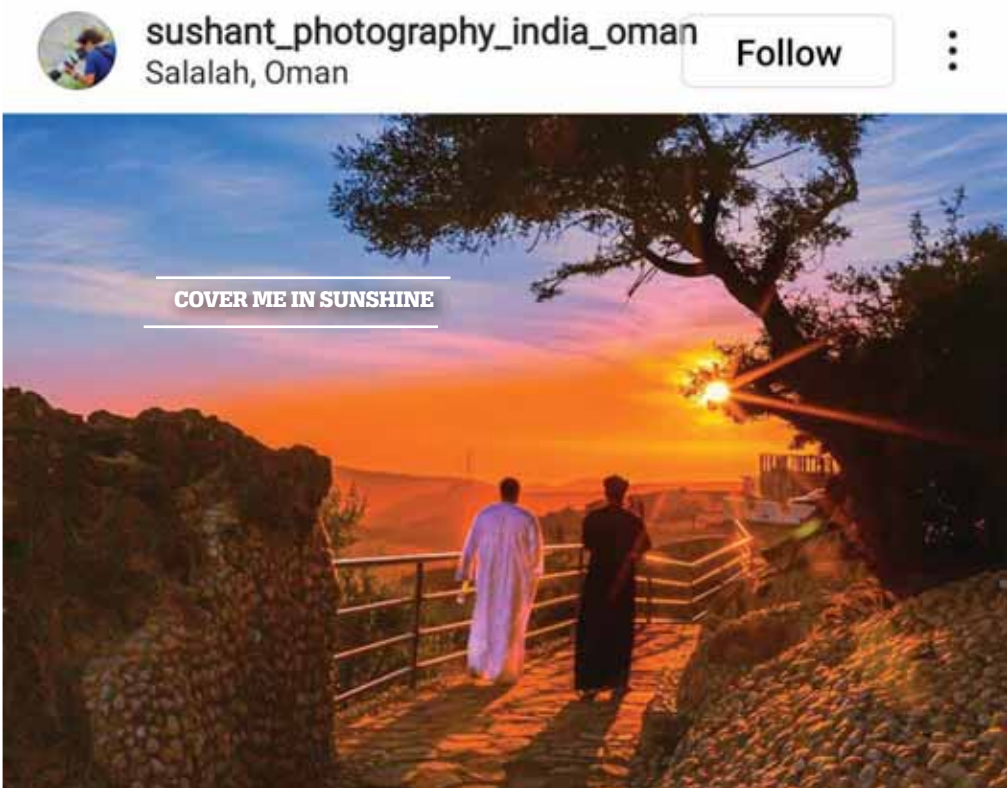
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19

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AROUND THE WORLD

ENTERTAINMENT

'Game of Thrones' studio tour takes fans into world of Westeros



FROM THE FROZEN LANDS "Beyond the Wall" to the destroyed "Throne Room", a new "Game of Thrones" Studio Tour takes fans behind the scenes of the hit television series.

Located at Linen Mill Studios in Banbridge, Northern Ireland, one of several locations where the fantasy show was filmed, the attraction opens up the world of Westeros to the public with an array of costumes, props, and sets on display.

Items include character Jon Snow's sword 'Longclaw' and the dress his sister Sansa wore for her wedding to Joffrey.

"Fans are just going to be delighted with a studio tour because everything they see here was used in the show," actor Ian Beattie, who played Meryn Trant, told Reuters at a preview on Wednesday.

"These are the actual sets that we walked on. These are the actual costumes we wore, the swords we swung — you name it, it's all here. And unlike the show where you don't always see it, you will actually get to see the incredible detail that went into every aspect of the making of this show."

The 110,000-square foot (10,000-square metre) attraction features sets including the Great Hall at Winterfell, King's Landing, and Dragonstone, as well as interactive experiences.

Based on the "A Song of Ice and Fire" novels by American author George R.R. Martin, "Game of Thrones", first aired in 2011, becoming a global phenomenon over its eight seasons. The award-winning HBO series wrapped up in 2019 with a finale that divided fans.

Prequel "House of the Dragon", which is set 200 years before the original series, is scheduled to premiere this year.

The Game of Thrones Studio Tour opens to the public on Friday.

"It was such an iconic thing, it kind of changed the landscape of television, so I hope that people still enjoy the show for years to come," said actor Daniel Portman, who played Podrick Payne. — **Reuters**

CONSERVATION

Mexican kayaker on mission to clean up floating gardens



AS DAWN BREAKS over Mexico City's floating gardens, Omar Menchaca paddles his kayak through a maze of canals collecting garbage left by visitors to one of the last vestiges of the ancient Aztec capital.

In the silence of the early morning, before the hordes of tourists arrive, the 66-year-old retiree fishes plastic bottles and other debris from the waters of Xochimilco.

"I came here to train for my competitions," says the former athletics champion.

"Over time, unfortunately, I started noticing that these canals were full of garbage."

As his single-seater kayak glides by, herons and pelicans take flight in the morning mist.

In the distance, the Popocatepetl volcano, Mexico's second highest summit, rises more than 5,400 metres (17,700 feet) above sea level.

Menchaca seems to be far from the network of congested roads that serve Mexico City and its nine million inhabitants.

In fact, "the ring road is only 600 metres away," he says with a smile.

Menchaca regularly puts down his paddle and uses his bare hands to pick up garbage floating on the surface of the water amid aquatic flowers.

Xochimilco is a magnet for tourists who ride colourful gondolas through its network of canals and artificial islands created centuries ago by the area's indigenous peoples.

On weekends in particular, couples, families and groups of friends come to eat, drink and dance to the sound of mariachi music.

The reserve is home to endemic species including the critically endangered axolotl, a salamander-like amphibian.

Cleaning up the waste left by visitors is a constant battle for Menchaca, who offers tours during which he recounts the history of the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

He likes nothing more than to see children copy him by collecting waste.

"Xochimilco is visited by around 6,000 people on weekends. Unfortunately, these people don't take care of the place," he says.

Conservationists also worry about the impact of development encroaching on the area, which is listed as a Wetlands of International Importance under an inter-governmental conservation treaty.

IF WE DO NOTHING

Menchaca curses when sees boats equipped with outboard motors.

"The canals are not very deep, barely half a metre," he says.

"A boat with an engine that carries up to 40 people causes noise and pollutes the wetlands with oil and gasoline."

At midday, Menchaca returns to the pier from which he set off through a vast canal with a breathtak-

ing view of Mount Ajusco, which rises to some 3,900 metres within the city limits.

His kayak is overflowing with garbage.

On the way he greets a man shoveling mud from the canal to use as a natural fertiliser.

"The people at the pier should pick up all the garbage and not Don Omar," says the 69-year-old, Noe Coquis Salcedo.

Back on dry land, Menchaca deposes of the debris in a dumpster near the parking lot.

He believes his efforts make a small difference helping to preserve the place for future generations, in addition to the work of the city authorities who say they are "constantly" maintaining the canals.

"The canals are paths," says Menchaca, enjoying a beer and enchilada in the January sunshine after his hours of physical exercise.

"That's why when I see this garbage, I try to collect it so that whoever passes afterward can enjoy a clean path," he adds.

Nearby young people in swimsuits dive from the top of a gondola moored at the pier.

"If we do nothing for our planet there will come a time when..." Menchaca says before pausing, his hands outstretched like a gesture of helplessness.

"There won't be much left for us to enjoy," he concludes. — **AFP**

MUSIC

The pianist who escaped a sect and topped the charts



FROM A VIOLENT French sect to living on the streets of LA to the top of the music charts, pianist Riopy's incredible journey is the epitome of the idea that music can save your life.

The 38-year-old — real name Jean-Philippe Rio-Py — wrote the score for award-winning films "The Shape of Water" and "The Danish Girl", spent three weeks at the top of the US classical charts last month and is streamed by millions around the world via meditation and yoga apps.

But it has been a hard road to success, worthy of a fantastical film.

"I had some bad luck that transformed into an opportunity," he said.

That is quite an understatement.

The "bad luck" was a sect in the Deux-Sevres region of western France, where he was raised by his mother along with two brothers and two sisters.

He faced beatings and other forms of psychological torment that left their mark in the form of an obsessive compulsive disorder and chronic depression.

The guru who ran the sect banned all music and television but the young Riopy found an abandoned piano and was able to teach himself to play.

"To say that music saved me is a cliché, but it's true," he said.

"They would put me on a chair and tell me: 'Don't move'. It lasted hours and hours. I loved to make up rhythms in my head that I later transferred onto the keyboard."

THE NIGHTMARE CONTINUED

Today, Riopy does not like to discuss the details of the sect, but he fled home at 18 and had no contact with his mother for the next 17 years.

He found himself living rough in Paris before heading for Los Angeles — chasing the American Dream, as he put it.

"But the nightmare continued. I was cleaning toilets in exchange for a bed. I ended up on the streets. A priest tried to rape me."

Giving up on the US, he eventually found himself in

Reading, a town outside the British capital, and it was there that his luck finally began to change.

Someone heard him playing in a piano store and offered to pay for his studies on a contemporary music course in Oxford.

From there, he settled in London and began to gig in piano bars.

"My music was so cinematic that it worked well in pubs," he recalled.

A British film producer, Nick Saunders, heard his music online and offered to represent him as his agent.

Soon he was playing in some of the ritziest venues in the city and picking up advertising gigs for the likes of IKEA, Samsung, and an Armani spot that was viewed more than 10 million times on YouTube.

A surreal full circle was achieved one night when he was invited to play at a dinner organised by *Vanity Fair* and met Chris Martin, lead singer of Coldplay.

Impressed by his playing, Martin offered to buy him a piano of his own — a moment that had particular resonance for Riopy.

"When I was 18, before going to LA, I was on the streets of Paris, in the snow. And I was crying and listening to the album 'Parachutes' by Coldplay," he said.

BACK FROM THE BRINK

Although his life seemed to have taken an incredible turn of good fortune, Riopy remained crippled by the demons of his past.

"I was suicidal. I drowned it in alcohol and drugs," he recalled.

Yoga and meditation helped pull him back from the brink and his career continued to blossom.

He has released a trio of successful albums since 2018 and found great success as a composer for films.

His darker moods are more under control and he says he can finally enjoy life.

"I have the chance to live from my music, to have a wife that I love and two little babies, and to be able to share my music with a huge number of people," he said. — **AFP**



The high price of collecting antiques and old coins

By Arwa al Hashimi

A close look into the collection of Salim al Hattali in his shop at South Al Hail in Muscat is like taking a trip down memory lane. The only difference is that you will have an opportunity to interact with the items displayed in some form of order only Salim knows so well.

Salim is one of the well-known antique and coin collectors in the Sultanate. Since he was a child, he was very interested in collecting different items, from coins and trinkets to rare items worthy to be displayed in a museum.

Collecting coins and antiques is a popular hobby around the world with many people spending millions to acquire a specific item that to them is valuable. Most people involved in this hobby include art lovers, archaeologists and people with money to spare. The collected antiques and coins are normally things that were very famous and favoured by people at a certain time

and they are no longer made currently. Therefore, these pieces can be considered often rare and precious.

While it started as a hobby in 2005, Salim had a realisation that he found his calling. Being a collector of antiques was something he was meant to do and from that awakened state nearly two decades ago, he continued his passion till this day even receiving an Archives and Records Management Certificate from a local newspaper in 2007.

Since his humble beginnings, Salim has expanded his collection. He rallied his friends and family including those outside of the Sultanate of Oman to bring whatever interesting coins they can find from their visits to different countries. From specialising in locally produced coins, his collection now boasts antique currencies from all over the world.

After years of collecting antique coins and creating a comprehensive gallery of different items, Salim eventually decided to trade coins

online. This move allowed him to network even further creating a relationship with different collectors from around the world. Through his online interactions, he became friends with people with the same interests and thus helping expand his dreams of transacting business as far as he can take it.

In 2019, Salim thought of opening an official business for buying and selling unique coins and antiques. He started slowly but surely taking responsibility not only for the day to day operation of the business but including its marketing.

In 2020, his business got affected badly by the pandemic and he was forced to make a drastic measures to avoid bleeding money. While his physical store had to take a sideline, he didn't stop the digital marketing as he was keen on gaining his customers' trust and making good and valuable relationships.

In his business, Salim shared that good capital is necessary to get some of the most valuable antique coins. He pointed however that without the proper cash flow, he

was unable to buy Omani currencies that are of high value and first edition. To add to his challenges, Salim shared that many of the antique currencies are also found outside of Oman that buying them from other collectors means paying more.

"Collectors are familiar with the different challenges of antique coin collection. In addition to their high prices, you also have to pay other fees including shipping", he said.

Other than the old coins and currencies, Salim also ventures on items with historical values. His collection now includes beautiful rugs, jewels, books, phones and even doors.

One of his prized collections is a mush'haf (holy Quran) that is nearly 300 years old with a manuscript produced by the Omani people. He said that he didn't sell it because finding it took him a long time and it is of great value for him. He also added that he aspires to find some other manuscripts and documents about the sultans of Zanzibar as well as some of their antiques.

