

Rains wane, clear skies likely

Active cloud formations continued over Al Hajar Mountains that brought thundershowers in the adjoining areas of the mountains and especially North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah and Muscat governorates by Sunday evening. “Muscat will begin to receive light to isolated rain by evening and by Monday it will be mainly clear sky,” said the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office. According to him Sunday had the last active wave of low pressure trough coming in from Iran.

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'RED WARRIORS' CHARGED UP TO CAPTURE WINNING POINTS AGAINST YEMEN



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OMAN MICE TOURISM EVENTS ATTRACT OVER 1.2 MILLION VISITORS



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PLANTS PLAY KEY ROLE IN RESTORATION OF BIODIVERSITY



MUSCAT

NEW NATURE RESERVES UNDER FINAL REVIEW

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, said the authority submitted six proposals for new nature reserves in Oman, which are under final review. On offering four natural reserves for investment, Al Amri indicated that there is a committee to evaluate and analyse the bids. On the national campaign to combat invasive fauna that the authority launched at the end of last year, Al Amri said about 25,000 birds were eliminated. The total number of trees planted touched 280,615 trees, and the total number of seeds amounted to 2,542,250.

SEE PAGE 3

OMAN'S SATELLITE SET FOR LAUNCH

AmanSat, will be launched from the UK's Cornwall spaceport on Tuesday (Oman Time). AmanSat will be launched using Virgin Orbit's Launcher One. Abdulaziz al Balushi of ETCO said that all formalities pertaining to the licensing and other permissions are in place to mark the launch of the satellite on Monday in the UK corresponding to Tuesday in Oman. "Although the launch is scheduled for Monday 23.00 hours, it will be at 3 am on Tuesday when the country makes history," he said.

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CHINA REOPENS BORDERS AFTER 3 YEARS

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MESMERISING WADI AL HAYOUL



The Wadi Al Hayoul area in the Wilayat of Mahdha is among the most important tourist destinations in Al Buraimi Governorate. Wadi Al Hayoul boasts mesmerising mountainous nature with water pouring down from the hilltop all year round. The sulphur springs scattered across the area represents a significant tourism attraction sought by many for enjoyment and healing.

REPORT ON P3

Competition for designing Oman Pavilion at Expo 2025 Japan begins

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said announced the launch of a competition to design Oman's pavilion for Expo 2025 Japan. The contest will be adjudicated by the Bilarab bin Haitham Award (BHA) for Architectural Design in conjunction with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth.

"In pursuance of the attention accorded to architecture by the BHA, Omani youth are encouraged to exhibit their skills in designing Oman's pavilion at Expo 2025 Japan at Osaka," HH Sayyid Bilarab said.

He affirmed that, in order to allow a larger segment of citizens to participate in this competition, no age restrictions are imposed on specialists in the fields of architecture, design and urban planning. The Participants can take part in the competition

In pursuance of the attention accorded to architecture by the BHA, Omani youth are encouraged to exhibit their skills in designing Oman's pavilion at Expo 2025 Japan at Osaka

HH SAYYID BILARAB BIN HAITHAM AL SAID

individually or collectively in as many as 5-member teams. Local consultation offices can also join the competition.

HH Sayyid Bilarab called

on young people who meet the conditions of participation to take the initiative in this national project aimed at enhancing the presence of the Sultanate of Oman on the global map. He hoped that the competition will generate prominent entries worthy of Oman's pavilion and the Sultanate of Oman's status among countries of the world.

A technical guide was prepared for this competition. The guide lists conditions and criteria that must be adhered within a specific timeline. The competition was launched on Monday and its results will be announced during the month of February 2023.

An area of 1,763 square metres has been allocated for Oman's pavilion. The winning project will get a cash prize of RO 10,000.

— ONA

MoL launches Ma'ak app for job-seekers

HIBBA AL KINDI & ONA
Muscat, Jan 8

The number of job-seekers for the first time crossed the 20,000 mark in the Sultanate of Oman. The number of employees who availed the job security benefit increased by about 3,000 in 2022, compared to 2021.

The Ministry of Labour (MoL) provided 35,000 jobs during 2022 in the public and private sectors and achieved over 100 per cent of job occupancy in the target segments.

The ministry explained that the number of job-seekers till the end of October 2022 stood at more than 85,000.

The figures were disclosed by Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour, on the sidelines of a meeting with governors in Muscat on Sunday to discuss employment in the public and private sectors, investment in governorates, Omanisation of professions and the challenges facing the governorates in localising jobs.

MoL also launched a new app Ma'ak (With You) which targets the concerns of job-seekers, the national workforce and employers. In its first version, the app provides more than 11 digital services for job-seekers. More services will be added later.

Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, said, "The meeting seeks to familiarise the governors with the ministry's policy, its plans for next year and the requirements of employment in each governorate."

The meeting elaborated on the employment programme and ini-

Number of job-seekers for the first time cross the

20,000 mark

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3,000 in 2022

tiatives through mechanisms that were espoused right from the beginning, as well as the pertaining challenges.

The programme also covered the system of individual and institutional performance proficiency, mechanisms for implementing the training programmes, the initiatives presented by the Training Support Centre, the National System for Capacity Building and Talent Management, and the tasks of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit's office.

Each governor shared a vision that targets his governorate—an initiative that the governor intends to incorporate in the economy.

The meeting includes a session of discussion between the governors and officials of the Ministry of Labour to outline the challenges facing each governor.

TURN TO P2

FIH chief hopes for a game-changing World Cup in Oman

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 8

International Hockey Federation (FIH) President Tayyab Ikram hoped that the first edition of Hockey 5s World Cup in the Sultanate of Oman would be a game-changer for the region in terms of hockey.

"I hope the inaugural Hockey 5s World Cup in Oman will act

as a major boost for hockey in the Gulf region," Tayyab Ikram (pictured) told Oman Observer in an exclusive interview.

"The stakes are high on the event and it depends how you present the championship to the public and to the international audience," Ikram said on the sidelines of the Junior AHF Cup tournament currently underway in Muscat. Ikram, in his first visit to Oman after being elected as FIH



president in November 2022, held talks with the top leadership of Oman regarding the hosting of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup.

Ikram met top leadership of Oman government, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth (MCSY), Oman Olympic Committee Chairman Shaikh Khalid al Zubair, and the Oman Hockey Association office-bearers.

"The government has taken up the matter with top priority.

Infrastructure is the main component of the event and that is already in place. We need final makeshifts and re-arrangement of the venue that will be done in due course," the top official of the world hockey governing body said.

Oman is poised to host the inaugural edition of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup, the quadrennial world championship for men's and women's hockey 5s teams in January 2024.

TURN TO P2



Ministry of Labour provided 35,000 jobs in 2022

FROM P1
The discussions aim to explain the views of the ministry's officials through a vision that explores the plans of the ministry and its concepts in decision making in accordance with the overall National Vision.
Fahd bin Khalfan al Batashi, Assistant Director General of Planning for Information Technology and head of the Digital Transformation Team at the Ministry of Labour, said Maak app constitutes the second channel for the ministry's digital services. In the next phase, the app will include the services rendered to employers (individuals and establishments), Omani and non-Omani workforce.
"This project serves as a reflection of the efforts taken to execute digital transformation projects while utilising smartphone applications within the country's national digitisation plan in line with the pillars of Oman Vision 2040.
"There are many electronic services, the most important of which is viewing job-seeker profiles, activating search status for job-seekers, electronic application of job opportunities in the private



and public sectors, the ability to save and share any job opportunities, the possibility of sharing profiles and CVs with employers, accepting and reviewing employment contracts and many services." The platform does not only target job-seekers, but also includes employees and businesses.



"The most notable services targeted at employers are the registration of job permits, work reports, tickets/ refund requests and employment contracts."
Employees can update personal data, apply for job opportunities, and file work related complaints. The application also provides a job-seeker with search options for vacant jobs, based on the educational level, gender, geographical location details (the governorate, the wilayat) and acceptance of employment contracts offered to national job-seekers.
During the meeting, the

Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion affirmed that, since March 2022, the number of economic activities prohibited for foreign investment in governorates stood at 78. The meeting was held within the context of exchanging views with officials and engaging in meaningful decision making that response to the decentralisation policy, given its significance in advancing the national economy.
This meeting also sought to contribute to upgrading the vision of the governors as they endeavour to promote their respective governorates.

الأوبرا السلطانية
دار الفنون الموسيقية
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An Evening of Jazz
Kenny Garrett
'Sounds of The Ancestors'

19th, 20th January | 7:00 PM

Composer, saxophonist, and flautist Kenny Garrett excels at emotional melodies. The GRAMMY Award-winning jazz musician, is considered one of the top alto saxophonists in the world. His newly released album 'Sounds of the Ancestors', explores an innovation in jazz by involving Yoruba chants and African drums.

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SEASON 2022-2023

Al Baleed excavation work focuses on mosque

SALALAH: The archaeological excavations carried out by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Al Baleed Archaeological Park in Dhofar Governorate in cooperation with the Italian mission from Naples Laurental University, are continuing within the mission of the archaeological season 2022-2023. The survey and excavation work for this season focused on a mosque located in the centre of the ancient city of Al Baleed under the third season of the Italian mission.
Saeed bin Suhail al Amiri, supervisor of Al Baleed Archaeological Park, said: This archaeological landmark was chosen specifically because it is located near Area (B), which is one of the oldest archaeological areas in the ancient city of Al Baleed, and more than 50 small mosques were discovered, which is important for uncovering these mosques and highlighting their contents.
He also added that the contract with the Italian mission specialised in Islamic history comes with the aim of carrying out archaeological studies in one of these mosques to search for the oldest mosque in the city, and to ascertain the actual use of mosques during that time period.
It is worth noting that Al Baleed, Samhuram, Wabar and Wadi Dawka are listed on the World Heritage List under the name 'Land of Frankincense Sites.' — **ONA**

Game-changing World Cup in Oman: FIH chief



FROM P1
Regarding the preparations for the World Cup, he said the organisers are in a comfort zone to arrange all the facilities on schedule.
"Oman will have a state-of-the-art spectator gallery along with a VIP zone at the main ground."
A new hockey turf will be laid on the main hockey stadium at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex for the World Cup.
"We will lay a new turf in the main stadium and it will have two hockey's pitches in it along with the training facilities."
"After the World Cup the hockey's pitch will be shifted to the adjacent area of the stadium and will have a permanent hockey's pitch there. Then, it will be two full size pitches inside the stadium and a hockey's pitch just outside — making up a high-performance hockey arena for Muscat," the official from Macau said.
The FIH chief is leaving for India soon for the inauguration of FIH Men's Hockey World Cup 2023 in the eastern Indian state of Odisha from January 13 to 29.
"The World Cup is our iconic event. All arrangements are in place for a spectacular edition in India. We will have a grand opening at the joint venues of Kalinga Stadium, Bhubaneswar and the brand-new Birsamunda Hockey Stadium in Rourkela," he said.



OMAN ENVIRONMENT DAY MARKED

Six proposals to register new nature reserve sites announced

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

The Environment Authority has submitted six proposals discussed by the National Committee for Reserves to register sites for new nature reserves in the Governorates of Oman, which are in the process of final review and will be subject to evaluation by the concerned authorities.

This was announced at a press conference addressed by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Omari, Chairman, Environment Authority (EA), on Sunday, which coincided with the celebration of Oman Environment Day, which falls on January 8 each year.

He indicated that Environment Day comes as an appreciation of the importance of Oman's environment and ensuring the sustainability of its natural resources and preserving its gains. He also added the importance carried out by EA with government institutions and the private sector. He also touched on EA's efforts to raise the level of performance and spending in order to achieve financial sustainability and quality, through continuous follow-up of work performance.

Engineer Faiza al Harthiya, supervisor of environment and natural resources, 'Oman Vision 2040' implementation follow-up unit, presented the national strategy of Oman for the orderly transition to the zero-neutral plan.

The plan focuses on the sectors that cause carbon emissions of greenhouse gases, and the ambition until 2040 to reach 54 per cent of



■ Project to establish a database in Al Dhahirah Governorate

■ Survey of coastal wetlands with 236 sites registered

■ Survey and collection of data on coral reef environments

■ Environmental laboratory in Dhofar

the total path. He also indicated that Sultanate of Oman is working to achieve the principles of the goals through the path of an organised transition through environmental sustainability, social and economic impact, and electric battery technology.

The governorates of the Sultanate of Oman also witnessed a number of projects and achievements in environmental management, including the development of the environmental laboratory in the Governorate of Dhofar, the Marjan initiative in the Governorate of Musandam, the field survey project for wildlife in the Governorate of Al

Buraimi, the project of inventory and documenting wild trees in the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, and the project of testing gas stations in North Al Batinah Governorate, and a project to establish a database for projects in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The Authority mentioned to the *Observer* that in order for the governorates to obtain their share of the environmental harvest, projects have been distributed in the various governorates so that they are strategic and qualitative projects that suit the environment through presenting projects and evaluating them according to the valuable



environment.

Among them was the cultivation project which reached more than two million, about 2,084,698 trees, and more than two-and-a-half million seeds have been planted, and the nurseries affiliated with the Authority expanded to 11.

This initiative embodied the strengthening of partnership with various sectors in order to protect the environment, improve the quality of life, adapt to climate change and reduce global warming.

Environmental harvesting included projects and biodiversity initiatives, where several projects were launched to protect and conserve natural resources and sustain them to save and rehabilitate wildlife of all kinds, and projects to propagate them in the local environment by modern scientific methods in the Sultanate of Oman.

Among the projects is a survey of the presence of coastal wetlands, with 236 sites registered, a survey and collection of data on coral reef environments in the Musandam Governorate at 11 sites, and a project to track turtles via satellite.

All set for Oman's first satellite launch

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The first satellite of the Sultanate of Oman, AmanSat, will be launched from the UK's Cornwall spaceport on Tuesday (Oman Time).

AmanSat will be launched using Virgin Orbit's Launcher One and once in orbit, it will take the best quality images of Oman and will do surveys on environment, urban planning besides helping the oil and gas industry by looking into details of the pipelines and checking on the same.

Abdulaziz al Balushi, Head of Marketing department ETCO, Omani technology innovator, said that all formalities pertaining to the licensing and other permissions are in place to mark the launch of the satellite on Monday in the UK corresponding to Tuesday in Oman.

"Although the launch is scheduled for Monday 23.00 hours, it will be at 3 am on Tuesday when the country makes history," he said.

"AmanSat, the first Omani satellite, has been successfully integrated with Virgin Orbit's Launcher One rocket."

Aman, the first Omani CubeSat is a result of international collaboration between Oman, the US and Poland. The project comprises Omani technology innovator ETCO, US launch

company Virgin Orbit, Polish nanosatellite manufacturer SatRev, and cognitive technology solutions provider TUATARA.

Virgin Orbit's integration team had performed the final cleaning and checks on AmanSat, before placing it on the launch dispenser.

The project is part of Oman Vision 2040, aimed at fostering economic competitiveness and social well-being. Oman expects its space programme to enable scientific research and the capturing of high-resolution satellite images.

Launcher One will carry seven payloads into low earth orbit, including a collection of satellites, on a mission called Start Me Up.

Abdulwahab bin Sulaiman al Busaidy, a Geologist and stargazer who worked for the PDO for 30 years said that launch of the AmanSat will be a historic achievement for the country.

"AmanSat will produce high resolution images and such accurate maps will help Oman for more exploration of potential oil reserves besides helping in weather, impacts, cyclone predictions.

It can also be used for rescue operations along the mountains by giving very accurate images besides helping in stability and security along the borders, checking pollution, etc," Al Busaidy said.

Rains wane, clear skies today in Muscat

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Active cloud formations continued over Al Hajar Mountains that brought thundershowers in the adjoining areas of the mountains and especially North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah and Muscat governorates by Sunday evening.

"Muscat will begin to receive light to isolated rain by evening and by Monday it will be mainly clear sky," said the weather forecaster at Oman Met Office.

According to him Sunday had the last active wave of low pressure trough coming in from Iran.

On Sunday morning the aerial photos from Oman Met Office showed the spread of clouds over parts of the governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi and the coasts of the



Sea of Oman.

Partly cloudy to cloudy skies are expected over Musandam, Al Buraimi, North Al Batinah, South al Batinah and Muscat governorates with chances of isolated rain occasionally thundershowers, according to Oman Met Office.

The general weather forecast stated that it would be mainly clear skies over the rest of the governorates with medium

and high clouds advection and chances of isolated rain along the coastal areas of Dhofar Governorate and adjoining mountains. In addition there are chances of late night and early morning low clouds or fog patches over governorates of South Al Sharqiyah, Al Wusta and Dhofar.

In the early morning hours of Sunday, Wilayat of Al Seeb witnessed light to medium rains, with the continuation of the flow and the formation of rain clouds on the coasts of the Sea of Oman and the Hajar Mountains.

On Saturday night Musannah experienced moderate to heavy rains, with chances of rainy thunderclouds flowing over Barka and the Met office had alerted there would be clouds concentrated on the coast of Muscat Governorate.

Rains of varying intensity was recorded in parts of the wilayats of Al Khabourah and Al Suwaiq.

Mesmerising nature abounds valleys in Wadi Al Hayoul

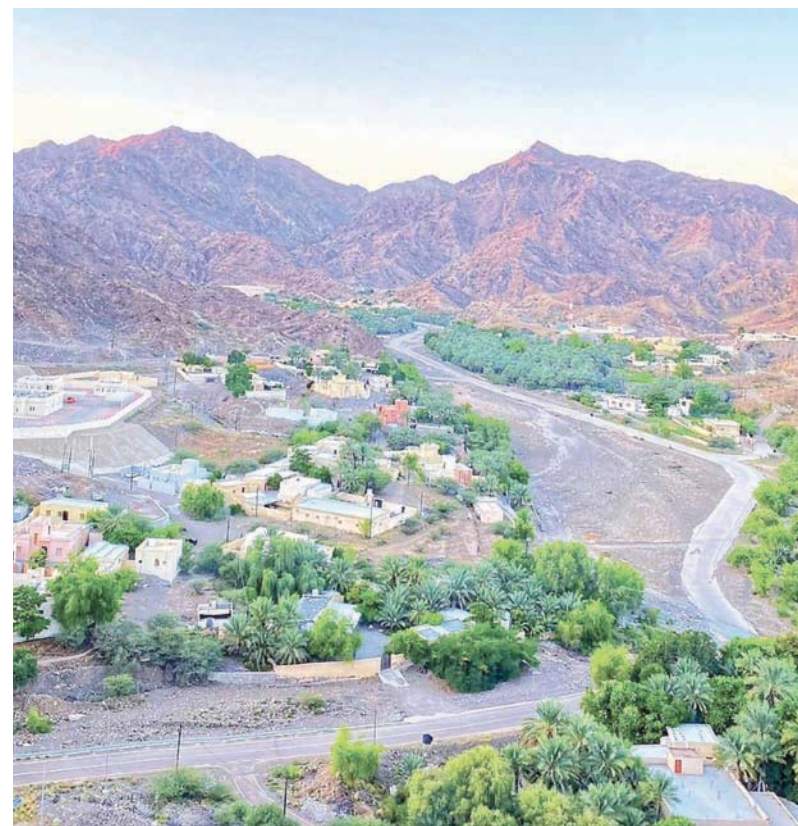
AL BURAIMI: The Wadi Al Hayoul area in the Wilayat of Mahdha is among the most important tourist destinations in Al Buraimi Governorate. The area is 85 kms away from the centre of Wilayat Mahdha.

It can be accessed via a 22-km mountain road branching off from the Al Buraimi-Suhar main road.

The area has a distinguished geographical location adjoining a number of wilayats of North Al Batinah Governorate from different directions. It is bordered by the wilayats of Liwa, Suhar and Shinas in the south-east. It is separated from the wilayat's centre by the Western Hajar mountain range in the north. It comprises nine villages and the inhabitants' main occupations are farming and craft work of date palm.

Wadi Al Hayoul boasts mesmerising mountainous nature with water pouring down from the hilltop all year round. The area has tall date palms, mangoes, banana, grapes and fig trees in addition to other seasonal plants.

The Sulphur springs scattered across the area represent a significant tourism attraction sought by many for enjoyment and healing. Beside their healing characteristics, the Sulphur springs are also a source of



irrigating water especially at times of year when water runs out and they contribute to increasing green area and vegetation.

The government is making efforts to provide water supply for the residents of the area from the water networks. It is currently working to cover the area with cellphone networks.

A three-storey school, a municipal office, a multi-purpose playground, a road cutting through the mountains, are coming up in the area. — **ONA**



FEED BIRDS BUT NOT IN PUBLIC PLACES



Nearly 60% of the respondents from a Muscat Municipality public opinion agree that ‘feeding birds in public squares and jogging walkways may pose a challenge to the environment and health where such practice is carried out randomly’

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Muscat Municipality has prohibited residents and citizens from feeding birds, especially pigeons, in public places. Signboards have been put up in many places urging people to avoid such practices. “Signboards have come up in places such as CBD, Al Khuwair and Maabela but people have not taken the issue seriously and they continue to feed the birds. While it may be on humanitarian grounds, those feeding these birds should

also consider the reasons why authorities are saying not to do so,” said Patel who used to do so in the past. Muscat Municipality recently raised concerns that the habits of feeding birds in public squares and places can adversely affect the health of people, the local environment, and the aesthetic appearance of neighbourhoods. The municipality took a public opinion on the matter and nearly 60 per cent of the respondents agreed that ‘feeding birds in public squares and jogging walkways may pose a challenge to the environment and health in some

areas where such practice is carried out randomly.” While the habit of feeding birds in public squares creates an accumulation of grain and food residues in open places with time, it can also lead to bad odours emitted from these residues, and droppings of birds. Feeding birds in places dedicated to walking can lead to inconvenience for passers-by apart from providing an attractive environment for insects, worms, and parasites. The phenomenon of feeding birds in some locations near multi-storey

buildings has led to situations where these birds take shelter in balconies, external lobbies of buildings, and external units of air-conditioners, causing damage. Visitors and residents of buildings also complain of unpleasant odour of buildings from bird droppings or even interruption of some services due to damage to electrical and communication cables. This situation can also affect the owners of the buildings negatively due to a lack of interest from existing and new tenants to stay at the property.



UAE tourists flock to Oman for visa-change

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Visitors from UAE are coming to the Sultanate of Oman as per a new visa-change policy implemented there.

In December last year, UAE made it mandatory for visit visa holders to extend their stay permits to exit the country and later can come back on a new visa.

According to sources, including those in the travel industry, visit visa holders prefer the Sultanate of Oman as a destination for a short stay.

“Oman is the nearest destination by road, which is also a more affordable option than travel by air. Some people travel by road to the nearby cities of Suhar and Al Buraimi, spend a few days and then return to UAE on a new visa,” said Rahim, a manager of a hotel apartment in Suhar.

Ratnakar Sharma, who recently visited Oman, says, “There is only private bus company operating between the two countries with three daily schedules and it is difficult to get a ticket these days.”

Several UAE and Oman-based travel operators have launched visa change packages, which include guaranteed one-day approval of the UAE visa and the next day’s return.

Some packages also include two-way tickets from Dubai and Sharjah to Oman while some operators, including airlines, offer facilities such as returning to the UAE after a few hours at the airport, provided their UAE visa has been approved.

Oman, UAE review educational ties

MUSCAT: Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, during her meeting with Dr Ahmed Belhoul al Falasi, Minister of Education, United Arab Emirates, on Sunday, reviewed the educational cooperation between the two countries.

The two sides agreed to work on renewing the memorandum

of understanding in the educational fields, and to develop a plan to activate educational cooperation between the two countries, in addition to exchanging experiences in the field of curricula and educational policies.

The two sides stressed the importance of benefiting from the expertise and experiences



witnessed in the education sector in the two countries, and what contributes to enhancing mutual cooperation in various educational fields of common interest.

The meeting was attended by a number of officials and specialists from the Ministries of Education from the Sultanate of Oman and United Arab Emirates. — ONA

OMANI CAMEL EXHIBITION ENDS IN RIYADH



A symposium and exhibition on the history of Omani camels, organised by the Royal Camel Corps, concluded in Riyadh on Saturday. The event shed light on camels in general and Omani camels in particular. Working papers dealing with camel economy, revenues acquired by Bedouin communities, camel products and the culture and history of camels were presented at the event. — ONA

Barbazoom Health Centre in Thamrait opens

SALALAH: The Directorate-General of Health Services in Dhofar Governorate opened Barbazoom Health Centre in the Wilayat of Thamrait, on Sunday.

The new health centre has a laboratory, a pharmacy, a medical store, male and female waiting halls, among other facilities.

Barbazoom Health Centre will provide primary healthcare services including general medicine, vaccination, school health, women’s care in the morning shift. — ONA



North Al Batinah OCCI discusses strategy for forming sectoral committees



SUHAR: The Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry in North Al Batinah Governorate on Sunday held its first meeting for the current year. The meeting discussed the strategy for events, activities, programmes and initiatives that serve the interests of the private sector.

The members of the Council reviewed the mechanisms for forming sectoral committees according to the requirements of the private sector during the next phase.

Engineer Saeed bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Board of Directors, pointed out the importance of the role of the Chamber and its branches during

the next stage, as stipulated in Royal Decree No (56/2022).

A strategic plan was formed to ensure the implementation of initiatives and programmes aimed at aiding business owners.

Al Abri added: “We look forward to strengthening the effective partnership and to enable the private sector to perform its work, as we are currently working on forming sectoral committees, which will have a major role in serving the various commercial sectors in the governorate. They can also adopt the challenges to find appropriate solutions that contribute to revitalising and developing the performance of the private sector. — ONA

Omani writers, winners to be honoured today

MUSCAT: The Omani Society for Writers and Literati (OSWL) will honour award winners for literary and cultural activity at its 13th session, under the auspices of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

The celebrations will be held at their headquarters in Airport Heights today.

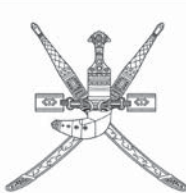
During the award ceremony, the association will announce the winning publications, awards for cultural creativity for the best literary publications, which was announced in September 2022 in six fields namely short story, novel, popular poetry, literary studies, intellectual books, and honouring those with cultural achievements.

The award will be divided into two types, the first being the Cultural Achievement Award, in which cultural personalities and projects that had a role and presence in the cultural scene will be honoured.

For the second award, will be for the best publications which will be awarded to the winners in the six fields and is subject to evaluation by arbitration committees other than the first, which is awarded by a decision of the board of directors of the association.

The ‘Written Achiever Personality’ award is granted to writers who have published productions and publications in the field of culture, literature and science. — ONA





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

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Tender No.	3/2023/MHT/HQ-3	Tender Name	Transfer, packaging and shipping of incoming and outgoing mail (documents, letters, documents and promotional materials) of the Ministry outside the Sultanate and vice versa for the year 2023.
Fees of Tender Documents (Non-refundable)	25 O.R		
Tender Document Sales End Date	29/1/2023		
Last Date for Bid Submission	21/2/2023		
Grade	First		
E-Tendering Portal	https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om		

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board (in the mentioned Grade) may obtain Tender documents from the E.Tendering website: against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.

Bids are submitted that fulfill the technical conditions and specifications, accompanied by a tender bond from a local bank not less than (400 OMR), valid for (90) days from the date of its submission.

- Any bid that does not meet the required tender bond will not be considered
- The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids

The bid submission period starts after the end of the inquiry period shown in the e-tendering system, until the last date for submitting bids before (10:00 am, Oman time).

Support and inquiries

For more information, related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering system: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or 24402200

For further information

Email : sotlc@mht.gov.om
Phones : 22088348 - 22088085



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. (3/2023)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Description	Document Fee	Last Date for Inquires Submission	Last Date for Obtaining Tender Docs.	Last Date for Submission
47/2022/MM/PA-14 Recall-1	Supply of Garbage Bags	25/- OMR	19/01/2023	26/01/2023	29/01/2023

1. Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.

2. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through link mentioned above.

3. Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond which is equivalent to (1%) of the total value of the tender to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality and valid for (90) days starting from the deadline for submission.

4. Offers not accompanied by a tender bond will be rejected.

5. Clarifications and support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please contact us through e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- For technical support of e-tendering system, please send an email to (etenderhd@mtc.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
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Russia hits Kramatorsk in ‘retaliatory strike’

MOSCOW: Moscow said on Sunday its army conducted a deadly “retaliatory strike” in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kramatorsk to avenge the deaths of 89 Russian troops killed in Makiivka.

“More than 600 Ukrainian servicemen were killed” as a result of a strike on Kyiv troops stationed in two buildings in Kramatorsk used as barracks, the Russian defence ministry claimed in a statement, calling the attacks a “retaliatory strike.”

AFP could not immediately verify the report.

On Saturday, AFP journalists in Kramatorsk, which is located in the eastern region of Donetsk, heard at least four explosions before midnight.

Both countries marked Orthodox Christmas on Saturday.

The Russian defence ministry did not say when exactly the strike had taken place but said that Russian intelligence had “over the past 24 hours” confirmed the points of temporary deployment of Ukraine’s armed forces in Kramatorsk.

More than 1,300 Ukrainian troops were housed in two



An elderly local resident walks past a destroyed residential building in Chasiv Yar, Eastern Ukraine. – AFP

buildings, Moscow claimed.

Earlier on Sunday, Pavlo Kyrylenko, the head of the Donetsk regional administration, said Russians launched seven rocket attacks on Kramatorsk.

He said that “an educational institution, an industrial facility and a garage cooperative” had

been damaged and that there were no casualties.

In a New Year’s attack, Ukraine struck a building in the occupied eastern Ukrainian town of Makiivka being used as a barracks.

Russia conceded 89 troops had died, in what was the worst single reported loss from a Ukrainian

strike.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had ordered a 36-hour ceasefire to allow Orthodox Christians to mark Christmas which is celebrated on January 7 in Russia and Ukraine.

Two Ukrainians were killed and another nine were wounded

despite Russian leader Vladimir Putin unilaterally ordering his forces to pause attacks on Orthodox Christmas, Kyiv said on Sunday.

As a result of “Russia’s armed aggression”, one person was killed and another eight wounded in the eastern region of Donetsk over the past 24 hours, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the Ukrainian president’s office, said on Sunday.

One more person was killed in the northeastern region of Kharkiv and another was wounded in the southern region of Kherson over the same period, Tymoshenko said.

“Despite the so-called ‘ceasefire’ declared by the Russian occupiers, over the past day, the enemy launched nine missile and three air strikes and fired 40 attacks from multiple rocket launchers,” Ukraine’s defence ministry said in a separate statement.

“In particular, civilian infrastructure was hit.”

Putin had ordered a 36-hour ceasefire to allow Orthodox Christians to mark Christmas which is celebrated on January 7 in

Russia and Ukraine. The unilateral ceasefire ended on Saturday.

Kyiv and AFP journalists on the ground said there was little sign the fighting had eased on Saturday.

“After midnight the enemy launched seven rocket attacks on Kramatorsk and two on Kostyantynivka,” said Pavlo Kyrylenko, head of the Donetsk regional administration.

The Russian defence ministry insisted on Saturday it observed the halt in fighting but repelled a number of Ukrainian attacks and killed dozens of Ukrainian troops.

Ukraine had dismissed the halt as a tactic by Russia to gain time to regroup its forces and bolster its defences following a series of battlefield setbacks.

Sergiy Gaiday, head of the Lugansk regional administration, said that Russians were redeploying forces from Bakhmut, the current epicentre of the fighting, to the city of Kreminna. “We are expecting an intensification of hostilities,” he added, pointing to freezing temperatures.

“Our heavy equipment will finally be able to move forward faster.” — **Agencies**

Migrants on agenda as Biden heads to Mexico

MEXICO CITY: US President Joe Biden will seek Mexico’s help tackling illegal flows of migrants and drugs, particularly deadly opioids, during a visit beginning on Sunday for a North American leaders’ summit.

Aiming to tame criticism over what he has called a “broken” immigration system, Biden will stop off in Texas for his first trip to a border overwhelmed by record numbers of migrants and asylum-seekers. The issue is almost certain



US President Joe Biden

to top the agenda when Biden meets Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador on Monday, a day before Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

joins them for the so-called “Three Amigos” summit.

Another priority for Biden is stepping up joint efforts to fight trafficking of fentanyl and other drugs behind an addiction crisis in the United States.

“Mexico is extremely relevant and important in dealing with both acute issues, which have become political vulnerabilities for Biden,” Michael Shifter, a senior fellow at the Inter-American Dialogue think-tank, said. — **Reuters**

Israel revokes Palestinian minister’s VIP pass

JERUSALEM: Israel suspended on Sunday a pass easing the Palestinian foreign minister’s travel in and around the occupied West Bank, among its responses to a Palestinian bid to involve the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in their decades-old conflict.

Foreign Minister Riyad al Maliki’s “VIP” travel card was confiscated by Israeli border staff as he crossed from Jordan into the occupied West Bank, his office said.

A spokesperson for Israel’s Defence Ministry, which administers the West Bank, confirmed the move, calling it part of the implementation

of a government decision on Friday.

In televised remarks to the Israeli cabinet on Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the decision entailed, among other measures, “sanctions against senior Palestinian figures.”

“The Palestinian Authority has promoted an extremist anti-Israeli resolution at the United Nations,” Netanyahu said.

The UN General Assembly, responding to an appeal by the Palestinians, on December 30 asked the ICJ for an opinion on the legal consequences of Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories.

On Saturday, Israel’s Defence Ministry said the VIP cards of three other senior Palestinian officials had been revoked in response to them visiting a member of Israel’s Arab minority who had been imprisoned for killing an Israeli soldier.

Issued under interim accords with Israel from the 1990s, the cards ease travel across the Israeli-controlled West Bank border with Jordan and from Palestinian-ruled territory into Israel. “The foreign minister will continue his job and his diplomatic activities with or without the card,” Ahmed al Deek, an aide to Maliki, said. — **Reuters**

Prince Harry: I only cried once after mother’s death

LONDON: Britain’s Prince Harry has said he only cried once after the death of his mother, and has described feelings of guilt in one of a series of interviews ahead of the publication of his memoir.

In a clip from “Harry: The Interview,” which was aired on Sunday, Harry speaks about being unable to show any emotion when meeting mourners following the death of his mother, Diana, princess of Wales, in 1997.

He also admits to feeling “some guilt” when walking among the gathered crowds outside Kensington Palace, saying the only time he cried was at his mother’s burial.

He tells presenter Tom Bradby: “Everyone knows where they were and what they were doing the night my mother died.

“I cried once, at the burial, and you know I go into detail about how strange it was and how actually there was some guilt that I felt, and I think William felt as well, by walking around the outside of Kensington Palace.” Harry describes feeling the mourners’ tears on his hands when he shook them.

“There were 50,000 bouquets of flowers to our mother and there we were shaking people’s hands, smiling,” he says.

“I’ve seen the videos, right, I



A woman leafs through the Spanish version of the book Spare in Madrid. – AFP

looked back over it all. And the wet hands that we were shaking,

we couldn’t understand why their hands were wet, but it was all the

tears that they were wiping away.

“Everyone thought and felt like they knew our mum, and the two closest people to her, the two most loved people by her, were unable to show any emotion in that moment.” The interview is the first of four broadcast appearances over the coming days, with Harry also speaking to Anderson Cooper for “60Minutes” on CBS News on Sunday, Michael Strahan of “Good Morning America” on Monday and Stephen Colbert on the “Late Show” on CBS on Tuesday.

A string of revelations have already been leaked from the memoir “Spare,” which is due to be published on Tuesday.

Harry says in the book he thinks that he is unable to cry in public because of his family’s preference for not showing emotion.

According to the Telegraph, Harry writes: “I disliked the touch of those hands. What’s more, I disliked how they made me feel: guilty.

“Why was there all that crying from people when I neither cried nor had cried? “I wanted to cry, and I had tried, because my mother’s life had been so sad ... but I couldn’t ... not a drop.

“Perhaps I had learnt too well, had absorbed too thoroughly the family maxim that crying was never an option — never.” — **dpa**

SHORT TAKES

BASRA

Iraq apologises after chaos at football tourney

Iraq has apologised to its neighbour Kuwait after a scuffle in the VIP section prevented the Kuwaiti emir’s representative from attending opening ceremonies at the Gulf Cup football tournament.

Matches are taking place in the city of Basra, near Kuwait, as war-scarred Iraq hosts the regional event for the first time in more than four decades.

The country was long banned from international football and is counting on the tournament to burnish its image.



Videos on social media showed about 20 men verbally abusing and jostling each other, for unknown reasons, in a VIP section of the city’s International Stadium.

SÅLEN

‘Sweden can’t meet some Turkey demands’

Turkey, which has for months blocked Nato membership bids by Sweden and Finland, has made some demands that Sweden cannot accept, Sweden’s prime minister said on Sunday.

“Turkey has confirmed that we have done what we said we would do, but it also says that it wants things that we can’t, that we don’t want to, give it,” Ulf Kristersson said during a security conference also attended by Nato chief Jens Stoltenberg.

“We are convinced that



Turkey will make a decision, we just don’t know when,” he said, adding that it will depend on internal politics inside Turkey as well as “Sweden’s capacity to show its seriousness.”

ALGIERS

Algerian poet says won’t run for president

Algerian poet Azzedine Mihoubi, a former minister and presidential candidate, has announced he is quitting politics, denying claims he will challenge President Abdelmadjid Tebboune’s re-election bid in 2024.

“My name has been cited by several publications... alongside speculation that has no truth to it,” Mihoubi said in a message shared this week on social media.

“I wish to refute all these allegations,” wrote the 64-year-



old, who said back in 2020 he would relieve himself of his duties in the Democratic National Rally, formerly one of Algeria’s ruling parties, to focus on writing.



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In brief

■ DAKAR



40 KILLED, 85 INJURED IN SENEGAL BUS DISASTER

Fourty people died and about 85 were wounded in central Senegal after two buses collided on Sunday, President Macky Sall tweeted.

The crash, one of the deadliest in the West African country's recent memory, was on one of the main east-west arteries near the town of Kaffrine, about 220 kilometres southeast of the capital Dakar.

Sall said he was "profoundly saddened" by the accident and announced three days of mourning starting on Monday.

The accident occurred after the tyre of one passenger bus burst, sending it into the path of another bus coming in the opposite direction.

■ COTONOU



BENIN HOLDS ELECTION SET TO TEST DEMOCRACY

Voters in Benin went to the polls on Sunday for a parliamentary election seen as a test of democracy as opposition parties are back on the ballot after boycotting or being excluded from the most recent presidential and legislative votes.

Benin's image as a bastion of democracy and stability in West Africa has been dented under President Patrice Talon, who went back on a pledge not to run for another term and oversaw an opposition crackdown since coming to power in 2016.

Seven parties are competing for 109 parliamentary seats including the Democrates party linked to Talon's rival Thomas Boni Yayi.

■ JAKARTA



BOAT WITH 185 ROHINGYA REFUGEES LAND IN ACEH

A boat with 185 Rohingya refugees landed on the shores of Indonesia's Aceh province on Sunday, a local disaster agency official said, following hundreds who arrived late last year fleeing desperate conditions in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Over half of those who arrived were women and children, Ridwan Jamil, head of Aceh Besar disaster agency, said.

Photos Ridwan shared showed the refugees sitting in groups and lying down on the sand. Hundreds of Rohingya have reached Aceh in the past few months, including a boat that washed ashore carrying 174 in late December.

40-DAY PERIOD OF LUNAR NEW YEAR TRAVEL BEGINS



A man hands flowers to a woman after she came through the international arrivals gate at Beijing Capital International Airport after China lifted quarantine requirement for inbound travellers in Beijing on Sunday. – Reuters

China reopens borders after 3 years

HONG KONG/BEIJING: Travellers streamed into China by air, land and sea on Sunday, many eager for long-awaited reunions, as Beijing opened borders that have been all but shut since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic.

After three years, mainland China opened sea and land crossings with Hong Kong and ended a requirement for incoming travellers to quarantine, dismantling a final pillar of a zero-Covid policy that had shielded China's 1.4 billion people from the virus but also cut them off from the rest of the world.

China's easing over the past month of one of the world's tightest Covid regimes followed historic protests against a policy

that included frequent testing, curbs on movement and mass lockdowns that heavily damaged the second-biggest economy.

Long queues formed at the Hong Kong international airport's check-in counters for flights to mainland cities including Beijing, Tianjin and Xiamen. Hong Kong media outlets estimated that thousands were crossing.

"I'm so happy, so happy, so excited. I haven't seen my parents for many years," said Hong Kong resident Teresa Chow as she and dozens of other travellers prepared to cross into mainland China from Hong Kong's Lok Ma Chau checkpoint.

"My parents are not in good health and I couldn't go back to

see them even when they had colon cancer, so I'm really happy to go back and see them now."

Investors hope the reopening will reinvigorate a \$17-trillion economy suffering its slowest growth in nearly half a century. But the abrupt policy reversal has triggered a massive wave of infections that is overwhelming some hospitals and causing business disruptions.

The border opening follows Saturday's start of "chun yun", the 40-day period of Lunar New Year travel, which before the pandemic was the world's largest annual migration, as people returned to their hometowns or took holidays with family. Some 2 billion trips are expected this season, nearly

double last year's movement and recovering to 70 per cent of 2019 levels, the government says.

Many Chinese are also expected to start travelling abroad, a long-awaited shift for tourist spots in countries such as Thailand and Indonesia. But several governments - worried about China's Covid spike - are imposing curbs on travellers from the country.

China on Sunday resumed issuing passports and travel visas for mainland residents, and ordinary visas and residence permits for foreigners. Beijing has quotas on the number of people who can travel between Hong Kong and China each day.

— Reuters

Pakistan seeks \$16 bn for flood rebuilding

GENEVA: Pakistan and the United Nations are holding a major conference in Geneva on Monday aimed at marshalling support to rebuild the country after devastating floods in what is expected to be a major test case for who pays for climate disasters.

Record monsoon rains and melting glaciers last September displaced some 8 million people and killed at least 1,700 in a catastrophe blamed on climate change.

Most of the waters have now receded but the reconstruction work, estimated at around

\$16.3 billion, to rebuild millions of homes and thousands of kilometres of roads and railway is just beginning and millions more people may slide into poverty.

Islamabad, whose delegation is led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, will present a recovery "framework" at the conference where United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres and French President Emmanuel Macron are also due to speak.

Guterres, who visited Pakistan in September, has previously described the destruction in the country as "climate carnage".

"This is a pivotal moment for the global community to stand with Pakistan and to commit to a resilient and inclusive recovery from these devastating floods," said Knut Ostby, United Nations' Development Programme's Pakistan Representative.

Additional funding is crucial to Pakistan amid growing concerns about its ability to pay for imports such as energy and food and to meet sovereign debt obligations abroad.

However, it is far from clear where the reconstruction money will come from, especially given

difficulties raising funds for the emergency humanitarian phase of the response which is around half funded, according to UN data.

At the COP27 meeting in Egypt in November, Pakistan was at the forefront of efforts that led to the establishment of a "loss and damage" fund to cover climate-related destruction for countries that have contributed less to global warming than wealthy ones.

However, it is not yet known if Pakistan, with a \$350 billion economy, will be eligible to tap into that future funding.

— AFP

Covid vaccination must for Thailand travel

BANGKOK:

Thailand will require international travellers to show proof they are fully vaccinated for Covid before flying to Thailand, according to the country's aviation regulator, as it prepares for more tourists after China reopened its border on Sunday.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Thailand (CAAT) said in a statement on Saturday that starting early on Monday, all foreign arrivals starting early on Monday must prove they are vaccinated or provide a letter certifying that they have recovered from Covid within six months.

Unvaccinated travellers must show a medical certificate explaining why they have not received the vaccine.

CAAT said airlines would be responsible for checking documents before passengers board and has released a list of how many doses are required for various types of Covid-19 vaccines on its website.

The new measure will remain in effect at least until the end of January, CAAT said.

The vaccination requirement was scrapped by Thailand last October but has been revived as China reopens its border following the easing of its zero-Covid policy.

The first commercial flight from China to Thailand, Xiamen Airlines flight MF833, will arrive to Bangkok from Xiamen on Monday carrying 286 passengers, government spokeswoman Traisree Taisaranakul said on Sunday. — Reuters

Indians evacuated from 'sinking' holy town

DEHRADUN: Authorities in one of the holiest towns in the Indian Himalayas were evacuating panicked residents on Sunday after hundreds of houses began developing yawning cracks and sinking, officials said.

The cause of the apparent subsidence in Joshimath in the northern state of Uttarakhand was unclear, but residents blamed the building of roads and tunnels for a nearby hydroelectric project.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called a high-level meeting on Sunday to discuss the problem after the government formed an expert panel to carry out a "rapid study" into the cause.

Local official Himanshu Khurana said that at least 60 families had been relocated into shelters and many more were



The cause of the apparent subsidence in Joshimath in the northern state of Uttarakhand was unclear, but residents blamed the building of roads and tunnels for a nearby hydroelectric project.

likely to be shifted out from their sinking dwellings.

Residents said a much larger number had already fled their homes and that around 600 houses and hotels were sinking in the town of around 20,000 people.

Another official said on condition of anonymity that several areas in the town had been "demarcated unsafe" and entry restricted. "People are deeply worried. The fear is that the town is sinking," he said as helicopters surveyed the area.

Many locals have been forced to sleep out in the freezing cold and said they had been warning authorities for weeks and in some cases months about cracks in buildings and roads, some of which were oozing brown muddy water. — AFP

Are you a strategic thinker



Dr Anchan C K

The writer is an international advisor in investments and trade

As we begin a New Year, many boards are turning their minds to the strategic planning cycle for the next 12 months. Directors are now encouraged to ‘think strategically’. Indeed, it is now considered that a board’s role is to think strategically and oversee strategic planning. However, what is strategic thinking? Strategic thinking is a powerful and invaluable skill, one that leads to greater chances of success in whatever professional and personal projects you are involved in. It involves setting goals, developing long-range plans, anticipating the unexpected, analysing your environment, and even cooperating with your

competitors. Strategic thinking is a way of understanding the fundamental drivers of a business and challeng ing conventional thinking about them, in discussion with others. Finally, strategic thinking is having an awareness of what has not yet taken shape, having foresight. Therefore, boards should encourage forward thinking. In a time of unprecedented uncertainty in the busi ness landscape, strategic leadership is more critical than ever. The ability to think strategically and navigate change effectively is key to creating a sustainable organisation — yet true strategic thinking and planning skills are a rarity among

STRATEGIC THINKERS INTENTIONALLY LOOK AT THINGS FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AND CAN RESIST THE URGE TO LET ONE DECISION DICTATE OR FORECAST FUTURE DECISIONS, THUS AVOIDING THE SUNK COST TRAP

most executives. It can be difficult to be strategic. A strategic thinker is always searching for the unusual

– something that is different – and is able to set assumptions aside. They intentionally look at things from different perspectives and can resist the urge to let one decision dictate or forecast future decisions, thus avoiding the sunk cost trap. One of the worst things managers can do is always think they are right. You know the type. They dig in during meetings, refusing to listen to others. They grow red in the face with apoplectic anger that anyone dare have a different view. Anyone who does not agree with them is a fool or a knave. These people destroy an organisation no matter how talented or brilliant they are.

The first step is just to make sure you constantly question your own opinions. Second, do not just read people who look at the world differently; surround yourself with them. You can do this either at work or by regularly setting up gatherings with friends who think in other ways. Make sure you recharge your brain and body regularly. Leaders who rise to the top are ones who constantly sharpen their strategic thinking by questioning their own views, by listening to different viewpoints, surrounding themselves by people with different expertise areas and doing anything else they can to gain different perspectives.

Show goes on at Palestinian theatres overcoming obstacles

ROSIE SCAMMELL

Past the sandbags and anti-tank obstacles in Jenin refugee camp in the occupied West Bank, theatre director Mustafa Sheta ponders the fate of Palestinian thespians. “We are under a very abnormal situation,” Sheta said at the camp’s Freedom Theatre. The streets were silent that December day as residents had called a public strike to protest Israeli forces killing a 16-year-old Palestinian girl in Jenin hours earlier. With Israeli forces raiding Jenin repeatedly in recent months, engaging in gunfights with Palestinian activists, the Freedom Theatre’s ability to provide residents with respite is under growing strain. In 2011, the theatre’s well-known Israeli-Palestinian director Juliano Mer-Khamis was gunned down in Jenin’s refugee camp, in an attack that remains unsolved. Other Palestinian cultural institutions across the West Bank, annexed east Jerusalem or Israel also face many obstacles. “It’s not like you have a clear plan in your schedule... you need to prepare for different scenarios,” said Sheta, 42. Ahead of the opening night of the theatre’s latest production, “Metro Gaza”, the creatives woke up to find three Palestinians had been killed in an Israeli operation. “What can we do? Can we continue, or stop, cancel the show?” asked Sheta. The actors took to the stage as planned and an audience of around 75 filled half the stalls. Yasmin Shalaldeh, 30, a Jerusalemite who plays a Gazan girl in the show, said it was “essential to keep on working”, particularly in Jenin. More than 40 Palestinians were killed last year during Israeli operations in the Jenin area, including activists, children, and a teenager involved in the theatre’s youth programme who was shot dead in November. After Jenin, “Metro Gaza” went on tour to Ramallah, east Jerusalem and finally Haifa in northern Israel. Each playhouse faces its own challenges and Jerusalem’s El Hakawati, also known as the Palestinian National Theatre, has seen its audiences dwindle since Israel began constructing a barrier around the West Bank in the early 2000s. “After the wall and the checkpoints, (it) started to get less and less, people cannot come,” said director Amer Khalil, as the sound of children enjoying a puppet show drifted into the room. Whether living in Jerusalem, the West Bank, Israel or the blockaded Gaza Strip, Palestinians hold different papers which impact the ability of theatre casts and audiences to travel. — AFP



Thomas Gibbons-Neff

The writer is the Kabul bureau chief and a former Marine infantryman



Natalia Yermak

The writer reports on the war in Ukraine

In a Ukraine workshop, the quest to build the perfect grenade

An array of mostly unremarkable items stretched across two wooden tables on the far side of a cramped workshop in eastern Ukraine: double-sided tape, gloves, Allen wrenches, a soldering iron, 3D-printed plastic, ball bearings, a digital scale. Next to them was a German DM51 fragmentation grenade. They were all important ingredients for Ukrainian troops trying to piece together a puzzle: How do you create a grenade that weighs next to nothing but can be dropped from a drone and destroy a roughly 40-tonne Russian tank? “War is an economy. It’s money,” said Graf, a stout, bearded Ukrainian soldier in charge of his unit’s drone team. “And if you have a drone for \$3,000 and a grenade for \$200, and you destroy a tank that costs \$3 million, it’s very interesting.” Since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine nearly a year ago, technological advancements on the battlefield have mostly centred on both countries’ increased use of small, remotely operated drones and their growing importance in almost every aspect of the war — including reconnaissance, correcting artillery fire and so-called kamikaze attacks. Now Graf and his team, who have become experts at killing Russian troops with munitions dropped from the air, are trying to raise the drones’ effectiveness to the next level: by using them to deliver what they consider the perfect grenade. The challenge is building that grenade. “It’s our main goal,” Graf said last month from his headquarters in the city of Sloviansk. He was surrounded by the various components needed to turn a flying toy into a lethal battlefield tool. Like other Ukrainian soldiers during the war, he identified himself to reporters only by his military call sign. The tinkering in Graf’s workroom is another example of how Ukraine’s military has adapted as the war progresses, creating advantages in the face of the Russian army’s superiority in troop numbers and long-range weaponry.



A member of a volunteer battalion practices the launch and retrieval of a DJI Mavic drone as the group trains outside Kyiv.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS ON THE BATTLEFIELD HAVE MOSTLY CENTERED ON BOTH COUNTRIES’ INCREASED USE OF SMALL, REMOTELY OPERATED DRONES AND THEIR GROWING IMPORTANCE IN ALMOST EVERY ASPECT OF THE WAR — INCLUDING RECONNAISSANCE, CORRECTING ARTILLERY FIRE AND KAMIKAZE ATTACKS

The grenade, Graf said, should weigh around 1.1 pounds, the maximum weight a DJI Mavic 3 drone can carry without its flight being significantly disrupted. To get the grenade closer to the desired weight, his team has been using a 3D printer to try to make a lightweight casing that can hold the explosives needed to penetrate a

tank’s armour. The painstaking task involves experimenting with grenades of differing designs, clasped in a vise in their workroom, and operating around the explosive mechanisms to fine-tune them. The grenade should be able to penetrate the hull of an armoured personnel carrier or tank — something not currently possible with a munition weighing around 1 pound, Graf said. For now, their best grenade is the German-supplied DM51, an explosive that, with stabilising fins attached, weighs near their imposed threshold. But the DM51 is manufactured to kill people and is not effective against a tank. “Every day, we study; we make some experiments with grenades, with bombs, with drones, and make our work better,” Graf added. To Graf and the legions of Ukrainian drone operators and armourers, the quest for an enhanced grenade is part of a broader drone arms race with Russia. Like Graf’s team, the Russian military is also trying to make its small unmanned vehicles deadlier, to varying levels of success. The Chinese-made Mavic 3 drone has turned into the ubiquitous backbone of Ukraine’s drone forces. It is small, portable, has a decent battery life and range and can quickly be outfitted to drop grenades. Russian forces use it, too. — *New York Times*

Make your journey worthwhile

“You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step,” Martin Luther King said. Tip toe if you must, but take the step. Likewise, as 2023 has just kicked off, one has to take the first step and start the yearlong journey. Along the way to reach your destination, you need to have a dream to chase, passion to get motivated and courage to take risks.

On the way, remember that success comes only to those who believe in their dreams! Life needs to be lived with a dream in mind to make it interesting. You must believe in dreams so that they come true someday. Otherwise, life will be meaningless without a dream or a goal to achieve. It is always worth chasing a dream to make it happen. All dreams are possible, but it depends on how much we believe in them.

“A man is but the product of his thoughts; what he thinks, he becomes,” said Mahatma Gandhi. You are what you think and you achieve what you believe in. Every time you tear a leaf off a calendar, you present a new place for new ideas, dreams and progress.

That is why the more people believe in their dreams, the easier they become possible and achievable. Regardless how challenging your dreams are, you can make them a reality by believing in them and persisting to achieve them.

Hellen Keller said: “Your success and happiness lies in you. Resolve to keep happy, and your joy and you shall form an invincible host against difficulties.”

Living without love makes life invaluable, so having no dreams in life makes it meaningless. In fact,



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HERE COMES THE TIME TO MAKE RESOLUTIONS, SET UP GOALS AND MOVE FORWARD TOWARDS ACHIEVING SUCCESS AND CHANGE OF YOUR LIFE

dreams add a flavour to our life for it becomes challenging and makes it rewarding. Albert Einstein said, “Never give up on what you really want to do. The person with big dreams is more powerful than the one with all the facts”.

Always the little persistence results in getting more achievements and whatever looks a failure and disappointing might suddenly turn into a commendable victory. Whether we want them or not, every new year brings new challenges.

Similarly, whether we grab them or not, every year presents new opportunities. Thus, it is upon you to decide how to make the most of all the challenges and opportunities that you come across. Although nobody can go back and make a new start, anyone can start from now and make a new ending for the ongoing journey in life.

There is nothing impossible to do regardless how difficult it is; you just roll the dice and make it happen. The road to success and fulfilling dreams is never an easy one; you face obstacles on the way. Nobody is too old to wish upon a star. Sometimes, it is just your fear of failure that stops you from pursuing your dreams and working to achieve your goals. However, where there is a will there’s a way.

Here comes the time to make resolutions, set up goals and move forward towards achieving success and change of your life.

It is also time to reflect on the year before and make plans for the year ahead. The New Year stands before us like a chapter in a book waiting to be written. Let us look forward to the opportunities of another one. Welcome 2023 with new hopes. Life is a challenge, face it. Life is a dream, realise it. Life is love, enjoy it.

ENTHUSIASM IS SKY HIGH



People fly kites during the eight-day-long International Kite Festival in Ahmedabad, India, on Sunday. – Reuters

In Asia, retirement means more work

MOTOKO RICH AND
HIKARI HIDA

All Yoshihito Oonami wants to do is retire and give his worn body a rest. Instead, every morning at 1:30, Oonami, 73, wakes up and drives an hour to a fresh-produce market on an islet in Tokyo Bay. While loading mushrooms, ginger root, sweet potatoes, radishes and other vegetables into his car, he frequently lifts boxes that weigh more than 15 pounds, straining his back. He then drives across Japan’s capital city, making restaurant deliveries up to 10 times a day.

“As long as my body lets me, I need to keep working,” Oonami said on a recent morning, checking off orders on a clipboard as he walked briskly through the market.

With populations across East Asia declining and fewer young people entering the workforce, workers such as Oonami increasingly are toiling well into their 70s and beyond. Companies desperately need them, and the older employees desperately need the work. Early-retirement ages have bloated the pension rolls, making it difficult for governments in Asia to pay retirees enough money each month to live on.

Demographers have warned about a looming demographic time bomb in wealthy nations for years. But Japan and its neighbours have already started to feel the effects, with governments, companies and, most of all, older residents grappling with the far-reaching consequences of an aging society. The changes have been most pronounced in the workplace.

Working at his age “is not fun,” said Oonami, rummaging through a box of carrots. “But I do it to survive.” For

JAPAN, SOUTH KOREA AND CHINA HAVE ALL BEEN FORCED TO EXPERIMENT WITH POLICY CHANGES — SUCH AS CORPORATE SUBSIDIES AND RETIREMENT ADJUSTMENTS — TO ACCOMMODATE POPULATION SHIFTS

some older people, the demand for workers has given them new opportunities and leverage with employers, especially if they felt pushed out by early-retirement ages in favour of younger workers. Now the question these aging nations are grappling with is how to adapt to the new reality — and potential benefits — of an older workforce while ensuring that people can retire after a lifetime of work without falling into poverty.

In East Asia, where populations are graying faster than anywhere else in the world, there is an urgent need for more flexibility. Japan, South Korea and China have all been forced to experiment with policy changes — such as corporate subsidies and retirement adjustments — to accommodate population shifts. Now, with the rest of the world not far behind, many nations will probably look to Asia for lessons in how to respond to similar crises.

Adapting to the Needs of Older Workers Long before Oonami started delivering vegetables, he tried working in an office and as a cabdriver. Eventually, he decided he preferred the solo life of a truck driver. That decision consigned him to perennial contract work rather than the more traditional path taken by many early postwar employees in Japan, with lifelong jobs of guaranteed salaries, regular promotions and corporate retirement benefits.

As a truck driver, Oonami would often lift heavy cargo, which became unsustainable

for him after he turned 50. His doctor told him that so much lifting had worn down the cartilage in his spine. “Moving the boxes was very rough for my body,” Oonami said.

He switched to smaller delivery jobs and landed a contract at the produce market about 15 years ago. Yet even as he approached Japan’s traditional retirement age of 60, Oonami could not afford to stop working. Having held contract gigs his entire career, he is only eligible for a basic national pension: about 60,000 yen (about \$477) a month — not enough to cover his daily expenses.

Japan isn’t the only country in East Asia where older people feel they have no choice but to keep working. In South Korea, with a poverty rate among older people close to 40 per cent, a similar proportion of those 65 and older are still working. In Hong Kong, 1 in 8 older residents works. The ratio is more than one-fourth in Japan — compared with 18 per cent in the United States.

In Japan and South Korea,



A man working in a tea shop in Hong Kong. – The New York Times

temporary job agencies and unions have formed to support older labourers. Although many older people must work out of economic necessity, employers have also become more reliant on them.

Koureisha is a temporary agency in Tokyo where job listings specify that applicants must be at least 60 years old. Fumio Murazeki, the president, said he believed employers were growing more receptive to hiring older workers. “People who are over 65 or even up until 75, they are very active and healthy,” he said.

Rental car agencies and building concierge services are eager to hire older workers, said Murazeki. One popular job for older contract workers is to sit in the front passenger seat of service vehicles while electricians or gas repairmen assist clients on site. The contract worker can move the vehicle when necessary, helping companies avoid parking tickets or traffic fines, Murazeki said.

At Tokyu Community, a

property management company for apartment complexes in Tokyo, almost half the staff is 65 or older, said Hiroyuki Ikeda, head of human resources. With a salary of just 2,300,000 yen (less than \$17,146) a year, the jobs do not appeal to younger workers, while older people are willing to accept the low pay to supplement their pension income.

The Japanese government now provides subsidies to small- and medium-size companies that install accommodations for older workers, such as additional railings on staircases or extra rest areas for workers.

“You Shouldn’t Work Until the End” Eiji Sudo, 69, wasn’t quite ready to retire.

He had spent more than four decades working maintenance and construction jobs at Tokyo Gas, a natural gas supplier. He retired at 60, and the company offered him a four-day-a-week contract at about half his peak salary. Once he hit 65, though, the company would no longer extend his contract, he said.

To earn enough money to travel comfortably with his wife, Kazue, Sudo wanted to keep working. He signed up with the Koureisha agency and now works as a contractor for Asuqa, a gas pipeline company in Tokyo. His wife, who faithfully packs him a homemade lunch when he works, appreciates that he gets out of the house. It means they both have “our ‘me time,’” she said. Still, “it would be very sad for anyone to die working,” she added. “You shouldn’t work until the end like that.” — The New York Times.

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25TH ARABIAN GULF CUP

J A N U A R Y 6 T O 1 9



RED WARRIORS

CHARGED UP TO CAPTURE WINNING POINTS AGAINST YEMEN

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 8

The Oman national football team are eagerly eyeing to capture the first victory in the ongoing 25th Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra city, Iraq as they will take on Yemen in the second round matches of Group A at the Basra International Stadium on Monday. The match will kick off at 5:15 pm (Oman Time).
Oman players managed to clinch one crucial point from the hosts Iraq in the tough opening

fixture on Friday night. The match was attended by thousands of Iraqi fans besides attendance of Omani supporters.
After the opener, the ‘Red Warriors’ squad reported back to the training sessions with full enthusiasm and excitement. The players targeted during the warm-up sessions on snatching the three points in today’s fixture. The stars of national team are fit except Amjad al Harthi who is having an injury concern since last match against Iraq. The team is raring to go forward in the Gulf Cup and

secure spot in the next round.
Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic said there are no easy matches in the tournament. “We are respecting all the teams in the Gulf Cup. We could be the better team on the paper but that does not mean to reduce the strength of the opponent. I have conveyed this important message to the players,” the Croatian coach said during the pre-match press conference.
“Yemen played a perfect match despite their defeat against Saudi Arabia in the previous game. I

believe that my team should be ready for all the scenarios and will keep concentrated for the victory’s target. Our aim is to secure spot for the semis,” the Croatian coach said.
The 69-year-old said in his comments that tomorrow’s assignment represented as a new opportunity for the team in this tournament. “The players have to be on their full focus to show a top game. The team is in good shape to meet Yemen. Salah al Yahyaei is ready for today’s encounter while Amjad al Harthi is injured and

will not take part in the match,” Branko Ivankovic said.
Mohammed al Musallami, the national team’s experienced defender, pointed out that Yemen delivered top game in the opening round. “The technical differences are only on the paper. Yemen players showed very top game. However, we are ready and will work hard towards registering the first win in the tournament,” he said.
Yemen, on the other side, will aim for compensation of their defeat against Saudi Arabia 2-0 in

the previous round.
Yemen head coach Miroslav Soukup said that Oman match will not be an easy game. “Our focus is taking advantage of any opportunity and shooting towards the goal. After a detailed analysis from the opening game, the team will be free from any tension and the players must be patient in front of the goal to perform well and score goals,” he said.
In the latest Fifa ranking, Oman are 75th while Yemen are ranked 154th.



Djokovic survives marathon before winning Adelaide title

ADELAIDE: Top seed Novak Djokovic saved a match point on Sunday before defeating Sebastian Korda to win the Adelaide International and reinforce his status as a heavy title favourite for the Australian Open.

The 21-time Grand Slam winner needed more than three hours to stamp his authority on his unseeded American opponent, son of former world number two Petr Korda, 6-7 (8/10), 7-6 (7/3), 6-4. In doing so, Djokovic extended his unbeaten streak in Australia to 34 straight matches.

The winner of 92 career titles now heads to the Australian Open in about a week with momentum in his bid to secure the Grand Slam for a 10th time, helped by the absence at Melbourne Park of injured world number one Carlos Alcaraz.

Djokovic, the 2007 champion at Adelaide in the early days of



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning the final of the ATP Adelaide International tournament against Sebastian Korda of the US in Adelaide. — AFP

his career, called the pre-Open tune-up week "very special for me", thrilled by overwhelming fan enthusiasm.

"It's been an amazing week. To

be standing here is a gift definitely," said the Serbian world number five, who missed last year's Australian Open after being deported over his vaccination status. "I gave it my

all today and throughout the week in order to be able to get my hands on this trophy. "The support I have been getting in the last 10 days was something that I don't think I've experienced too many times in my life," he added, with packed pro-Djokovic crowds whenever he played. "It definitely felt like playing at home."

Djokovic nullified Korda's match point while serving at 5-6, 30/40 in the second set, coming good on an overhead to make the save before the set moved into another tie-breaker which the Serb won.

Korda, 22, was playing his fifth career final and said the experience boded well for the rest of the season. "It was a great start to the year, I wish I could have gotten it done today, but I know there's a long journey to go and a lot of positives from this week," he said. — AFP

Fritz beats Berrettini as USA win inaugural United Cup

SYDNEY: World number nine Taylor Fritz battled past Italian Matteo Berrettini with a powerhouse performance to steer the United States to the inaugural mixed teams United Cup title in Sydney on Sunday.

Frances Tiafoe and Jessica Pegula both won their singles rubbers to give their country a 2-0 lead in the best-of-five tie with Fritz delivering victory in winning 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (8/6).

"It's amazing for the team to win this event, we came in with really high hopes," said Fritz.

"Really happy to be in the position to clinch the match. The emotions when you win are amazing. We had a lot of team bonding this week," he added. "When we combine the guys and girls from the US we are so deep through the rankings it just makes team so much stronger."

A dominant United States crushed the Iga Swiatek-led Poland 5-0 to make the decider of the new tournament — which began with 18 nations playing round robin matches in Perth, Brisbane and Sydney — while Italy outgunned Stefanos Tsitsipas's Greece 4-1.

Fritz constantly put pressure on the Berrettini serve, earning four break points on his first two service games, but all were saved.

Despite the American being in charge from the baseline, it went to a first set tiebreak where he got two decisive early breaks to move 3-0 ahead before closing out the

set. Fritz again created a series of break points in the second set, but Berrettini hung on and it again went to a tiebreak where he again prevailed.

Women's world number three Pegula, who burst into the top 10 in 2022 by winning the WTA 1000 Guadalajara tournament, stormed home 6-4, 6-2 against Martina Trevisan.

Tiafoe then surged through the first set 6-2 against Lorenzo Musetti before the Italian retired due to a right shoulder injury.

"Definitely very relieved, first match of the day, first match of the final," said Pegula. "Martina is playing great, she's a fighter, I feel like she's thriving on the atmosphere with the fans and her team and really hard to beat someone like that."

HIGH LEVEL

Trevisan stunned world number six Maria Sakkari in a gripping three-hour encounter on Friday, and her confidence was high.

But Pegula was also in red-hot form, toppling world number one Swiatek for the first time in the semifinals. She came out firing against Trevisan, racing to a 3-0 lead after breaking the Italian's opening serve.

Trevisan showed the fighting qualities that helped her beat Sakkari to claw back, converting a break point in the fifth game and holding serve to get it back on level terms. — AFP



Taylor Fritz of the US celebrates after winning his match against Italy's Matteo Berrettini in the United Cup final. — Reuters

'Game-changer' Suryakumar powers India to series win

RAJKOT, India: Suryakumar Yadav, the world's leading Twenty20 batsman, said on Saturday he was thriving in his role as a "game-changer" after smashing a blazing century in India's series-clinching 91-run win over Sri Lanka.

The hosts rode on Suryakumar's unbeaten 112 off 51 deliveries to post 228-5 after electing to bat first in the series decider in Rajkot.

India then bowled out Sri Lanka for 137 in 16.4 overs for a 2-1 triumph to extend their unbeaten record in bi-lateral series to 12 on home turf which stretches back to February 2019.

Suryakumar, known as a 360-degree player for his ability to play all around the ground, stood out with his third T20 hundred — in 45 balls — as he stamped his class as the world's number one batsman in the format.

"It's really important to put pressure on yourself when you are preparing for a game. If you do that in practice, it gets a little easier

while playing the game," man of the match Suryakumar said.

Asked about his conversations with coach Rahul Dravid, a batting great in the classical mould, Suryakumar said, "He just lets me enjoy myself, whatever I am doing. "Whatever situation I go in he tells me 'just enjoy yourself, express yourself and try and be the game-changer on a given day.'"

Skipper Hardik Pandya praised Suryakumar, known as 'SKY', saying, "He has been surprising everyone and making everyone know that batting is very easy.

"If I am a bowler, I will be disheartened with the shots he plays. He has played blinders after blinders, which is now becoming a habit."

The T20 sensation smashed seven fours and nine sixes including three off his trademark scoop shot over fine leg to entertain the raucous home crowd.

India lost two wickets inside six overs after electing to bat first but



Suryakumar and Shubman Gill, who hit 46 off 36 deliveries, put on 111 runs to lay the foundations for the total.

- 'Lot of positives' - Left-arm quick Dilshan

Madushanka struck in the opening over to send back the left-handed Ishan Kishan, caught at slip for one by Dhananjaya de Silva.

Rahul Tripathi, 31, who made his debut in the previous match,

then hit back with Gill for company as he hit Maheesh Theekshana for three fours in the fifth over.

Tripathi smashed fast bowler Chamika Karunaratne for two successive sixes but got caught

out in an attempt to get another boundary. He made 35 off 16 deliveries.

Suryakumar, who reached his fifty in 26 balls, then took charge with his all-round hitting including three sixes with his scoop shot over fine leg.

Gill joined in the charge as he and Suryakumar smashed 23 runs in the 14th over from Theekshana.

But after three fours and two sixes in his 36-ball knock, Gill was bowled by leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga and two more wickets fell before Suryakumar kept up the charge.

In reply, Kusal Mendis started briskly but fell to Axar Patel's left-arm spin for 23 in the fifth over.

The left-handed Axar was named man of the series for his three wickets and 117 runs in the three matches. Wickets kept tumbling at regular intervals with Pandya, fellow quick Umran Malik and leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal taking two each. — AFP



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Gulf Stone suspends operations, launches audit probe



QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, JAN 8

Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) announced on Sunday the temporary suspension of trading in the shares of publicly-listed Gulf Stone Company following the latter's disclosure that it has halted operations of its Suhar plant due to acute cash-flow challenges.

At the same time, Gulf Stone announced an internal audit of its accounts in the wake of the unannounced departure of the company's Chief Accountant, who had left the country without prior warning.

A leading manufacturer of quartz based engineered stone products, Gulf Stone said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) that the Chief Accountant's "abrupt departure" without prior notice or approval had prompted an audit investigation to unearth any discrepancies in the company's accounts.

"Upon his departure, the management informed the Audit Committee, where the company requested the Internal Auditor to

conduct an internal audit to verify the existence of any financial irregularities in the company's accounts," Ahmed al Rasbi, Audit Committee Chairman, stated. "We will keep you posted on the outcome of the forensic audit," he further added.

Earlier, Gulf Stone announced a complete suspension of operations effective from January 5, 2023, citing "severe cash flow problems".

In a separate filing to CMA, the company's Chairman attributed Gulf Stone's financial troubles to a decline in sales of its products following a slump in demand brought on by the pandemic.

"The Board of Directors is trying to find a solution by increasing the capital and / or bringing in new investors to subscribe to the company's shares. As the company has run out of all financial resources and is not in a position to procure raw material and to run its day-to-day operations, the company is forced to suspend operations starting from 5 January until further notice," the Chairman stated.

Oman MICE tourism events attract over 1.2 million visitors in 2022

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 8

The meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) sector — a key pillar of the Sultanate of Oman's vital tourism industry — has reported strong growth in 2022 in line with the objectives of the Oman Tourism 2040 Strategy.

The Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC), the primary hub of the country's business tourism sector, hosted as many as 215 MICE events during 2022, drawing more than 1.2 million visitors — local and international — during the year.

As Oman's premier meetings and conferences venue, OCEC played host to a number of world-class events ranging from fan zones to science, technology, construction, agricultural produces and fashion shows during the year.

Notable events include a special fan zone football fans for the duration of the World Cup Qatar 2022, the Green Hydrogen Summit and Exhibition (December 5-7), the Muscat International Jewellery Exhibition (December 1-5), the 89th UFI Global Congress (November 14-17), Oman Maritime Confex



(October 24-27), the Food and Hospitality Oman and the Oman Health Exhibition and Conference (September 26-28) and many more.

Of the 215 events that OCEC hosted in 2022, 6 were regional events, 10 international events, 17 graduation ceremonies with more than 17,000 graduates, 28 exhibitions and 185 institutional events.

With more than 300 volunteers and 20 internship programmes, holding such numerous events is not an easy task for OCEC which used 1.5 million square metres for

exhibition space — an equivalent to 200 football pitches and installed 1,700 square metres of LED screen — an equivalent to 9 tennis courts. In a post, OCEC said that more than 120,000 meals were served for these events. In association with Oman Food Bank, OCEC said that no food were wasted for the events.

In a similar post, OCEC forecasted about 50 events to be held in Q4 2022, with about 300,000 visitors. Surprisingly, 70 events were held in the Q4 with more than 500,000 visitors of which

10,000 were international delegates. Among the events include 46 corporate functions, 10 exhibitions, 7 live events, 4 graduation and 3 conventions.

With more than 10,000 international delegates who attended events at OCEC during Q4 2022, staying an average of 5.5 days in Oman and spending around RO 169.4/day, OCEC said that the estimated national impact from business travellers to OCEC during the Q4 2022 is more than RO 9.31 million.

Sweets of Oman starts liquidation process

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 8

Sweets of Oman SAOG, a publicly-listed confectionery, approved the dissolution and liquidation of the company.

The confectionery company released a statement sharing the approval of the liquidation process after an extraordinary general



meeting was held on Thursday. Earlier in November, the

company cited its "deteriorating financial position" in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA), as the reason behind the decision, claiming that it could not be adequately resolved within the timeframe specified by the CMA.

The company reported a net loss of RO 4.511 million in 2020, and a net loss of RO 2.476 million in 2021.

In the filing, the deputy chairman

stated: "The Board, after discussion and deliberation of the company's burden and liabilities, has agreed to proceed and to go ahead — for the sake of protecting shareholders' interests, after a lapse of three years of attempts to boost the company's activities.

Al Zulafa for Consulting and Business SPG has been appointed as the company's liquidator.

Hy-Fly to support growth of Hydrogen Hubs in Oman

Decarbonisation agenda: National alliance commits to nurturing development of hydrogen-centric ecosystem

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 8

Oman's National Hydrogen Alliance (Hy-Fly), a grouping of leading energy industry stakeholders led by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, has affirmed its keenness to support the development of Hydrogen Hubs at key locations across the Sultanate of Oman.

Set up in August 2021 to help

create a wider national ecosystem around a future green hydrogen industry, the 15-member alliance sees Hydrogen Hubs as key to unlocking opportunities for collaboration to enhance local utilisation and export of low-carbon hydrogen.

Promising locations for the establishment of Hydrogen Hubs include Suhar, Sur, Duqm and Salalah given their proximity to port infrastructure and the presence of industrial clusters as well.

According to Dr Khalil al Hanashi (pictured), Coordinator of Hy-Fly, the alliance's aspiration to develop hydrogen hubs in Oman is tied to their potential to



stimulate investment inflows and strategic partnerships, in addition to enabling and driving the national decarbonisation agenda.

Furthermore, hydrogen hubs can leverage existing infrastructure and services to

accelerate the development of the hydrogen value chain.

Speaking at an energy summit held in the city recently, Dr Al Hanashi cited in this context a pre-feasibility centring around the planned development of a

The hydrogen hubs are important because they are suitable for hydrogen production, they have the expertise to handle hydrogen, and from there we can ship hydrogen derivatives (to export markets).

DR KHALIL AL HANASHI
Coordinator, Hy-Fly

hydrogen hub at Sur on Oman's east coast.

The site currently hosts the gas liquefaction plant of Oman LNG, an ammonia and urea complex of Omifco, and sizable power generation and water desalination capacity.

"I think if we are to develop the hydrogen economy, the hydrogen hubs — which (integrated logistics services provider) Asyad Group refers to as 'Hydrogen Valleys' — are important because they are suitable for hydrogen production, they have the expertise to handle hydrogen, and from there we can ship hydrogen derivatives (to export markets)," the official said.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Bank Muscat wins Leading Corporate for Investor Relations Award from MEIRA

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has won the Leading Corporate for Investor Relations award from the Middle East Investor Relations Association (MEIRA) at an awards ceremony held in Riyadh recently.

The award was received on behalf of the bank by Nasser al Balushi from the Riyadh branch at an event, which was attended by senior officials from a number of stock exchanges and listed companies from the region.

MEIRA is an independent, non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting the Investor Relations (IR) profession and international standards in corporate governance.

The awards initiative is part of the integrated efforts made by MEIRA in partnership with regulators and stock exchanges in the region to promote disclosures and raise awareness about the need for transparency as well as the importance of disclosing interim and material information.

MEIRA aims to enhance the reputation, efficiency and attractiveness of capital markets



in the Middle East region through dialogue among members and encouraging the Investor Relations community to implement global best practices within the field.

The association works closely with stock exchanges, regulators and other market participants

to support companies in their professional development and certification programmes.

As a corporate member of MEIRA, Bank Muscat, which is recognised as the leading financial services provider in Oman, is committed to the implementation

of best practices in its investor relations, greater transparency and improved market communications Bank Muscat in line with its vision ‘To serve you better, everyday’, has always committed to providing accurate and updated information to all its stakeholders

in accordance to the relevant rules and regulations. It is indeed a matter of great pride that the bank has put in place a clear strategy to disseminate critical information in a consistent and timely manner to its stakeholders.

The bank regularly issues financial results data as well as clarifications and disclosures on issues, which may affect its current and future operations. Furthermore, the bank engages with investors periodically as per the Investor Relations regulations and practices to provide updates and outlook on the bank’s performance.

The award from MEIRA adds to the substantial number of international and local awards and accolades received this year. Earlier in 2022, Bank Muscat was ranked by Forbes Middle East as one of the Top 30 Banks as well as one of the Top 100 Listed Companies in the region. The bank has also won Muscat Securities Market’s (now known as MSX) Quality of Disclosure Award.

Get new home furniture in 10 minutes with Alizz Islamic Bank



MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank and IFIN (the first Islamic Fintech of its kind) continue to provide instant ‘Goods Financing’ for the bank’s customers. This is part of Alizz Islamic Bank’s constant pursuit to provide its clients with innovative financial solutions.

The instant finance solution is available at all branches of Danube Home as well as at Mustafa Sultan Electronics, Enza Home, Sofa Land and Fahmy Furniture, Sky Orbits and Al-Madinah Cement. Alizz Islamic Bank customers are able to avail instant finance on their goods right at the stores.

This service allows customers to instantly take home their desired goods from any of the aforementioned merchant stores having them financed for up to 120 months without the need of visiting any bank branch.

The process of availing finance has been simplified into a simple 10-minute process at the store’s checkout counter, where the customer will go through an online verification process and sign the finance contract following an immediate approval.

IFIN is the world’s first Shariah compliant, multi-institutional, multi-product, multi-channel Islamic FinTech solution facilitating instant Islamic financing at the retailer outlets.

This game-changing solution is geared to redefine the way Islamic financing is being done, making it secure, quick and easy for everyone.

NBO to provide digital banking services to Nesto Hypermarket

MUSCAT: Further strengthening a longstanding relationship, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has recently signed an agreement with Nesto Hypermarket on providing global transaction banking services to Nesto in Oman.

As NBO is continuously seeking to optimise, automate and personalise its services, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will see the bank providing online direct debit and smart digital payment solutions to Nesto Hypermarket. These online services will be available through the bank’s Corporate Internet Banking platform, integrated Point of Sale (POS) Machine and



Payment Gateway, which will further optimise the management of the client’s working capital.

Furthermore, the agreement will improve the customer experience in Nesto stores and will result in co-marketing initiatives and joint campaigns, while both NBO and Nesto employees will be able to benefit from special offers

as well.

Mohammed al Jabri, Assistant General Manager, and Head of Global Transaction Banking at National Bank of Oman, said, “Our reimagined partnership with Nesto Hypermarket enables our long-standing client to benefit from our sustainable and cutting-edge technological solutions and

our Corporate Internet Banking platform.”

He added, “We aim to support all our corporate clients through a range of state-of-the-art global transaction banking services. As banking is transforming at a rapid and tech-driven pace, we will keep on pushing for further improvements in our services. Hereto, we remain committed to our relentless exploration of the most innovative digital solutions that support our clients’ specialised business needs and drive progress over time.”

Al Sayyid Khalid bin Mahfoodh bin Salim al Busaidy, partner at Nesto Group, said, “At Nesto Hypermarket, we strive to provide

our customers with the best shopping experience. As one of the leading hypermarkets in the region and rapidly growing, we are continuously looking for ways to improve our services and take our customer service to the next level.

With this in mind, we have recently partnered with National Bank of Oman to provide a range of innovative digital banking solutions, which will help optimise the management of our working capital and further enhance the customer experience in our stores. We are delighted to be collaborating with such a renowned financial institution and look forward to the many benefits that this agreement will bring.”

Ford unveils New Year Delights campaign across the range

MUSCAT: Now any of your favourite Ford vehicle and get a chance to make every journey memorable with exclusive benefits for New Year Delights. They include service 3 years / 60,000 kms and registration 1 year. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Ford showroom.)

Ford’s range of vehicles are designed to impress and make an instant mark with their stylish exteriors, loaded features and inspiring safety technology.

In Oman, Ford range of vehicles include the all-new Territory, all-new Ford Bronco, all-new Ford Taurus, and all-new Ranger WildTrak. The all-new Territory is based on the rich heritage of the brand Ford and its iconic aesthetics. It embodies three fundamental design principles: commanding, agile, and responsive.

On the all-new Ford Territory’s exterior, the Ford DNA is visible through coast-to-coast upper graphics — comprising an integrated grille and signature light — balanced with lower graphics, with full LED lighting, which drives the focal point higher and communicates purpose, stability, and capability.

The all-new Ford Territory is equipped with an EcoBoost 1.8L engine, delivering 320Nm torque using moderate fuel and impressive power up to 190 hp (187 bhp). The vehicle is



equipped with an advanced dual clutch Seven-Speed automatic transmission providing smooth, responsive gear shifting with exceptional fuel efficiency. The all-new introduction — the 2-door Bronco WildTrak delivers maximum 4x4 go-anywhere, anytime capability and confidence.

The Bronco is equipped with fantastic features that elevate off-road experiences for drivers, including off-road mapping and drive technologies. Race-bred EcoBoost engines and a 10-speed automatic transmissions give the all-new Bronco the optimal combination of power, torque and gear ranges to perform in a

wide variety of terrains and uses. Bronco’s advanced four-wheel-drive technology is at the core of its off-road capabilities, and at the heart of it all is Bronco’s exclusive Terrain Management System with G.O.A.T. Modes that is designed to help drivers better navigate any type of terrain. Up to seven driver-selectable modes are offered including Normal, Eco, Sport, Slippery and Sand, with Baja, Mud/Ruts for off-road driving.

Best-in-class projected gasoline-powered horsepower and torque is available with the 2.7-litre EcoBoost V6 engine, which is projected to produce 310 horsepower and 400 lb.-ft. of torque, while

the 2.3-litre EcoBoost is targeted to deliver best-in-class four-cylinder torque of 310 lb.-ft. with an expected 270 horsepower.

The all-new Ford Taurus blends seamless connectivity, high on-road performance, and an entirely new sleek modern design. Boasting an all-new design, on an entirely different platform, the all-new Taurus still exudes refinement with numerous premium touches. Featuring 19-inch, 10-spoke polished alloy wheels, a new flatter streamlined hood, and a power-deployable door handle, Taurus is sleeker in its stance.

Under the bonnet, Ford’s proven 2.0-litre EcoBoost engine powers the

all-new Taurus, mated to an eight-speed automatic transmission, producing 232 Hp and 388 Nm of torque. Offered with front-wheel drive and three driving modes — Normal, Sport, and Eco — the Blue Oval’s flagship sedan enjoys an impressive economy of as much as 15.3 km/l.

The Ford Ranger Wildtrak makes it imposing presence felt with its stunning exterior and bold style. Its high-strength steel frame ladder chassis, its tough steel body and versatile cargo box make it an ideal companion for unplanned outings.

The tough exterior design incorporates a high beltline, a raked grille and slanted windshield which give Ranger its athletic appearance and superb aerodynamics which helps cut wind noise and improve fuel economy.

The powerful Ranger Wildtrak is equipped with a 3.2-litre turbodiesel engine that produces 196 hp and 470 Nm of torque. This is paired to a six-speed auto transmission.

Off-road, Ranger’s short front and rear overhangs mean impressive approach and departure angles for tackling steep terrain, while its ample ground clearance allows it to clear obstacles easily.

Ranger is also able to navigate watery obstacles up to 800mm deep, allowing drivers to push through conditions that may stop its competitors in their tracks.

Oman real estate deals reach RO 2.3 billion

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JAN 8

The value of real estate transactions in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of November 2022, reached RO 2.311 billion compared to RO 2.375 billion during the corresponding period in 2021, constituting a decline by 2.7%, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Fees collected for completed legal transactions amounted to RO 57.7 million compared to RO 78.8 million during the corresponding period in 2021, constituting a fall by 26.8%. Transactions value of sale contracts dropped by 3.1% to stand at RO 1.073 billion by the end of November 2022 compared to RO 1.107 billion during the



corresponding period in 2021.

The number of sale contracts also went down by 20.6% to reach 64,233 compared to 80,900 by the end of November 2021.

On the other hand, transactions value

of mortgage contracts went down by 2.2% to stand at RO 1.223 billion by the end of November 2022 compared to RO 1.251 billion by November 2021.

The number of mortgage contracts

increased by 6% to stand at 17,804 compared to 16,795 during the corresponding period in 2021.

Swap contracts' transactions value declined by 12.9% to stand at RO 14.5 million by the end of November 2022 compared to 16.6 million by the end of November 2021.

The number of swap contracts dropped by 23.2% to reach 1,234 compared to 1,606 contracts by the end of November 2021. The number of title deeds issued by the end of November 2022 reached 216,168, comprising a decrease by 6.6%.

Meanwhile, the number of title deeds issued for citizens of GCC countries increased by 6.2% to reach 788 compared to 742 during the corresponding period in 2021.

Hy-Fly to support growth of Hydrogen Hubs in Oman

FROM PAGE 13

"When we talk about Sur, for example, we have an ammonia jetty, given that ammonia is also a carrier for shipping hydrogen around.

Further, when we talk about Suhar, where know that around 40 per cent of the natural gas that goes into Suhar industries is converted into hydrogen.

Likewise, when we talk about Salalah, we recall the recent news announcement about a hydrogen-based bunkering hub being established there for ships," he stated, noting that Duqm will feature a major hydrogen centre of its own on Oman's southeastern coast.

Importantly, a key objective of the Alliance, said Dr Al Hanashi, is to enable the development of an integrated hydrogen ecosystem to underpin the future hydrogen economy in Oman.

Initiatives that will contribute to this endeavour include the potential for value-adding hydrogen blending projects, processing of hydrogen into chemicals, opportunities for hydrogen export, and related R&D prospects.

"We operate as a body of expertise on the hydrogen economy of Oman," he said.

We have three working groups that provide an (objective) review, sometimes initiating work as well, based on a steer from the Steering Committee headed by His Excellency the Minister of Energy and Minerals as the chairperson of the committee.

The goal is to build that ecosystem that goes beyond the production of hydrogen. We nudge people to be part of that ecosystem, or we'll probably not be harnessing the full potential of this economy.

This is the shared national vision of Hy-Fly from Day 1 – to carry along every organisation that is important to this goal. After all, as His Excellency Minister pointed out earlier, the public would need to know what's in it for them; that is also part and parcel of the National Hydrogen Alliance's objective to create that national vision for hydrogen."

OQ Group finances three environment conservation projects



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, JAN 8

OQ, a global integrated energy group, signed today three agreements with the Environment Authority (EA) to finance three environmental initiatives. This step reflects OQ's belief in the importance of preserving the environment and embodies its social partnership and support for the efforts exerted by governmental entities and initiatives.

The first agreement is related to OQ's Green Initiative, a project that aims to increase green areas by planting 250,000 trees as part of the national initiative for planting 10 million trees launched on 8 January 2020.

The second agreement relates to supporting Al Saleel Natural Park as part of OQ's belief in the importance of effective social engagement for the wellbeing of the society members. The third agreement is related to supporting

the initial response unit for oil pollution incidents at Musandam governorate.

This project falls under OQ's social investment programme as part of its approach aiming at promoting the efforts exerted to protect the environment and conserve natural resources. Environment conservation is considered a pillar of the social responsibility programmes carried out by OQ.

These agreements were signed by Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of

Environment Authority, and Tala bin Hamad al Aufi, Chief Executive Officer of OQ Group.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri said: "We appreciate the efforts exerted by OQ, the global integrated energy group, in various environmental aspects whether when it comes to complying with the national and international environmental frameworks and legislations in its operations or implementing environmental requirements in various operation sites."

Keys to a greener, sustainable future for Oman and UK



SIMON PENNEY

The author is UK's His Majesty's Trade Commissioner (HTMC) for the Middle East and Pakistan. He was appointed in May 2018.

Oman and the UK have strong economic ties, which deliver thousands of Omani jobs, growth and prosperity. 47 per cent of all foreign direct investment into Oman is British, with the energy sector playing a vital part.

British flag-bearers — bp and Shell — and a whole ecosystem of UK energy companies, including SMEs from across the UK — heavily contribute towards a sector that

underpins 77 per cent of Omani state revenue.

COP26 and COP27 have shown how energy is changing; and I am delighted that Oman is surging ahead as a regional leader.

Last month's second Green Hydrogen Summit in Muscat brought together leaders in every aspect of the hydrogen value chain from production and transportation to applications and storage.

Spearheaded by the Omani government, the Summit demonstrated the Sultanate of Oman's ambition to be a global leader in green hydrogen. Oman's renewable energy potential stems in large part from its enviable location.

With strong sun, fierce winds and abundant space, located near strategically located shipping ports for future exports, Oman will only have to allocate 0.1 per cent of its landmass for renewable energy to support its own future energy requirements, making energy exports key.

Vision, innovation and collaboration are also key to success, and the Sultanate of Oman's plans to build a hydrogen-



centric economy by 2040 hold significant opportunities for partnership between our two nations.

Three factors drive the potential for this UK/Oman collaboration: the strength of the UK's policy framework, renewables ecosystem; and Government export financing.

The UK's policy framework

Low carbon hydrogen is the UK's new home-grown super-fuel and it will be vital for our own energy security, in order to meet our legally binding commitment to achieve net-zero by 2050.

Last year the UK government doubled the UK's 2021 hydrogen production ambition to up to 10GW, by 2030.

This places the UK firmly at

the forefront of the global race to develop hydrogen. As hydrogen provides a secure, low carbon replacement for fossil fuels, it enables the transition to a greater energy security and of course to reach our net-zero targets.

The UK's renewables ecosystem

We cannot achieve our green energy goals in a vacuum, and we need to work with partners around the world to reach global solutions. I was delighted to be a keynote speaker at the Omani Government's 'New Energy Oman' conference at Mansion House in London in July last year.

I joined Abdulsalam al Murshidi, Qais al Yousef and senior representatives from OQ,

PDO, Hydrom and many more. We were joined by over 250 UK institutional investors and energy companies from every corner of the UK.

These companies see the opportunity in Oman and were keen to hear about the hydrogen opportunities on offer. Many of these attendees visited Oman for the British Embassy's Energy Trade Mission last October, and December's green hydrogen summit.

The UK Government's export financing

The UK-Oman Sovereign Investment Partnership, signed almost one year ago, has provided the springboard to diversify and keep increasing bilateral investment, to support prosperity and quality jobs across every corner of both our countries. One critical element to unlocking Oman's renewables potential is finance. Through the UK's export credit agency, UK Export Finance, the British Government has the potential to play a catalytic role in this area.

UKEF is emerging as a pioneer export credit agency for sustainability.

Last year, UKEF was the ECA which provided the most financing for sustainable deals, with £3.6bn provided for sustainable projects.

It was recognised as the top ECA for sustainable financing, according to an independent ranking. UKEF recently launched a new mission statement which puts sustainability at the heart of its agenda, and revealed an ambitious suite of new emissions reduction targets.

With an already strong partnership with Oman, and a track record of financing strategic projects here, I expect to see UKEF emerge as a key participant in supporting major deals in Oman's renewable energy and clean growth space.

In summary, the UK recognises that partnership, collaboration and co-investment hold the keys to a greener and more sustainable future for Oman and the UK; and the UK's offer will continue to support new jobs, growth and prosperity across Oman and the UK.

The Trade and Investment team at the British Embassy Muscat are primed and ready to drive this forward – onwards we go.

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Plants play key role in restoration of biodiversity

Plants can overcome or compensate most of this disbalance of nature and help in restoration of biodiversity. Agroforestry practices that deal with the growing the tree species intentionally at mountainous slopes and high runoff areas... **P20**

The significance of wood in the Omani Environment

UNDER THE auspices of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al-Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, Bait Al Zubair in partnership with the Ministry of Education launched the "Wooden Sculpture" exhibition by the fine arts teachers of Al Dhahirah Governorate last week at Bait Al Zubair-Muscat.

Oman is full of materials

that inspire artists in various fields of fine arts. Wood is one of the materials that is abundant in Oman, and varies in terms of shapes, sizes, and types, which opens an extensive horizon for studying it and knowing its characteristics.

A training programme for fine arts teachers, was organised to enrich

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

The exhibition was organised to enhance training workshops of fine arts teachers in Al Dhahirah Governorate. The exhibition contains

30 sculptural works with various techniques and treatments by teachers. The exhibition "Wooden Sculpture" will continue until February 5 at Bait Al Zubai.

Visitors can see the exhibition during opening hours from Saturday to Thursday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

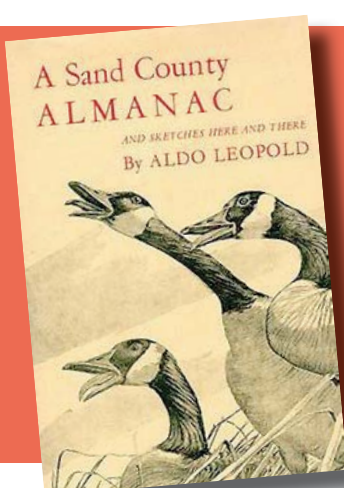


READ

A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC

BY ALDO LEOPOLD

It describes Aldo Leopold's experiences learning about the ecosystems of his home in Wisconsin and other places around North America. It is widely considered one of the most important books on ecology and environmentalism ever written



A RECORD

Cooks prepare the longest chorizo (highly-seasoned sausage) in the world at the Tres Piedras restaurant in Tulua, Valle del Cauca Department, Colombia, on January 7. —AFP



LIFESTYLE

A family cools off by a waterfall in Erawan National Park in Kanchanaburi on January 8, 2023.

—AFP





New Indonesia capital imperils ancient Eden with ‘ecological disaster’

THE TWISTING ROAD that leads to Indonesia's future capital is lined with dense rainforest and pockets of plantations, punctuated every so often with monkeys enjoying a laze out on the tarmac.

Located in eastern Borneo — the world's third-largest island — Nusantara is set to replace sinking and polluted Jakarta as Indonesia's political centre by late 2024.

But the two-hour drive from Balikpapan city to the sweeping green expanse of Nusantara's "Point Zero" reveals the scale of the new capital's potential impact on a biodiverse area that is home to thousands of animal and plant species.

With construction set to ramp up this year, environmentalists warn building a metropolis will speed up deforestation in one of the world's largest and oldest stretches of tropical rainforest, estimated to be more than 100 million years old.

"It's going to be a massive ecological disaster," Uli Arta Siagian, forest campaigner for environmental group Walhi, said.

The island that Indonesians call the "lungs of the world" — shared with Malaysia and Brunei — is home to long-nosed monkeys, clouded leopards, pig-tailed macaques, flying fox-bats and the smallest rhinos on the planet.

But by 2045, the Indonesian government says Nusantara will host 1.9 million residents, more than twice Balikpapan's population, importing a wave of human and industrial activity into the heart of Borneo.

The relocation to the 2,560-square-kilometre (990-square-mile) area follows capital moves by Brazil to Brasilia — considered an urban utopia failure — and Myanmar to the ghost town of Naypyidaw.

Drastic changes to the land's topography and the man-made disasters that could follow "will be severe and far more difficult to mitigate compared to natural disasters", said Siagian.

Indonesia also has one of the world's highest rates of deforestation linked to mining, farming and logging, and is accused of allowing

firms to operate in Borneo with little oversight.

The government, however, says it wants to spread economic development — long centred on densely populated Java — around the vast archipelago nation, and to move away from Jakarta before the city sinks due to excessive groundwater extraction.

WORKING WITH NATURE

Indonesian President Joko Widodo has pitched a utopian vision of a "green" city four times the size of Jakarta where residents would commute on electric buses.

His city authority chief, Bambang



Susantono, presented the initial plan to journalists in mid-December, pledging carbon neutrality by 2045 in what he dubbed the world's first-ever sustainable forest city.

Architect Sofian Sibarani is in charge of creating a master plan for the new city, outlining everything from road maps to a transit system. He insisted that his plan envisaged "minimum changes to the environment".

Sibarani spoke of a metropolis that appears out of the jungle, rather than replaces it.

"We are trying to create (a city

that is) working with nature instead of working against it," he said.

Initial projects include a parliament, workers' homes, a dam, a grand mosque and a presidential palace shaped as the towering mythical bird Garuda.

Experts, including Sibarani, however have warned authorities against breakneck building.

"My concern is if you rush this, we may compromise," he said.

Erased our traces

Nusantara could also displace generations-old Indigenous communities.

Sibukdin, a local Indigenous Balik tribe leader who goes by one

"It erased our traces," he said.

While officials have vowed to respect Indigenous rights and compensate those affected by Nusantara, provincial officials said they would verify all land claims and only accept ownership proof.

Sibukdin said not all Balik tribe areas had been formally recognised.

"When the new capital comes, where else can we go?" he asked.

THREAT TO ANIMALS

While Susantono said the first stage would be finished by next year, the city will not be completed for decades.

The project will cost 466 trillion rupiah (\$30 billion), with taxpayer money expected to cover about 20 per cent, according to a government estimate.

Jakarta has been wooing potential investors, including Saudi Arabia and China, with hefty tax breaks to cover the cost.

It has secured the backing of three property developers to fund housing worth 41 trillion rupiah (\$2.6 billion), Nusantara authority secretary Achmad Adiwijaya.

But funding has proven elusive, with few commitments announced. Japanese tech conglomerate SoftBank pulled its backing for the project in March without elaborating.

That left Indonesia with an uphill battle to swiftly relocate and find the money to open Nusantara's doors by the time Widodo leaves office, raising fears Jakarta could cut corners.

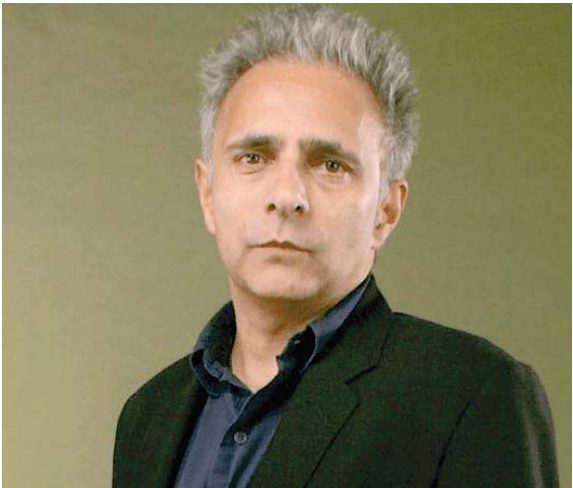
Eka Permanasari, urban design professor at Monash University Indonesia, warned that there was still a lot of "homework that needs to be done". Life is already changing for the worse for some of the area's animal inhabitants.

At an orangutan sanctuary home to around 120 apes on land marked for Nusantara's future expansion, illegal encroachments have intensified since the capital's location was announced.

"Mines, land speculators, they encroach on our place," said Borneo Orangutan Survival Foundation (BOSF) chief executive Jamartin Sihite. — **AFP**

LITERATI

Author Hanif Kureishi says he cannot move his arms or legs after fall



AUTHOR AND PLAYWRIGHT Hanif Kureishi has said he is in hospital in Rome following a fall on Boxing Day, and is unable to move his arms or legs.

The 68-year-old British playwright, novelist and filmmaker - best known for his works "The Buddha Of Suburbia," "Intimacy" and "Mother"-shared a message on Twitter in which he said he was being treated at Gemelli University Hospital in the Italian capital.

Kureishi said he was in the city on December 26 when he fell during a walk from Piazza del Popolo to Villa Borghese and then back to his apartment.

He said: "I had just seen Mo Salah score against Aston Villa, sipped half a beer, when I began to feel dizzy.

"I lent forward and put my head between my legs; I woke up a few minutes later in a pool of blood, my neck in a grotesquely twisted position, my wife on her knees beside me."

Kureishi said he saw "a scooped, semi-circular object with talons attached scuttling towards me" before realising it was his hand.

He added: "It occurred to me then that there was no co-ordination between what was left of my mind and what remained of my body. I had become divorced from myself. I believed I was dying. I believed I had three breaths left."

Kureishi said his wife heard his "frantic shouting", adding: "She saved my life and kept me calm.

"For a few days I was profoundly traumatised, altered and unrecognisable to myself. I am in the hospital. I cannot move my arms and legs."

He continued: "I cannot scratch my nose, make a phone call or feed myself. As you can imagine, this is both humiliating, degrading and a burden for others.

"I've had an operation on my spine and have shown minor improvements in the last few days."

Kureishi said he has "sensation and some movement" and will soon begin physiotherapy and rehabilitation.

He added: "At the moment, it is unclear whether I will ever be able to walk again, or whether I'll ever be able to hold a pen, if there is any assistance that I would be grateful for, it would be with regard to voice assisted hardware and software, which will allow me to watch, write -and begin work again, and continue some kind of half life."

After his post, Kureishi received well wishes from TV chef and foodwriter Nigella Lawson, journalist Sarfraz Manzoor, who co-wrote Blinded By The Light, writer Reni Eddo-Lodge, historian and author William Dalrymple and comedian Sanjeev Bhaskar.

Dalrymple wrote on Twitter: "Oh Hanif. This is just bloody miserable. Much love and strength for further healing and recovery xxx."

Kureishi is known for tackling difficult subjects including the complexity of relationships and the marginalisation of minority groups.

In 1985 he was commissioned by Channel 4 to write a play, which resulted in My Beautiful Laundrette, a film about a gay British Pakistani youth in 1980s London.

The film, directed by Stephen Frears, won the New York City Film Critics best screenplay award and received an Academy Award nomination for best original screenplay.

Kureishi's other screenplays include Sammy And Rosie Get Laid, London Kills Me, The Mother and Venus.

In 1990, Kureishi published one of his most famous works, The Buddha Of Suburbia, which won the Whitbread Award for the best first novel and was later adapted for a BBC television series with a soundtrack by David Bowie.

The novel follows a bisexual British South Asian character called Karim Amir as he explores class, ethnicity, sexuality and culture in late 20th-century London.

The book is semi-autobiographical and draws on a number of Kureishi's own experiences growing up in London.

Kureishi's second novel, The Black Album, was published in 1995 and deals with Islamic fundamentalism and freedom of speech, and was adapted for the stage in 2009.

His third novel, Intimacy, came in 1998 and follows the story of a man contemplating leaving his wife and children after feeling rejected by his wife.

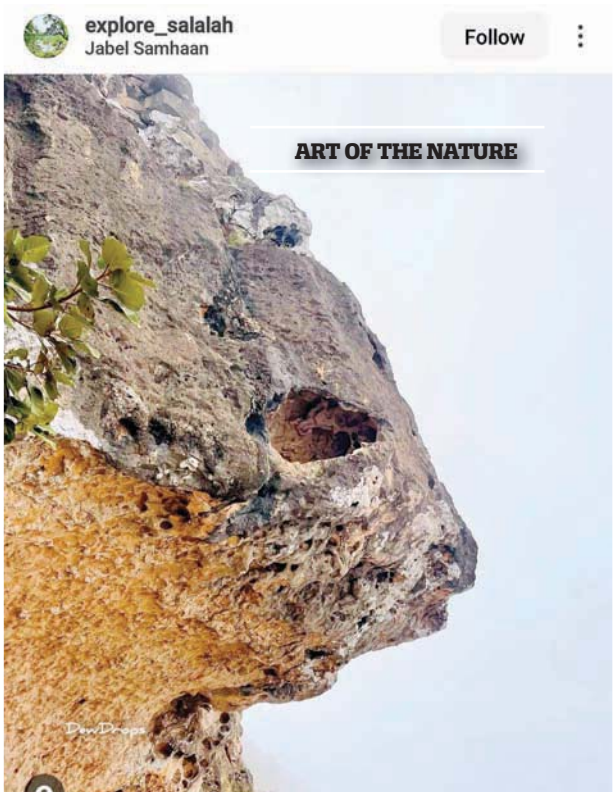
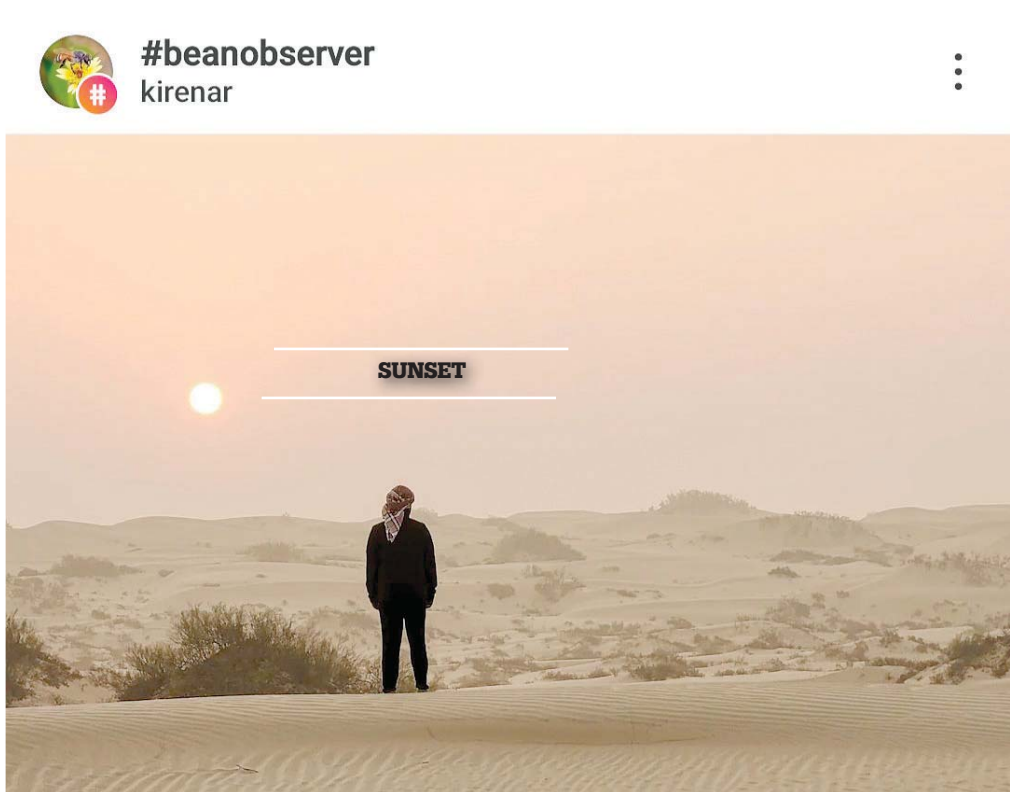
He was made a CBE in 2008 and sold his archive to the British Library in 2014, which included personal diaries and notebooks, and also the working material for his major works.

— **dpa**



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AROUND THE WORLD

CUISINE

Flavours of Thailand



KABEER YUSOUF

The Kingdom of Thailand has a unique gastro-nomic culture and it is a major attraction behind its annual tourism statistics. What gives Thai foods a different identity is that the Thai platter is amazingly balanced with a mix of sweet, sour, bitter, and salty flavours which are finished with aromatic herbs.

Various iconic places including the capital Bangkok has a plethora of joints to reckon with and a visit to this country wouldn't be complete without trying its unique delicacies which vary from foods influenced by many cultures including India, China and Portugal.

It is a rare tribute to the yearning food aficionados in Oman that how the Thais have incorporated these influences into their cuisine for centuries to create their own unique dishes at the Grand Millennium Muscat.

The Thai food fest will be an exciting opportunity to experience the rich flavours of this Southeast Asian country as Thai Master Chef Sirlak Suksumran and her team will visit Muscat to display their expertise in authentic Thai dishes, for the first time.

Bahriyat Restaurant is all Thai-fied to serve an ala carte menu of well-known Thai dishes during lunch and dinner while the chef deep inside you can take classes from Master Chef Sirlak where the specific ingredients and cooking techniques used in each meal will be taught while enjoying the delicious meal.

"The Thai food fest is an exciting opportunity for both Omanis and expatriates to come and try the unique festival that allows guests to sample authentic Thai food and to get the opportunity and learn how to prepare dishes during the cooking classes. We are excited to be hosting the Thai fest," said Luca Medda, Cluster General Manager at Grand Millennium Muscat.

The festival, to be held from January 10 till 31, will feature delightful Thai cuisine with live street food cooking stations, cooking classes and Thai entertainment. A range of Thai foods ranging from Pad Thai (Stir-Fried Noodles), Tom Yum Goong (Hot and Sour Shrimp Soup), Kaeng Lueang (Yellow Curry), Gaeng Daeng (Red Curry), Gaeng Keow Wan Gai (Green Curry), Khao Soi (Thai Coconut Curry Noodle Soup), and Khao Pad (Thai Fried Rice) and many more are a sure bet to tickle one's taste buds all these days.

MUSIC

A rave of their own: Egypt's women DJs creating inclusive dance floors



Laser beams illuminate a darkened restaurant turned dance hall in Cairo as revelers move to thumping beats from female DJs — part of a generation of women shaking up Egypt's underground electronic music scene.

"All my life, I've seen men behind the decks," said party-goer Menna Shanab, 26, as psychedelic visuals reflected off the waters at the Nile-side venue.

"It's good to see the music scene evolving," said the young Cairo resident, decked out in fashionable streetwear.

In Egypt's patriarchal society, the music industry remains male-dominated, while the conservative country's cultural establishment marginalises and even bans electronic music artists.

Female party-goers for years have complained about harassment on the dance floor, while many revellers find mainstream venues too pricey.

Now, a generation of young women DJs are forging their own path, seeking to create more inclusive spaces for performers and party-goers alike.

A small but vibrant electronic music scene is "booming" in the Egyptian capital, according to Yemeni music journalist and occasional DJ Hala K, asking like others AFP interviewed to be identified only by her stage name.

"A lot of female talents feel more confident and empowered to pursue DJing," the Amsterdam-based Hala K said by telephone.

Aspiring artists are taking inspiration from female DJs from the region, she added — such as Palestinian Sama Abdulhadi, who has performed from Egypt to France and at

premier US festival Coachella.

In Cairo, there are "powerful, talented women at the turntables: they know how to make people dance," Hala K said.

PARTY IN PEACE

DJ and promoter A7ba-L-Jelly decided to establish her own collective as part of making the underground electronic dance music scene more inclusive.

"I just wanted to go and party in peace."

More than 90 per cent of women in Egypt aged between 18 and 39 said in 2019 that they had experienced some form of sexual harassment, according to the Arab Barometer public opinion research network.

"In some places in Egypt, where they play more commercial music... you won't enter because you are single, or because you don't look rich enough," A7ba-L-Jelly added.

"I book male and female DJs to create dance floors that are inclusive in terms of music, gender and social class," she said.

From the Nile-side dance venue, DJ Yas Meen Selectress complained that regardless of gender, "there are no dedicated spaces for us where we can play our music".

Locations are often gardens or other makeshift sites, organisers told.

"Traditions, society and other factors mean that there are fewer women than men in the scene," Yas Meen Selectress added. Less than 20 per cent of women are officially employed in the country of 104 million.

For the DJ in her late 20s, who lives between Cairo and

New York, however, "to be only defined by one's gender is reductive".

For others like Dalia Hassan, it is a selling point.

Over the past two decades, she has made a name for herself playing at women-only events from Cairo to the Yemeni capital Sanaa and Riyadh in Saudi Arabia.

Hassan said she DJs at bachelorette parties, gender-segregated weddings and anywhere a female audience wants to "get dressed up and dance as they please".

Having a woman at the turntables allows other women to let loose — "especially those who are veiled", she added.

DOMINATED BY MEN

For France-based researcher Hajer Ben Boubaker, the lack of women DJs runs counter to Egypt's strong tradition of women performers.

"Female singers have always been well represented in the Arab cultural scene," she told AFP.

"The symbol par excellence of Egyptian music is still the mythical Umm Kalthoum," she added, referring to the 20th-century diva revered around the Arab world.

But "women are barely represented in the Egyptian electro scene of mahraganat, which is the most popular music today," she added.

Mahraganat relies heavily on computer-generated and synthesised beats and features blunt lyrics that tackle topics including love, power and money.

The country's musicians' union announced late last year it was abolishing the genre as part of a campaign to "preserve public taste".

— AFP

TECHNOLOGY

From bees to bullets, CES tech show gives gamers the feels



GETTING SHOT, standing in a downpour, being surrounded by bees: None are ideal, but for gamers, feeling the sensations of each is the goal.

At the CES tech show, the video game industry is showing off just how lifelike gaming can be made with new vests, head cushions and other simulation products.

"Lots of consumers are doing games, and they are looking for gaming hardware," Kiuk Gwak of bHaptics Inc. told AFP as he demonstrated his company's vest and gloves at the Las Vegas gathering, which ends on Sunday.

The haptic vest replicates the feeling of action playing out in virtual worlds, while matching haptic gloves add a feeling of touch.

"People are not just using our vest for getting shot, but they can feel the wind or rain or even bees in virtual reality," Gwak said.

Gaming hardware company Razer showed off what it said was the world's first surround-sound audio and haptics head cushion, called Project Carol, which allows "gamers to feel everything behind them, placing them firmly in the middle of the action."

Razer also said it will release an "Edge" handheld gaming unit in the United States on January 26 at a price of \$400.

Backseat gamer?

Razer is one of multiple companies, including Dell and Acer, that showed off laptops sporting rich screens and mighty computer chips meant to tempt gamers who crave speed and immersion.

Gaming computers powered by the latest chips from rivals AMD and Nvidia were also on display.

"Modern games with increasingly life-like visuals require new levels of graphics horsepower," said AMD graphics unit senior vice president Scott Herkelman.

Nvidia also announced that its GeForce Now cloud video game service would be included in vehicles for the first time thanks to an alliance with Hyundai Motor Group, BYD and Polestar.

"Thanks to cloud technology and the mobile internet, vehicle occupants can keep boredom at bay with the ability to enjoy music, movies and now video games in the car," Nvidia said in a release, noting whoever is in the driver's seat will only be able to play while parked.

"The ability to stream games to the car is a key component of the future of in-vehicle experiences."

CES exhibits by tech titans such as South Korean competitors LG and Samsung, meanwhile, included screens tailored for gamers with features such as sweeping curves to enhance the feeling of immersion.

Evolving field of play

Dominican Republic-based Clover Gaming flaunted a virtual casino that offers slots, roulette, horse betting and other Las Vegas-style gambling in the metaverse.

The CloverLand casino platform plans to use blockchain and cryptocurrency, chief development officer Eilla Lefebvre told.

"We are using new technologies, which is part of the reason we came to CES," Lefebvre said.— AFP



art & life

Local Scene

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MONDAY | JANUARY 9 | 2023

Plants play key role in restoration of biodiversity



Dr Priyanka Verma

Oman is situated at southeast coast of Arabian Peninsula. Oman has long coastal line of about 2,092km bordered by Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman and Arabian sea. The 82 per cent of total area comprises of desert and 15 per cent belongs to mountains and remaining is plain. Oman is unique in terms of its origin as it's the only country that is mostly composed of oceanic crust and rocks. Richness of plant biodiversity and uniqueness in terms of endemism is the characteristic feature of this country as out of 1,212 existing plant species, 87 per cent was found to be endemic or semi-endemic. Oman is highly vulnerable to climatic changes like rise in temperature and desertification. Rise in temperature lead to ocean-deoxygenation leading to alter marine life as well as also a cause of frequent tropical cyclones. International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) data showed due to climatic changes the rate of extinction of species is 1,000-10,000 times more in comparison to the natural evolution process. Frequent floods, drought, storms lead to the loss of pollinators and dispersal of seeds resulting into extinction of species. Oman faced two recent cylcones "Gonu" in 2007

and "Shaheen" in 2021 that caused extensive biological and economical loss. Plants can overcome or compensate most of this disbalance of nature and help in restoration of biodiversity. Agroforestry practices that deal with the growing the tree species intentionally at mountainous slopes and high runoff areas to minimise the desertification, and soil-sedimentation is one of the important tools to restore the soil fertility and conserve soil and water. Out of many, the most relevant example of this is the Wakan village located in Al Batinah South Governorate. It is situated at 2,000m above the sea level in the Western Al Hajar mountains. Ecosystem and habitat conservation is another relevant practice to restore the biodiversity where a particular area is protected and maintained according the required species survival and multiplication. It includes the various fauna based natural reserves like Ras al Hadd Turtle Reserve, Arabian Oryx Sanctuary, Wadi al Sareen, Jabal Samhan Nature Reserve, Damaniyat Islands, Seven tidal inlets (khawrs) in Dhofar, Al Saleel national park. The largest flora-based reserve is the Botanic Garden in Muscat covering 9.6 land of Oman that conserves and displays the native flora. The role of scientists and researchers in the field of plant biology is one of the most relevant

aspects of conservation that has already completed many milestones all over the world. Abundance of biodiversity conservation or restoration work has been going on through developing tissue banks of rare and endangered plant species, biotechnological interventions to generate drought and salt resistant variety of desired crops, transgenics and many more in the list. Sultan Qaboos University, University of Nizwa, Dhofar University, UTAS-Sur are the leading institutes of Oman that are working on various aspects of plant conservation and multiplication. Government authorities are also highly active in terms of environment protection. Apart from financing the conservation programmes at the institutional level, they are also putting their efforts directly to reach out the common people. Recently in 2020, Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs (MECA) along with Petroleum Development Oman has launched an "Ashjar initiative" that target the plantation of 10 million trees. Mangrove forests restoration is one of the leading government projects. Mangrove vegetation is unique coastal wetlands that lower down the speed of cyclones and prevent the shores from erosion created by tides and water currents. It represents diverse flora and fauna and compose the complete marine ecosystem. Plantation and

restoration of mangrove at six coastal governorates namely North and South Al Batinah, Muscat, South Sharqiyah, Al Wusta, and Dhofar are the prime manifesto. Recently 10,000 mangrove saplings have been planted in Shaleem & Al Halaniyat Islands of Dhofar and 7,000 in Khor Ghawi in Al Wusta. Directorate General of Nature conservation planted 3,000 mangrove seedlings in Bakhur Salan in Wilayat of Qurayat. To conserve the mangrove ecosystems, Sultanate of Oman also joined UN Environment's "clean sea campaign" through beach cleaning activities. Along with all these ongoing efforts, experts also suggest to plant trees that can withstand cyclones. Trees should be planted along the coastal line that have strong roots, flexible wood and solid trunk structure that can withstand high speed winds. The trees should be planted in rows altering the types providing plenty of room to spread the roots. It was reported that, Azadirachta indica, terminalia bellerica, and Arjuna terminalia trees withstood the high wind speed during cyclones and lost only 50 per cent of branches in comparison to the other plants that were totally uprooted during the high-speed winds. Some of the wind resistant trees that grow in saline conditions are Quercus geminata, Sabal palmetto, Phoenix canariensis and Olea europaea.