

Focus on improving air quality

The second day of the Oman Conference for Sustainability focused on air pollution and climate change. The conference included sessions on indicators of climate change, air quality, apart from workshops on green hydrogen. Dr Abdullah al Amri, EA Chairman, said "Pollution does not adhere to specific areas and there is a need to develop solutions to meet challenges facing the environment to reduce emissions and maintain air quality." SEE P2



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BIDIYA TO HOST OMAN DESERT MARATHON FROM JANUARY 21



P14

OMAN TOPS MENA REGION IN SUSTAINABLE ENERGY REGULATION



P20

CAPTURING THE ESSENCE OF OMAN



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY SUDAN CHAIRMAN

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from Lt Gen Abdul Fattah al Burhan, Chairman of the Transitional Sovereignty Council in the Republic of Sudan, in response to His Majesty's cable of greetings on the occasion of Sudan's 67th Independence Anniversary. Al Burhan thanked His Majesty the Sultan's sincere sentiments. He wished HM good health and the people further development and growth. — ONA

KABUL

3 FOREIGN NGOS PARTIALLY RESUME AID

At least three leading international aid agencies have partially resumed life-saving work in Afghanistan after assurances from the Taliban authorities that Afghan women can continue to work in the health sector. Hundreds of NGOs have been instrumental in trying to address one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with half of Afghanistan's 38 million people hungry. SEE PAGE 6

BERLIN

BORIS IS GERMANY'S DEFENCE MINISTER

Germany's government named Boris Pistorius as defence minister on Tuesday at a time of mounting pressure on Berlin from Western allies to allow Ukraine to use German-made tanks in the war with Russia. Christine Lambrecht resigned as defence minister on Monday, ahead of a conference on Friday at the US military base in Ramstein . SEE PAGE 7

INSIDE



TROOPS KILL PALESTINIAN AFTER ALLEGED ATTACK

P5



AL SHABAAB LAUNCHES ATTACK ON SOMALI MILITARY BASE

P6

HM TO LEAVE FOR UAE TODAY



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will pay a visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Wednesday.

A statement to this effect was issued by the Diwan of Royal Court, reading as follows: "His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik will leave tomorrow for the

United Arab Emirates (UAE), in response to UAE President Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan's invitation to His Majesty to take part in a fraternal meeting between GCC Leaders, King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and President Abdel Fatah el Sisi

of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

"His Majesty the Sultan will be accompanied by an official delegation comprising Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad

al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; and Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the UAE.

"May the Almighty Allah guard His Majesty the Sultan wherever he might be and grant him permanent success."

— ONA

Royal Decree ratifies protocol of amending air services agreement

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday issued Royal Decree No (5/2023) ratifying the protocol of amending the air services agreement between the governments of the Sultanate of Oman and the Republic of Turkey, signed in Montreal on September 29, 2022. Article (1) ratifies the aforementioned protocol in accordance with the version attached to this decree. Article (2) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA

Empty Quarter Festival kicks off on Jan 25

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

The second edition of Empty Quarter Festival will be held in the Al Khadf area in Niyabat Al Shisr in the Wilayat of Thamrait from January 25 to February 3. The festival, which will be held in cooperation with a number of government agencies and the private sector, is organised by the Directorate-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar Governorate.



No forced labour or trafficking of Chadians: OHRC

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

The Oman Human Rights Commission (OHRC) followed up on the video regarding some officials and a number of Chadian women. The video reports that these Chadian women had been returned from the Sultanate of Oman after being treated inhumanely by their employers.

Within the framework of its terms of reference and responsibilities, as soon as the OHRC monitored the issue, it communicated with the competent authorities in the Sultanate of Oman to ascertain the truth of the issue and to correct any legal

or humanitarian abuse towards the said women.

Accordingly, the Commission found the following:

1. The Chadian women referred to in the video were employed under contracts of employment pursuant to the law and the procedures followed in Oman, under the mutual agreement and consent between the women and the relevant employers.
2. Only one of the said women

The presentation of the issue through the video and the description thereof was exaggerated and even contradictory to the truth

filed a complaint to the competent authorities for a dispute between her and the employer, the issue was settled as per legal procedures and she accepted to return to work.

3. Through the competent authorities, the OHRC

has ascertained that all the aforementioned women have not been subjected to forced labour or human trafficking, as all documents submitted by the competent authorities prove that

they have not filed any report or complaint in this regard. The OHRC and the Human Trafficking Committee have not received any report in this regard.

4. The competent authorities in the Republic of Chad requested the competent authorities in the Sultanate of Oman to assist in facilitating the process of returning the aforementioned women to their countries. As a matter of mutual cooperation between the two sides, the competent authorities in Oman took all the necessary steps in terms of providing travel tickets and receiving their financial dues, in consideration of the period of employment with their employers. **TURN TO P2**

India set to overtake China as world's most populous nation

NEW DELHI: India is expected to overtake China as the world's most populous country this year even though its population growth has been slowing down, United Nations says.

China's population shrank last year for the first time in more than six decades, official data showed on Tuesday, as the birth rate slows in the face of mounting financial

pressures and shifting social attitudes.

The world's most populous country is facing a looming demographic crisis as its workforce ages, which analysts warn could stymie economic growth and pile pressure on strained public coffers.

Analysts point to the soaring cost of living — as well as a growing number of women in



China's population shrank last year for the first time in more than six decades.

the workforce and seeking higher education — as reasons behind the slowdown.

"Who dares to have kids?" a Shanghai resident in his thirties said on Tuesday. "The unemployment rate is so high, Covid destroyed everything, there's nothing we can do. Next year we'll have declining growth again."

SEE ALSO P6



OMAN, UAE HOLD TALKS IN LEGISLATIVE FIELD



ABU DHABI: A session of official talks was held here on Tuesday between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on the legislative field. During the talks, Oman was represented by Shaikh Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, while the UAE was represented by Saqr Ghobash, Speaker of the Federal National Council of the UAE. During the talks session, the two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest. — ONA

No forced labour, finds OHRC

FROM PAGE 1

Therefore, the OHRC considers that the case was only a matter of disagreement or lack of agreement between the employers and the aforementioned women. This issue may sometimes occur and is governed by the laws, legislation and procedures of the terms of the contract made between the worker and the employer. Any violation by both parties of these controls and procedures can be reported to the competent authorities, including the Ministry of Labour, the Royal Oman Police and other concerned authorities.

Furthermore, having found such information and facts, the Commission believes that the presentation of the issue through this video and the description thereof was exaggerated and even contradictory to the truth. If there had been any infringement or violation of the rights of the said Chadian women, they would have reported the issue to the competent authorities in Oman prior to their travel in order to investigate any abuse and maintain their rights in accordance with the law. However, neither the said women nor the Republic of Chad, which has followed up on their subject, has reported any case to the competent authorities.

The OHRC affirmed that all means of communication and reporting any complaint to the competent authorities are available around the clock to all citizens

and residents of Oman. It also welcomes any communication or follow-up request from any third party working to protect human rights.

2. Only one of the said women filed a complaint to the competent authorities for a dispute between her and the employer, the issue was settled as per legal procedures and she accepted to return to work.

3. Through the competent authorities, the OHRC has ascertained that all the aforementioned women have not been subjected to forced labour or human trafficking, as all documents submitted by the competent authorities prove that they have not filed any report or complaint in this regard. The OHRC and the Human Trafficking Committee have not received any report in this regard.

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Oman, UNEP review environmental issues

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, met with Sami Dimassi, Regional Director and Representative of the United Nations Environment Programme for West Asia (UNEP) on the sidelines of Oman Conference on Environmental Sustainability.

They discussed a number of topics related to international relations, training programmes in climate change and biodiversity, the effect of dust on air quality and the suitable solutions to limit its effect



on the Sultanate of Oman's Environmental Performance Index (EPI). The UNEP representative underscored the importance of partnership between the UNEP and the Environment Authority in preparing the national strategy for adaptation and mitigation of climate change, noting that the Sultanate of Oman has achieved positive figures in EPI. — ONA

Conference focuses on improving air quality

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The second day of the Oman Conference for Sustainability focused on air pollution and climate change.

The conference included sessions on indicators of climate change, air quality and efforts made in this regard, apart from workshops on green hydrogen.

Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority and Chairman of the Organising Committee of the Conference, explained to Oman News Agency that the conference focuses on three main axes represented in the employment of scientific research through the presentation of scientific papers by a committee of experts and scientists to ensure the quality of the scientific product.

Dr Abdullah al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority (EA), said "Pollution does not adhere to specific areas and there is a need to develop solutions to meet challenges facing the environment to reduce emissions and maintain air quality."

Headed, "It is possible to provide



solutions to many local, regional and international environmental issues and challenges, explaining that the scientific papers will be published in an internationally refereed scientific journal and in category A and among the best scientific fields, and high standards have been set for selecting the research participating in the conference."

The conference highlighted the role of the youth to provide innovative solutions related to climate change and air quality and the conference aims to make Muscat a main station for scientific research.

Anneke Roger of the German Aerospace Center stated that methane is the second most important anthropogenic greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide, due to the relatively short life of methane, which is about 10 years, indicating that the significant decrease in anthropogenic methane

emissions would help reduce the concentration of the atmosphere within a decade.

Walid al Hamoud, Director of the Environment Department at the General Secretariat of the GCC states, said that within the framework of the GCC countries' follow-up to the current environmental situation in the world, and the challenges and difficulties that the common environment is going through, it requires everyone to increase attention and ensure coordination and cooperation in a way that limits and reduces environmental damage, and preserves its components, resources, and sustainability for future generations."

He pointed out that the GCC countries are committed to comprehensive and sustainable development for current and future generations.

شركة الدقم لتوليد الكهرباء ش.م.ش.
Duqm Power Company S.P.C.

Tender Announcement

Introduction
Duqm Power Company SPC (herein after "DPC") inviting proposals from qualified and experienced Tenderers to undertake to provide Permanent Accommodation for Staff at Duqm based on **Design, Build, Own, Operate and Maintain Contract**. The DPC invites Bidders to submit their proposals as described below.

Tender Number	Tender Title	Tender Description	Tender Fees	Clarification Closing Date	Bid Submission Date
DPC-PSA-00-000-LE-TND-0001	Design, Build, Own, Operate and Maintain Permanent Staff Accommodation at Duqm	DPC intends to obtain proposal from experienced developers and operators of residential real estate projects for the provision of 100 Nos of Permanent Staff Accommodation with all facilities at Duqm based. The Contract type will be Design, Build, Own, Operate and Maintain 1. The Tenderer shall submit a bid bond obtained from a locally registered bank in Oman for a value of 2% of the Tender Value. 2. The successful Tenderer shall provide a Performance Guarantee for a value of 5% of the Contract Value.	1,250 OMR	7 th March 2023	12 th March 2023

Request for proposal
The RFP will be made available in electronic form only from **9:00 AM, 22nd January 2023 Oman time.**

Contractor Minimum Qualifications
Contractor must hold valid registration with Government Entities for works of this nature and have necessary builders experience with financial stability in Oman.

Interested Tenderers shall contact DPC via email to tender@marafiq.om with the subject heading **"Permanent Staff Accommodation at Duqm."** to receive further instructions related to payment of tender fee and collection of RFP Package.

P.O. Box 80 P.C. 102
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
www.marafiq.om

Shura panel debates Foreign Capital Investment Law



MUSCAT: The Economic and Financial Committee of Majlis Ash'shura discussed the impacts of applying the Foreign Capital Investment Law promulgated by Royal Decree 50/2019 for the aspects related to the rate of ownership, minimum capital and impermissible activities for foreign investors in accordance with the resolution issued by the minister of commerce, industry and investment promotion.

The committee held its fourth meeting of the fourth annual session under the chairmanship of Ahmed bin Said al Sharqi.

In addition, the committee reviewed an analytical paper submitted by the economic and development sector and took suitable decisions and measurements in this regard coinciding with the proposed amendments referred to the committee from the Majlis.

The committee discussed an expressed desire regarding the granting of usufruct contracts at the projects of the Five-Year Plans. It also reviewed the reply provided by the Ministry of Economy pertaining to its report on the evaluation of the meeting of Majlis Ash'shura during which it hosted the minister of economy in February 2022.



Expect chilly temperatures during Muscat Nights

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As the capital prepares for three weeks of mostly outdoor Muscat Nights, the visitors will be subject to somewhat chilly temperatures in the initial days.

According to Oman Meteorology, temperatures in most parts of the city are expected to come down, especially in the initial days, between 14 degrees Celsius and 19 Celsius in most parts of the country, especially Muscat which will host the event.

The winter season is expected to be very cold due to polar vortices, and increased rates of weather depressions, and countries near the equator are most affected by the temperature drop, according to weather experts.

Speaking to the Observer, an official at Oman Meteorology said, visitors to venues such as Naseem Park, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) and the Oman Automobile Association (OAA) grounds will be subject to cold and breezy weather than at Qurum Natural Park.

The official also indicated that apart from a high sea wave on the coasts of the Sea of Oman, low temperatures will prevail in most of the Sultanate's governorates.

He added that while temperatures will come down in the later days of Muscat Nights, one cannot rule out the chances of rain during the coming day.

According to health experts, visitors should take care with appropriate winter clothes to avoid cold-related illness such as throat infections and flu, which has already been severe this year.

According to Muscat



Municipality, Muscat Nights, which is the largest entertainment, cultural and community event, is key to making the city bustling and alive again with shows and events after three years.

This year's event will be a successor to the Muscat Festival, which was held in the capital annually since its inception in 1998. The last edition of the festival was held in 2019 as the mega event was suspended following the Covid-19 related restrictions.

Two awardees to perform in Muscat

KABEER YOUSUF
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Acclaimed names in the tinsel town and national awardees, Suraj Venjaramood and Aparna Balamurali, are all set to enthrall the Oman audience with their troupe on January 20 at the Qurum Amphitheatre.

Dr Humaid bin Saeed al Amiri, President of the Oman Film and Theatre Society, will be the chief guest at the event that aims to celebrate the magnificent colours of diversity.

Titled 'The Mega Show', a number of luminaries from South Indian cinema, playback singer Vidu Pratap, presenter Lakshmi Nakshtra, Star Magic Comedy actors Binu Adimali, Thanku, Ullas Pandalam, Akhil Kavalayoor, Anumol, Aishwarya Rajeev along with singers Master Rituraj, Naseer Minnale, Swetha Ashok and many more are in the line up for the grand event that is expecting audience to the capacity.

Organised by Warm Home Events, Cocktail Family & SP events, the show will begin by 6.30 pm, according to the organisers.

ROP efforts reflect in high security ranking

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman has been rated the fourth most secure country in the world. Oman also occupied 5th global position as a crime-free country, according to the Global Database Index (Numbeo).

Oman received 80.3 points in the security level and 19.7 points in scale measuring the spread of crime.

The results reflect the efforts made by the Royal Oman Police (ROP) in preserving security and public order, protecting lives and properties, preventing and combating all sorts of crimes.

The accomplishment also affirms the high level of awareness in Omani society, with citizens complementing the efforts of the ROP in maintaining law and order. — ONA

Training programme on virtual museums

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education, represented by the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development (Citizenship Department), recently held a training programme for 30 employees from the Ministry's General Diwan and the Oman Through Time Museum.

The programme, titled "Educating Citizenship and Virtual Museums," took place at the Specialised Institute for Professional Training for Teachers and was led by Dr Basma bint Hamad al Riyami, Educational Researcher at the Citizenship Department of the Directorate-General of Curriculum Development.

The programme aimed to familiarise participants with the concept of virtual museums, including their importance, objectives, features and characteristics. This is particularly relevant given the growing number of museums around the world and the desire of many people, particularly students and researchers, to view their collections remotely.

Some museums make use of virtual reality technology, particularly in the fields of education and science. These museums feature a collection of 2D or 3D digital objects that are designed to give visitors the impression that they are viewing the exhibited collections in their natural environment.

The programme covered the use of virtual reality technology in the educational process, citizenship education and the design standards for virtual museums.

Participants were also trained in designing interactive educational activities and linking them to curricula, as well as how to use virtual reality glasses and connect them to portable digital devices. They also learned about various platforms and websites that allow for virtual museum experiences.

National Museum hosts 'Oman in Photography' conference

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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The National Museum, represented by the learning Centre, in collaboration with the French Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman, hosted on Tuesday a conference titled "Oman in Photography: A Scenographic Experience Through the Lens of Omani and French Photographers".

The conference was attended by Veronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of the French Republic to the Sultanate of Oman. It was also attended by photography enthusiasts, members of photography societies, students, teachers, professional and amateur photographers, as well as reputed and emerging visual artists.

Dr Abdulmunim bin Mansour al Hasani, Founder of the Photo Society of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), highlighted the stages that photography underwent in Oman from 1970 until today.

Al Hasani reviewed the early features of photography in Oman during the 60s and 70s and the emergence of some individual



Omani photographers.

He also touched on the institutional beginning of photography in 1988 by establishing a mini-group for photography in the Cultural Club. Through this group, photo exhibitions were held and despite their scarceness those gatherings exhibited a fascination with a silent nature, people's lives and Omani architecture.

Dr Abdulmunim al Hasani pointed out that in an organised manner the photography group at SQU was established during 1990, followed by the Omani Society for Fine Arts in 1993 and the Photography Society in 2012.

Al Hasani highlighted the emergence of student institutions and the Stal Gallery team, in addition to some independent photographers who studied the art of photography and presented their experiences in their own unique way, away from institutional frameworks.

On her turn, Dr Genevieve Galliano, Chief Curator at the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon, touched on the history, activities and departments of the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon, and explained the reasons of the Museum's invitation to Ferrante Ferranti and the artistic purpose of this collaboration.



TENDER NOTICE

Oman Development Bank is the leading player in financing projects that add value to national development and providing facilities for micro, SMEs and major ventures.

Oman Development Bank seeks tenders for the following services from reputed vendors which specialized in providing IT equipments:

Tender No	Description of service	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date for Purchasing Tender	Last Date of Submission of Tender
13/2023	Purchase the Microsoft Surface	-	24/01/2023	31/01/2023

◆ Interested vendors may obtain tender documents from the Head Office of the bank (Ground Floor) located in MBD Area near the Ministry of Commerce & Industry and Investment Promotion on any working day (Sunday to Thursday) between 8 AM and 2 PM.

The Tender enclosed in a sealed envelope addressed to IT Department, Oman Development Bank SAOC, should be submitted to the reception at Grand Floor by 2:00 PM on or before 31/01/2023.

Oman Development Bank SAOC reserves the right to accept or reject any or all of the offers, extend the tender closing date, modify tender document(s) or cancel the tender without assigning any reason. Tender Committee's decision shall be final and binding.

OMAN DEVELOPMENT BANK SAOC

Post Box 3077, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. 24726991 o.zeidi@odb.om odb.om



67%

OF THE NATIONAL ADULT
POPULATION IS REPORTED TO
HAVE POOR DIETARY HABITS



KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

As much as 67 per cent of the national adult population is reported to have poor dietary habits and are either overweight and obese, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) nutrition survey.

Out of the 67 per cent, nearly 30 per cent of the population, mostly women, have a BMI of more than 30, which shows a rise in the cases of obesity in Oman when compared to the last survey in 2008. However, some of the GCC countries are far ahead of Omani in the global statistics.

The survey developed by the WHO in partnership with the Ministry of Health's and Al Jisr Foundation addresses the dietary community's awareness and knowledge in Oman with a specific focus on salt, sugar and trans-fat consumption.

Oman launched its 2023 national nutrition-related knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) survey for people between 14 and 60

years old aimed at designing baseline quantitative data on KAP related to sugar, salt and trans-fat and look into the relationships between those variables and socio-demographic parameters under the auspices of Dr Said al Lamki, Under-Secretary of Health Affairs with the attendance of Dr Jean Jabbour, and national stakeholders and called for collective national efforts towards better nutritional health.

"Nutrition and dietetics knowledge is an integral part of health knowledge, whereby poor health outcomes are related to low health literacy," said Dr Jean Jabbour, the WHO Representative in Oman.

"We are continuously trying to improve health and to provide common platforms for working together. Hence, partnerships, networks and initiatives are key factors to boost the ability to effectively educate and create awareness," he said, adding, "playing its role of coordinating and supporting the health priorities

THE RISKS OF POOR NUTRITION

and needs following the thirteenth General Programme of Work (GPW 13), WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) Vision 2023, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)."

Oman's earlier national Non-Communicable Diseases Survey (NCD survey) conducted in 2017 had also revealed that 67 per cent of the national adult population reported poor dietary habits and there is a prevalence of overweight and obesity. The survey also showed an increasing percentage of malnutrition related NCDs such as cholesterol by 37 per cent and diabetes by almost 16 per cent. In addition, there is an increase in obesity and weight gain among children and adolescents in the country.

Globally, NCDs cause 74 per cent of deaths each year and will burden health systems and communities significantly if efforts to encourage sports and other forms of physical activity among their populations do not improve. Increases in NCDs are projected to result in

an estimated \$47 trillion loss to the global economy between 2010-2030.

WHO compared the situation in Oman to that in the Eastern Mediterranean region, where approximately 49 per cent of adults are overweight or obese, with higher rates among women (53 per cent), compared to men (more than 45 per cent), and more than two in five deaths (45 per cent) are attributed to cardiovascular diseases. Because of the significance of nutrition and its impact on people's lives, WHO developed the Nutrition Strategy 2020-2030, with the goal of eliminating all forms of malnutrition and improving nutrition throughout the life course by 2030.

Following the launch, a 5-day training for 44 healthcare trainers from across the Sultanate is being held to teach them how to collect data from the four required questionnaires in the PHCs, taking all ethical considerations into account. 5,623 participants will be invited to fill out the four different forms.





Israeli troops kill Palestinian after alleged attack

HALHUL: Israeli soldiers shot dead a Palestinian man on Tuesday after he allegedly fired at troops in the occupied West Bank, medical and military officials said.

The Palestinian health ministry said Hamdi Abu Dayyeh, 40, was killed “by Israeli occupation bullets” in the southern town of Halhul.

Israel’s army said an assailant shot at soldiers, “who responded with live fire and neutralised him.”

An AFP photographer saw the body of a man beside a military tower at the northern entrance to the town, before it was covered by soldiers.

A Palestinian woman said she was in a car with her family when gunfire erupted.

“We were on the road, people were moving around normally...

the army kept firing, we got down under the seats,” said Umm Amir Taqatqa, a resident of nearby Beit Fajjar.

The Halhul shooting raises the toll of Palestinians killed this month in the West Bank to 15, including civilians and fighters, according to an AFP tally.

The majority have been killed by Israeli forces, which have occupied the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War.

A surge in violence in 2022 made it the deadliest year in the West Bank since United Nations records began in 2005. At least 26 Israelis and 200 Palestinians were killed across Israel and the Palestinian territories last year, according to AFP figures. The majority of the fatalities were in the West Bank, while 49

Palestinians were killed in a three-day conflict in Gaza.

The West Bank, among areas where Palestinians seek statehood, has seen a surge in violence since Israel stepped up military sweeps in response to a spate of street attacks in its cities last year.

“The assailant fired at the soldiers, who responded with live fire and neutralised him,” the Israeli military said, adding that no soldiers were wounded.

Before Tuesday’s incident, 13 Palestinians had been killed in raids since the start of this year, including four teenagers, according to Palestinian officials. No Israeli soldiers have been killed in the operations. A Palestinian who stabbed a Jewish settler in the West Bank was shot dead in the same period. — **AFP**



Tear gas is fired by Israeli forces to disperse people and journalists gathering at the scene near the body of Palestinian Hamdi Abu Dayyeh in the village of Halhul north of the city of Hebron in the occupied West Bank. - AFP

Medical shortages compound suffering of cancer patients in Yemen

SANAA: Ali Jabri cradles his sobbing son Ayoub ahead of chemotherapy treatment at Yemen’s largest cancer hospital in the capital Sanaa where an eight-year war has led to shortages in life-saving medicine and equipment.

The 12-year-old is one of 81,000 patients registered with the National Oncology Centre (NOC) from across Yemen seeking free treatment, which has increasingly been limited by shrinking funds and restrictions on flow of goods in the import-reliant country.

“He is getting worse,” said Jabri breaking down in tears as he stood by the bed where Ayoub, who began treatment for neck cancer three years ago, received an intravenous drip.



Radiotherapy masks are pictured at the National Oncology Centre in Sanaa. - Reuters



An employee of the National Oncology Center prepares medicines at the centre in Sanaa. - Reuters

“The hospital gives the medicines they have but the expensive medicines you have to go and buy them outside... we can’t afford these medicines,” Jabri said, pleading for help from well-wishers to send his son abroad for treatment.

The NOC in Sanaa is funded by the de facto Ansar Allah authorities in North Yemen. The internationally recognised government finances two parallel centres in the south where it is based after being ousted by Ansar Allah from Sanaa in 2014.

Tunisia president’s former top aide jailed in absentia

TUNIS: Tunisian President Kais Saied’s former chief of staff was sentenced in absentia on Tuesday to prison over audio recordings critical of him, local media reported. Nadia Akacha had been a key aide to Saied until she quit in January last year, citing “fundamental differences of opinion” over the national interest.

Some three months later, 11 audio recordings appeared online featuring a woman, purportedly Akacha, relating details from private meetings since the president’s July 2021 power grab.

In some, the woman criticised the president and staff members or shared gossip about his in-laws.

Akacha has denied being the woman in the recordings,

describing them as fakes aiming to undermine her former boss.

On Tuesday, a Tunis court sentenced Akacha in absentia to 14 months in jail, local media reported, adding that the sentence was in relation to a suit filed by the president’s sister-in-law. Prosecutors had opened an investigation in May to determine the recordings’ authenticity.

Akacha left the country after her resignation. Tunisian media have reported she has since been living in France.

A constitutional lawyer like the president, she was appointed as Saied’s legal adviser in late 2019 before becoming his chief of staff in January 2020, travelling widely with him domestically and abroad. — **AFP**



Nadia Akacha, senior advisor to the Tunisian President in charge of Legal Affairs. – AFP File

Lebanon to name new prosecutor in Salameh case

BEIRUT: Lebanon will soon appoint a new prosecutor in a stalled corruption probe into the central bank governor, a move that could delay responses to cooperation requests by European investigators conducting their own inquiry, a senior judge said.

Ghassan Oueidat, Lebanon’s top prosecutor, said on Tuesday the new prosecutor would be named “in the coming days” and would be tasked with filing charges against governor Riad Salameh before referring the case to an investigative judge.

Confirming comments he made to the pan-Arab newspaper Asharq Al Awsat, Oueidat said the judge could then request a delay in responding to judicial cooperation requests by European judges pending the Lebanese judge’s own investigations. — **Reuters**



Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre

TENDER ADVERTISEMENT

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care & Research Centre announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Tender Title	Site Visit Date	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing	Tender Fees
CCCRC/T/021/2023	Design and build of new proposed car parking project	30/01/2023 09:00AM Meeting Point: SQCCRC Main Lobby	30/01/2023	05/02/2023	70 OMR

Qualified companies interested in participating in this tender shall collect the tender specifications from the date of this advertisement from the following address:

Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre – Purchases Department.

Biddings that meet the above requirements should be submitted in a sealed envelope (hardcopy & softcopy) and should be delivered and deposited in the tender box at SQCCRC.

Please note:

- Bids received after the deadline indicated above, for whatever reason, will not be considered.
- Queries/ clarifications should be submitted immediately, but not later than One week before the date of tender submission.
- For Queries you may Contact via e-mail: purchase@cccrc.gov.om
- The committee is not obliged to accept the lowest price of the bid or any other bid.

Invitation to Tender

In accordance with the following conditions:

Tender / Auction Number	Subject	Tender / Auction Document Fees (Nonrefundable)	Tender / Auction Bond	Tender/ Auction Offer	Closing Date
AL-AWALIA/ TD/2023/05	Call-Off Agreement for the Supply of Gabbro Aggregate (FOB) for Qatar Primary Materials Company (“Supplies”)	2000 QAR	1,000,000 QAR	Two Bids (Technical & Commercial)	25 Jan 2023 01:00 PM

- 1) Tender Documents can be collected from our head office located at Al-Saad, Suhaim bin Hamad St., Qatar First Bank Building, 10th Floor (Sunday: Thursday) between 08:00 to 13:00.
- 2) Bids are to be submitted in two sealed (in red wax) envelopes (Technical & Commercial) and addressed to Tenders and Auction Committee, Tender reference number and subject are to be clearly written on the envelopes, provided that the last date for submitting bids is one o’clock in the afternoon on the closing day. Any bids submit after this date will not be accepted.
- 3) Tender Documents will be released only after delivery of Deposit Slip Stamped by Commercial Bank along with Authorization Letter to the delegated person signed by authorized person as per Computer ID, Copy of commercial Registration (CR), Business License and Computer ID.
- 4) Tender Fees are nonrefundable and can be transferred online to Account of Qatar Primary Material Company- Bank A/C (4050-651111-006) at Commercial Bank of Qatar. **IBAN No. (QA 18 CBQA 0000 0000 4050 651111 006).** Tender reference number and subject are to be written on the deposit slip.
- 5) Tender Bond (Bank Guarantee/ Manager Cheque) must be valid for 120 days after closing date and must be submitted in separate & sealed envelope along with technical bid and a photocopy is to be attached with commercial bid. Bids without tender bond will be rejected.
- 6) Bids must be valid for 90 days after closing date and are to be submitted in two copies (Original & Duplicate).
- 7) Any queries relating to the Tender Documents must only be raised in writing, preferably by email, to the address specified in the respective Tender Document. Any response issued by Qatar Primary Material Company will be in the form of a question and answer and will be distributed to all Tenderers without revealing the identity of the originator of the query(ies) in the Form of Tender Bulletins. Queries must be received at the address specified in the respective ITT Documentation at least five (5) calendar days prior to the Tender closing date. Any queries received after such date will be ignored.
- 8) The amount of the Performance Bond to be provided by the awarded bidder is (10% of the contract value) and its validity period; must remain valid under the contract implementation period and the guarantee period according to the terms of the tender.
- 9) The Technical Bids shall be opened within one week from the closing date.
- 10) Qatar Primary Material Company has the right, during the contract period, to request an increase or decrease in the amounts of the items, works or services by a percentage not exceeding (20%) of the contract value with the same conditions and prices, provided that the increase is of the same type of contracted items, works or services.
- 11) Qatar Primary Material Company’s tendering terms and conditions apply.

For further Inquiry, please send your queries at Fax Number: **44479559** or email to tender@gpmc.qa or visit Qatar Primary Material Company website @ www.gpmc.qa



China population dips first time in 60 years

BEIJING/HONG KONG: China's population fell last year for the first time in six decades, a historic turn that is expected to mark the start of a long period of decline in its citizen numbers with profound implications for its economy and the world.

The country's National Bureau of Statistics reported a drop of roughly 850,000 people for a population of 1.41175 billion in 2022, marking the first decline since 1961, the last year of China's Great Famine.

Long-term, UN experts see China's population shrinking by 109 million by 2050, more than triple the decline of their previous forecast in 2019.

That's caused domestic demographers to lament that China will get old before it gets rich, slowing the economy as revenues drop and government debt increases due to soaring health and welfare costs.

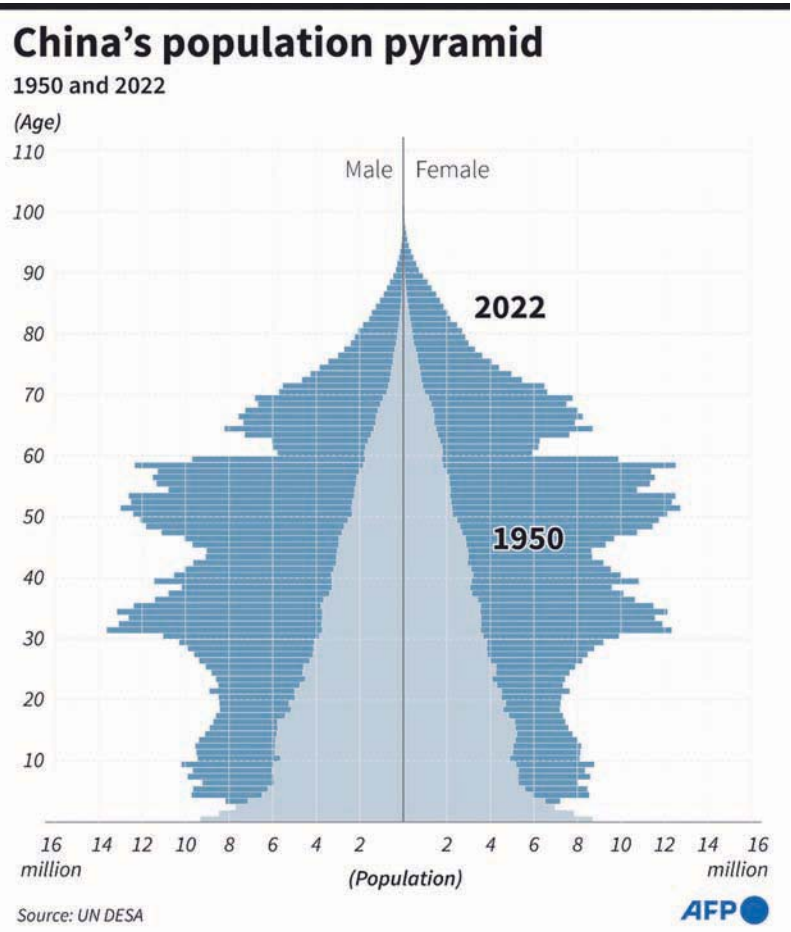
"China's demographic and economic outlook is much bleaker than expected. China will have to adjust its social, economic, defence and foreign policies," said demographer Yi Fuxian.



Much of the demographic downturn is the result of China's one-child policy imposed between 1980 and 2015 as well as sky-high education costs

He added that the country's shrinking labour force and downturn in manufacturing heft would further exacerbate high prices and high inflation in the United States and Europe.

"Economic growth will have to depend more on productivity growth," added Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management. Kang Yi, head of the national statistics bureau, dismissed concerns about



the population decline, telling reporters that "overall labour supply still exceeds demand". China's birth rate last year was

just 6.77 births per 1,000 people, down from a rate of 7.52 births in 2021 and marking the lowest birth rate on record. — Reuters

Three foreign NGOs partially resume aid in Afghanistan

KABUL: At least three leading international aid agencies have partially resumed life-saving work in Afghanistan after assurances from the Taliban authorities that Afghan women can continue to work in the health sector.

Hundreds of NGOs have been instrumental in trying to address one of the world's worst humanitarian crises, with half of Afghanistan's 38 million people hungry and three million children at risk of malnutrition.

CARE, Save the Children and International Rescue Committee (IRC) suspended their operations in late December in protest against a government order banning Afghan women from aid work, the latest rollback of women's rights in the country.

"We have received clear, reliable assurances from relevant authorities that our female staff will be safe and can work without obstruction," Save the Children said in a statement, confirming they had resumed work in the health sector in the few days.

"However, with the overarching ban still in place, our other activities where we do not have reliable assurances that our female colleagues can work, remain on hold."

The international community has been urging the government in a series of high-level meetings to reverse the order banning women in the aid sector, which was expected to have heavy consequences on aid flows coming into the country. — AFP

Al Shabaab launches deadly attack on Somali military base

NAIROBI: Al Shabaab launched a deadly attack on a Somali military base on Tuesday, just a day after the government claimed a "historic victory" over the fighters with the capture of a strategic coastal town.

There were conflicting reports about the death toll after the fighters stormed the camp in the town of Hawadley north of the capital Mogadishu. Army chief Odowaa Yusuf Rage said on national radio that five soldiers including a senior officer had died in the attack claimed by the Al Qaeda-allied group.

The fighters detonated a car



Somalia's President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud attends a rally against the Al Shabaab group in Mogadishu. — AFP

packed with explosives outside the camp 60 kilometres north of Mogadishu before gunmen stormed the compound, witnesses and security officials said.

Al Shabaab, which controls swathes of countryside in Somalia, claimed responsibility for the attack via its communication channels.

In recent months, the army and local clan militias have retaken chunks of territory from the militants in Galmudug and Hirshabelle states in an operation backed by US air strikes and an African Union force.

But despite the gains, Al Shabaab has demonstrated the ability to strike back with lethal force against civilian and military targets.

The Hawadley base had only been recaptured from Al Shabaab in October last year by the Somali National Army (SNA) and allied militias.

Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre on Monday proclaimed a "historic victory" over Al Shabaab after the army took control of the strategic city of Haradhere in central Galmudug state without a fight. — AFP

Nepali hospitals return bodies from air crash to grieving families

POKHARA: Nepali hospital staff began the grim task of handing over bodies to grieving families on Tuesday after a plane with 72 people on board crashed, the country's worst aviation disaster in three decades.

The Yeti Airlines flight with 68 passengers and four crew plummeted into a steep gorge, smashed into pieces and burst into flames as it approached the central city of Pokhara on Sunday.

All those on board, including six children and 15 foreigners, are believed to have died.

Rescuers have been working

almost around the clock extracting human remains from the gorge strewn with twisted plane seats and chunks of fuselage and wing.

Seventy bodies had been retrieved by early Tuesday, police official A K Chhetri said. Another senior official said the day before that the hope of finding anyone alive was "nil".

"We retrieved one body last night. But it was three pieces. We are not sure whether it's three bodies or one body.

It will be confirmed only after a DNA test," Chhetri said.

Drones were being used and



Family members of victims who died in a plane crash weep outside a hospital in Pokhara. — AFP

the search for the two remaining bodies had been expanded to a radius of two to three kilometres (one to two miles), he added.

The black boxes from the plane, made by France-based ATR, were handed over to authorities on Monday, said Bikram Raj Gautam, chief of Pokhara International Airport.

Hospital workers in blue and white protective suits and masks loaded bodies wrapped in plastic onto army trucks on Tuesday as distraught relatives wept and hugged outside.

The trucks then left for the

airport, where the bodies would be airlifted back to the capital Kathmandu.

The body of one victim, journalist Tribhuban Poudel, was laid out on a bier covered with orange marigold flowers outside his home as mourners filed past offering prayers in the winter sunshine. "Eight bodies have been handed to families. We will hand over another 14 bodies after completing autopsies.

Forty-eight bodies have been sent to Kathmandu for DNA tests and handover to the families," Chhetri said. — AFP

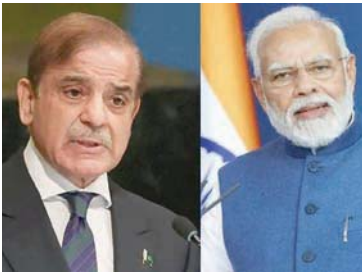
ISLAMABAD

Pakistani premier offers Modi talks over Kashmir

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif renewed an offer on Tuesday to hold talks with India over Kashmir.

"Let us sit down at the table and have serious and sincere talks to resolve our burning issues like Kashmir," Sharif said in a message addressed to his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi, in an interview with broadcaster Al Arabiya.

"We are nuclear powers, armed to the teeth and if, God forbid, a war breaks out, who will



live to tell what happened?" he said.

He said that the UAE - where Al Arabiya is based - could play a role in bringing India and Pakistan to the table. — dpa

JAKARTA

Court hears suit after kids die of tainted cough syrup

Families of Indonesian children who died because of tainted cough syrup demanded restitution as an Indonesian court started hearing their class-action lawsuit against pharmaceutical firms.

About 200 children have died of acute kidney injury in Indonesia since last year and authorities have said two ingredients found in some syrup-based paracetamol medications are linked to the illness.

The ingredients are used



in antifreeze, brake fluids and other applications, but also as an alternative in some products to glycerine, a solvent or thickening agent in many cough syrups.

— AFP

UNITED NATIONS

Yemen envoy encouraged by talks on new truce

The UN envoy for Yemen said he was encouraged by what he called an intensification of diplomatic efforts to arrange a new truce in the eight-year war there, saying there was "a possibility that should not be wasted."

But special envoy Hans Grundberg also cautioned that despite a showing of "general military restraint" by both sides, "a simple miscalculation could reignite a cycle of violence that will be difficult to reverse."

Since an earlier truce between



government forces and Ansar Allah fighters expired on October 2, "the overall military situation in Yemen has remained stable," Grundberg informed the UN Security Council. — AFP



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In brief

■ WASHINGTON



US SLAPS SANCTIONS ON BELARUS OVER TRIAL OF OPPN LEADER

The United States announced visa restrictions against 25 people in Belarus in response to the trial in absentia of opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya and other pro-democracy activists.

The move came as Tikhanovskaya, who claimed victory over strongman Alexander Lukashenko in 2020 elections, went on trial facing charges of high treason, and creating an extremist organisation.

Those targeted by sanctions include members of the National Assembly that passed legislation authorising the death penalty for persons convicted of “attempted acts of terrorism.” — **AFP**

■ LUETZERATH



LAST ACTIVISTS LEAVE GERMAN VILLAGE

The last two climate activists occupying a western German village to stop it making way for a coal mine extension left their underground hideout marking the end of the police operation to evict them.

Already abandoned by its original residents, Luetzerath has become a symbol for resistance against fossil fuels.

Around 300 activists occupied the village, staking out emptied building and building positions in the trees, to try to prevent the expansion of the adjacent Garzweiler open-cast coal mine. Police launched an operation to clear the protest camp, making quicker progress than expected. — **AFP**

■ LONDON



HUNDREDS OF POLICE FACE SACK AS PART OF CLEAN-UP

Hundreds of officers in London are likely be sacked for domestic abuse offences, Britain's most senior policeman said as he sought to regain public trust after an officer admitted being a serial abuser.

London's Metropolitan Police which has been rocked by scandals in recent years was plunged into further crisis after David Carrick, 48, admitted carrying out 24 counts of abuse over almost two decades while serving as a police officer while his colleagues missed chances to stop him.

Many jobs will be lost as part of the process, he said.

— **Reuters**



A person lays flowers in memory of those killed in the strike on a residential block in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro, at the monument to famous Ukrainian poetess Lesya Ukrainka in Moscow. — **AFP**

GERMAN TANKS FOR UKRAINE IN SIGHT

DNIPRO, Ukraine/KYIV: Ukraine came a step closer on Tuesday to winning the fleet of modern battle tanks it hopes could turn the course of the war against Russia, after the West's big holdout Germany said this would be the first item on its new defence minister's agenda.

In the central city of Dnipro, authorities called an end to the search for survivors in the ruins of an apartment building destroyed during Russian missile attacks on Saturday.

Forty-four people were confirmed killed and 20 still unaccounted for in the attack, the deadliest for civilians of a three-month Russian missile bombardment campaign. Seventy-nine people were wounded and 39 rescued from the rubble.

Nearly 11 months after Russia invaded, Kyiv says a fleet of Western battle tanks would give its troops the mobile firepower to drive Russian troops out in decisive battles in 2023.

German-made Leopard battle tanks, workhorse of armies across Europe, are widely seen as the only plausible option available in sufficient numbers. But they cannot be delivered without authorisation from Berlin, which has so far demurred.

With Western allies meeting at a US airbase in Germany on Friday to pledge military support for Ukraine, Berlin is under intense pressure to lift its objections this week, in what would be one of

New German defence minister announced as Berlin holding up tanks from other European allies. Death toll in Dnipro rises to 44

the most consequential shifts in Western aid so far.

The decision sits on the desk of Germany's new Defence Minister Boris Pistorius, named on Tuesday to replace Christine Lambrecht, who quit after missteps including a cheerful New Year's message about the war that opponents called tone deaf.

“When the person, when the minister of defence, is declared, this is the first question to be decided concretely,” German Economy Minister Robert Habeck told Deutschlandfunk radio broadcaster on Tuesday, before the appointment was announced.

In his first comments in the job, Pistorius, a regional politician, viewed as close to Chancellor Olaf Scholz, made no mention of weapons for Ukraine: “I know the importance of the task,” he said in a statement.

“It is important to me to involve the soldiers closely and to take them with me.”

He is due to host US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin on

Thursday ahead of Friday's big meeting of allies at Ramstein air base.

Germany has been cautious about approving weapons that could be seen as an escalation. But allies increasingly argue that concern is misplaced, with Russia showing no sign of backing down from its assault on its neighbour.

Britain broke the taboo over heavy tanks over the weekend, pledging a squadron of its Challengers. But it has too few to form the basis of a Ukrainian force.

Washington's Abrams tanks run on turbine engines, seen as burning too much fuel for Ukraine to field in large numbers.

That leaves the Leopards, which Germany made in the thousands during the Cold War and which are now fielded by armies across Europe.

Poland and Finland have already said they would send Leopards if Berlin gives re-export approval.

“We hope and are trying to organise bigger support for Ukraine.

We hope a few partners, allies, will give tanks to Ukraine,” Polish President Andrzej Duda said on Tuesday at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Tens of thousands of people have been killed and millions driven from their homes since Russia launched what it calls a “special military operation” in Ukraine in February last year.

— **AFP**

Boris is Germany's new defence minister

BERLIN: Germany's government named Boris Pistorius (**pictured**) as defence minister on Tuesday at a time of mounting pressure on Berlin from Western allies to allow Ukraine to use German-made tanks in the war with Russia.

Following several missteps, Christine Lambrecht resigned as defence minister on Monday, ahead of a conference on Friday at the US military base in Ramstein on Western plans to provide Kyiv with more arms.

Until now, Germany has been cautious about approving the despatch of heavy Leopard tanks due to worries that such a move could be seen as an escalation of the war.

Other countries with such tanks also need Berlin's approval before they can be passed on to another country.

“There are important decisions to be made in the short term, in particular the urgent question of how we continue to support Ukraine in its right to self-defence,” Economy Minister Robert Habeck said in a statement.

“Germany bears a responsibility here and has major tasks to accomplish,” he said.

The new defence minister is expected to host his US



counterpart, Lloyd Austin, in Berlin on Thursday.

Pistorius, 62, who completed his military service in the early 1980s, has been interior minister in Lower Saxony since 2013 and in this role has worked with the armed forces.

Like Chancellor Olaf Scholz, he ran for the leadership of the Social Democrat (SPD) party in 2019 - they both lost - and he is known for taking a hard line on security issues.

In a statement before he is formally appointed on Thursday, Pistorius said the armed forces could rely on him.

“I know the importance of the task,” he said. “It is important to me to involve the soldiers closely and to take them with me.”

Scholz described him as a friend and good politician.

— **Reuters**

Illegal immigration to Germany reaches six-year high

BERLIN: More people entered Germany illegally in 2022 than in the six previous years, information obtained on Tuesday by dpa showed.

However the information noted that illegal immigration was lower from 2020-21 due to the coronavirus.

There was also an increase in the number of people smugglers identified from 2,132 in 2021 to 2,553 last year.

Last year, the Federal Police, which is responsible for border protection, registered 91,986 people entering Germany without

permission. In the previous year, that number was 57,637.

In 2022, a significant increase was observed in the second half of the year. While in January 4,436 people were detected entering the country without permission, that number tripled in October, when more than 13,000 unauthorised entries were reported.

In December there were about 8,600 illegal entries.

The federal government is currently voting on reforming a law that regulates the tasks and powers of the Federal Police. — **dpa**

Investigators find hideout of mafia boss following arrest

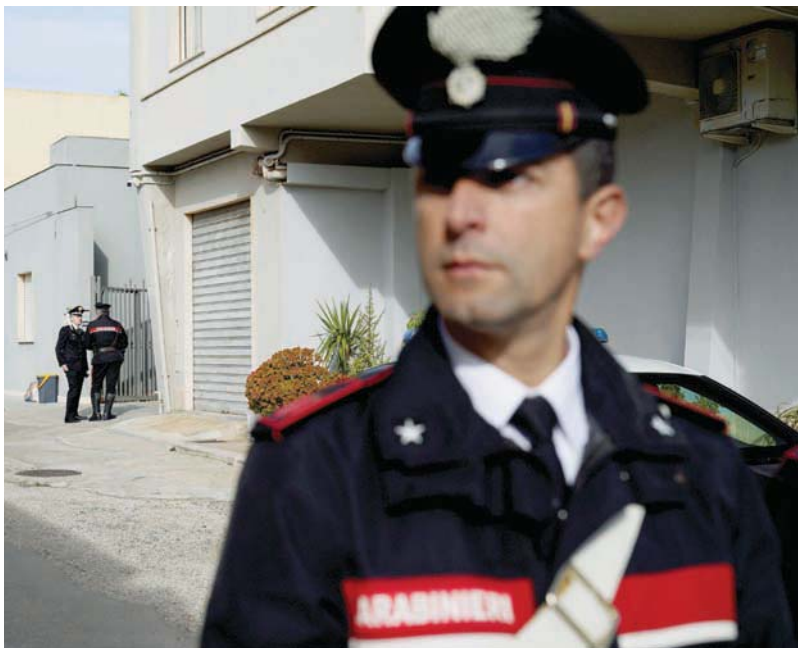
ROME: Investigators have found the last hiding place of mafia boss Matteo Messina Denaro, following his arrest in hospital, the authorities said on Tuesday.

The most wanted criminal in Italy for years was last seen in a house in the small town of Campobello di Mazara, not far from his Sicilian birthplace Castelvetro.

Carabinieri police officers and special forces searched the 60-year-old's flat on Monday night. According to Italian media reports, the investigators seized luxury items such as expensive clothes and watches.

No weapons were found in the two-storey building.

The security forces want to use the searches to gain further



Carabinieri police stand guard near the hideout of Matteo Messina Denaro, Italy's most wanted mafia boss, after he was arrested, in the Sicilian town of Campobello di Mazara. — **Reuters**

insights into the organisation of the Sicilian Cosa Nostra.

Above all, they hope that Messina Denaro kept the so-called archive of Salvatore “Totò” Riina in the inconspicuous house in a residential area.

The Mafia godfather was arrested in Palermo in 1993, but henchmen - including Messina Denaro, according to investigators and key witnesses - were able to remove documents and records from his flat before the police arrived.

Whether the archive or parts of it are in the building was not yet known at noon on Tuesday. Searches and police analysis were still on going, and the street was cordoned off.

Messina Denaro, who had

evaded capture by spending 30 years in hiding, was arrested in a private clinic in Palermo on Monday. He had been receiving treatment for cancer there on and off for about a year.

He was then flown out of Sicily by military plane and taken to a high-security prison in the town of L'Aquila in Abruzzo, the ANSA news agency reported.

The prison, about an hour and a half's drive from Rome, specialises in the detention and isolation of serious mafia criminals.

Italians have been outraged that the police had been unable to catch the Cosa Nostra boss for so long, when he apparently had not left his home region for three decades. — **dpa**

Its time for Muscat Nights and wintry nights



Lakshmi Kothaneth
@lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

It is time to celebrate Muscat festival and the winter weather. The days of the Festival will now be ‘Muscat Nights’ and the beauty is that it starts this week and is being organised by Muscat Municipality.

The memories of Muscat Festival are plenty - as a broadcaster going live from the various festival locations and as a visitor with family and friends and about the people who are visitors and exhibitors and vendors, and not to forget traffic and parking.

The good thing about the festival was that it was not just meant to be for one particular age group.

I have personally, enjoyed the cultural shows, international features and exhibitions concerning the festival.

The lockdowns for health reasons have made us forget how wild we used to be rushing to the venues and no matter how long the line was, we took the time to enjoy

the various aspects of the festival. And now they have become memories.

Enjoyed scanning the exhibition stalls every time there was a break on air during the show. It was always lovely to see people from different parts of the world bring their products.

Traditional crafts were another attraction from art to jewellery to sculpture to beads. We did not have had to visit the respective countries to learn about them, we learnt it right here as we watched the crafts people from various countries.

Most importantly shopping was satisfying.

This is 2023 and here we are going to see the Muscat Nights. It is the first year but it is already gathering up excitement.

Most importantly the youth are enthralled at the fact that for the first time Esports are going to be a major feature of Muscat Nights.

FOR THE FIRST TIME ESPORTS ARE GOING TO BE A MAJOR FEATURE OF MUSCAT NIGHTS THIS YEAR AND THE YOUTH OF THE NATION ARE ENTHRALLED

Today Esports has also become a spectators’ delight as the online gaming has viewers who may not be playing but adore to watch it. The trend of online games has been growing in Oman. Esports is another culture all together and if you are not into it yet the Muscat Nights will introduce you to the trend.

The Esports organised by 968Gamez will be held at Oman Automobile Association.

Qurum Natural Park is making a comeback as a venue for the

activities for Muscat Nights this year. And that reminds us about the early years of Muscat Festival and particularly the year where we had stalls in the Qurum commercial areas. We could just walk around the streets.

Now that is the key element - walk. There will be a plenty of opportunity to walk and enjoy the weather this year too at Muscat Nights.

We can expect to see unique ideas as there would be participation of SMEs and startups. One can stay updated and book tickets through the smart phone app.

One can also follow the Muscat Nights on Twitter and Instagram @muscatnightsom throughout the 17 days till February 4.

Qurum Natural Park’s major attraction used to be the traditional village, the sights and sounds of the past. It would be intriguing to see what the park will offer for Muscat

Nights 2023.

According to the Chairman of Muscat Municipality, Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) will have international flavours.

Naseem Park will once again be a venue featuring attractions of Muscat Nights. He explained that Muscat Nights is the beginning of various events planned throughout the year during different seasons.

After a gap of two years, it is time to be outdoors with family and friends to create memories while enjoying the beautiful winter weather right here in Oman.

And not to forget the hashtag #MuscatNightsOm while sharing one’s moment from the nights starting from January 19 to February 4.

So, for the next few days Muscat Nights will be an addition to our social lives.

Ukraine war’s shadow hangs over Cyprus church

CHARLIE CHARALAMBOUS

When the Greek-Orthodox Church of Cyprus enthroned its new leader this month, one bishop stayed away in silent protest over a dispute sparked by the Ukraine war. Neophytos of Morphou — on the Moscow side of a church schism between Russia and Ukraine — said he preferred to pray alone in his “humble cell” during Archbishop Georgios’s glittering anointment ceremony.

The bishop, known to be outspoken on a range of controversial issues, charged that in war-torn Ukraine, Orthodox bishops seen as pro-Russian were now being “threatened and persecuted” by forces aligned with President Volodymyr Zelensky.

His stance, shared by several other Cypriot bishops, puts him at odds with Georgios, 73, the winner in the contest to succeed Chrysostomos II, who died of cancer at 81 in November.

The rift highlights the Ukraine war’s broader impact on the small Mediterranean island-nation, an EU member-state that has long-standing cultural, religious and business ties with Russia.

Cyprus is home to a large diaspora from Russia, a major source of investment and tourism in years past. The seaside city of Limassol is sometimes dubbed “Moscow on the Med”.

Public opinion in Cyprus is more pro-Russian than in almost any other EU member country, according to the European Parliament’s Eurobarometer survey in December. However, Cyprus last year also joined the rest of the bloc in levelling tough sanctions against Russia and stopping direct flights, while also taking in many Ukrainian refugees.

“The election of the new archbishop is important for Cyprus because the Orthodox church is a powerful influence in society,” said theologian Theodoros Kyriakou.

The church holds major sway in the Republic of Cyprus, which controls the southern two thirds of the island, with the rest a Turkish-occupied breakaway statelet since a war in 1974.

The founding father and first president of Cyprus, a former British colony, was Archbishop Makarios III, whose statue can be found in every village, town and city. The church retains a strong conservative influence on social and political life and is a major economic player, with vast land holdings and stakes in beverage, banking and other sectors. — AFP



Julie Turkewitz

The writer is the Andes bureau chief for NYT

Deadly protests in rural Peru grow into a referendum on democracy

Highways blocked with giant boulders and broken glass. Entire cities shuttered by mass protests. Fifty families mourning their dead. Calls for a new president, a new constitution, a new governing system altogether.

Pledges to take the fight to Lima, the capital. Local officials warning that the country is headed toward anarchy.

A protest anthem shouted in the streets: “This democracy is no longer a democracy.”

Rather than fade, protests in rural Peru that began more than a month ago over the ouster of the former president have only grown in size and in the scope of demonstrators’ demands, paralysing entire sections of the country and threatening efforts by the new president, Dina Boluarte, to gain control.

The unrest is now far broader than anger over who is running the country. Instead, it represents a profound frustration with Peru’s young democracy, which protesters say has failed to address a yawning gap between the rich and the poor and between Lima and the country’s rural areas.

Democracy, they say, has largely helped a small elite — the political class, the rich and corporate executives — accumulate power and wealth, while providing few benefits to many other Peruvians.

More broadly, the crisis in Peru reflects an erosion of trust in democracies across Latin America, fuelled by states that “violate citizens’ rights, fail to provide security and quality public services, and are captured by powerful interests,” according to a new essay in The Journal of Democracy.

In Peru, the former president, Pedro Castillo, a leftist, had promised to address long-standing issues of poverty and inequality, but was impeached and arrested in December after he attempted to disband Congress and rule by decree.

His supporters, most of them in the country’s poor, rural regions,



Members of the police stand guard on the street in Humay, Peru after detaining a convoy of members of the Chancas ethnic group on their way to Lima to participate in a major demonstration against Peruvian President Dina Boluarte. — AFP

THE CRISIS IN PERU REFLECTS AN EROSION OF TRUST IN DEMOCRACIES ACROSS LATIN AMERICA, FUELED BY STATES THAT ‘VIOLATE CITIZENS’ RIGHTS, AND FAIL TO PROVIDE SECURITY AND QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES,

launched protests, sometimes burning government buildings, blocking vital highways and occupying airports. Peru’s government soon declared a state of emergency, sending security forces into the streets.

Boluarte, who comes from the rural south-central region of Apurímac, ran on Castillo’s ticket last year, and was elected vice president. But she rejected her former ally’s attempt to rule by decree, calling it an authoritarian power grab, and replaced Castillo. She has since urged unity and, responding

to protesters’ demands, called on legislators to move up new elections.

Congress, with many members reluctant to yield power, has blocked that effort, and Boluarte’s critics now call her a weak president working at the behest of a self-interested, out-of-touch legislature.

At first, demonstrators mainly sought Castillo’s reinstatement, or new elections as quickly as possible. Now, they want something much bigger: a new constitution and even, as one sign put it, “to refund a new nation.”

Since Castillo’s removal, at least 50 people have been killed, 49 of them civilians, some of them shot in the chest, back and head, leading human rights groups to accuse the military and the police of excessive use of force and of firing indiscriminately at protesters.

Those deaths have hit particularly hard in the southern city of Juliaca, a two-day drive from the capital, past scrubby, snow-capped mountains and grazing llama-like vicuña.

At nearly 13,000 feet above sea level, just 40 per cent of Juliaca’s population has running water, many roads are unpaved and malnutrition is the biggest problem at the lone public hospital. — *The New York Times*

Why Arabic food is so attractive

Arabic delicacies including mandi, kabsa, falafel, hummus, shawarma or meshkak and salads like fattoush are becoming the favourite meal choices of many Indians. As such, there are thousands of specialised Arabic restaurants in India doing pretty good business as food-savvy diners throng them.

Arabic cuisine characteristically attracts people looking for healthier options as they are nutrient-rich and grilled rather than fried.

Another major highlight is the availability of this food at an affordable rate.

Cashing in on the interest of people who love feasting on Arabic food, restaurants and food joints are popping up with Arabian delicacies in substantial numbers in cities like Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kochi, Kozhikode and Bengaluru among other cities in India.

Most of those exclusive Arab eateries have been started by Indians with connections in the Gulf countries, whose travels back and forth have led to the idea that there is a market for mostly grilled meat dishes that are well-priced and convenient to order.

In some outlets, even the decor and ambiance are arabesque. Step into any restaurant, especially for an evening meal, and you'll be enticed by the rich and inviting aroma of mandi and the like.

Ask for a sulaymani in any tea shop, you'll get sweet black tea with lemon.

Initially, their presence to a large extent was limited to the Malabar area in Kerala but slowly found its way to most parts and continues to grow more and more each day.

Now the aroma of Arabian food wafts across not only in cities, even other smaller towns have a fair amount of hotels serving Arabic cuisine or their versions.

The culinary bequest of the Indian and Gulf Arab interaction is remarkably impressive. Centuries of trade relations and cultural exchange



Samuel Kutty
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The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

IN SOME OUTLETS, EVEN THE DECOR AND AMBIENCE IS ARABESQUE. STEP INTO ANY RESTAURANT, ESPECIALLY FOR AN EVENING MEAL, YOU'LL BE ENTICED BY THE RICH AND INVITING AROMA OF MANDI AND THE LIKE

resulted in a significant influence on each region's cuisines.

Several historians have drawn parallels between Arabic and Indian cuisines. When the Arabs travelled, they brought with them the ingredients from their hometowns. These ingredients were used in cooking.

With a monopoly in the spice trade during the first millennium, these Arabs wanted to tap into the lucrative Indian spice market and spruce up their basic traditional food.

Even before Abu Fazl wrote about how delicacies were whipped up for the imperial Mughal kitchens of Akbar the great in his A'in-i Akbari, the southwestern coast of India used to break fasting with culinary delights based on recipes brought across the seas from the Middle East.

Often when the monsoons delayed the return journey home, many Arab traders chose to settle in Kerala and marry locals instead.

From this time, organically Arabic culinary practices got blended with the local palate giving rise to the so-called Mappila or Malabar cuisine.

Further to the growth of Arabic food has been the Islamic customs are the Muslim fasting month of Ramadhan, festivals, and marriages, each of these celebrations has specific traditions in Arabia, and each day calls for specific kinds of food.

Not only are ingredients similar in both regions, but the two share a commonality in the way they eat certain dishes.

Rice is a staple that is often the main course in both the Gulf Arab and Indian regions.

Eating rice by hand is a norm in both countries and has deep roots in history and is often still practiced in traditional settings to keep in touch with the culture.

Therefore, although India and Arab countries differ in certain disciplines, the similarities in dishes, spices, and ways of eating are a testament to how both sides absorbed a diversity of influences, enriching their respective cultures.

WARMING UP



■ A man chops wood for heating in Ukrainian city of Kharkiv on Tuesday. – AFP

His Majesty's honouring of charities

On the third anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's accession to power on January 11, His Majesty issued Royal Orders providing financial support to charity teams operating within Social Development Committees in all the wilayats of Oman and honouring the volunteers.

The Royal Orders also provide for extending financial support to charities assisting the Ministry of Social Development in recognition for their efforts and roles in serving the community.

This is undoubtedly a wise and important gesture that comes at a time when the whole world is grappling with financial woes. However, among our biggest difficulties with the voluntary work is the lack of centrality and strict oversight which caused it to be randomly distributed and afflicted with financial corruption and lack of clear vision.

I am well-aware, so are all of us, of the importance of charities and voluntary teams. Their honouring by His Majesty is nothing but a clear affirmation of their social and humanitarian role, yet at the same time I emphasise the importance of centrality through bypassing the ramification of the ministries to the authority system.

Fewer of ministries is a healthy condition and the multiplicity of authorities with their few staff and



Badr al Abri

The writer is interested in rapprochement and understanding. He is the author of *The Jurisprudence of Terrorism*

CHARITIES CAN CREATE JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE UNEMPLOYED AND ALSO ACHIEVE LIVELIHOOD SECURITY



clear goals is a healthy condition, too.

The purviews of the charities and voluntary teams are intertwined in many ministries that are teeming with bureaucracy. If not for their social partnership, charities would lose their credibility and might get corrupted.

Even so, charities suffer from obvious mismanagement despite their undeniable social role. Given the current stagnant economy, turning to charities and voluntary teams is a dire need as they can positively contribute to the circulation of money.

Though, the present issue is more intricate than low salary or default on loan. Today's issues are much more complicated than ever before from the sheer numbers of job-seekers to the laid-off employees due to economic conditions and unemployment resulting from the increasing number of graduates and limited job opportunities.

Hence, it is imperative that the cooperative aspect and the legal aspect should be intertwined as charities and voluntary organisations contribute to realising the cooperative aspect which, on turn, contribute to

achieving the legal side in order not for charities to become another tool of hidden begging or negative employment of funds while those funds can be utilised, through charities, for generating hundreds of job opportunities by opening scores of stores, factories, etc.

Thus charities can create job opportunities for the unemployed and also achieve livelihood security.

The job-seekers might be asked to start up a small business that does not yield a satisfactory revenue at the beginning, but the charities could generate a

monthly insurance in such cases thereby contributing to achieving social equality.

Hence, charities and voluntary teams could serve as positive tools within the society by stimulating the market and boosting development and investments.

In addition, charities and voluntary teams could stir tourism, boost annual festivals and religious and national festivities through encouraging fledgling talents and individual innovations which need to be funded in order to see the light and be utilised and invested in the tourism industry.

Thus, charities may invest money through creating jobs related to individual talents and innovations. Our tourism industry is allergic to partnership with talents and it tends to deal with the formal hierarchy.

Charities and voluntary teams could have a significant contribution to realising social equality which is why they need an incubator, an institution or authority to economically, socially and intellectually address their issues and to prevent them from getting diverted in a path that threatens the national security as it happened in some Arab countries and to prevent them from contributing to hidden begging through random distribution.



25th Arabian Gulf Cup



OMAN AND IRAQ IN REPEAT OF OPENER

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Oman national team snatched the final berth after victory against Bahrain with Jamil al Yahmadi goal in the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup competition at the Basra International Stadium in Iraq on Monday.

Oman qualified for the semifinals after beating Saudi Arabia in their last group match. The Red Warriors reached the final match for the fifth time out of six.

Oman national team participated in 22 previous editions of the Arabian Gulf Cup, the first participation was in the third edition in 1974, they won two titles in 2009 and 2017, while they finished runner-up twice as well, in 2004 and 2007. They played 104 matches with 19 wins, 58 losses, 27 draws and scored 81 goals.

The Omani team beat Bahrain 3-2 in 2004 in Qatar, 1-0 in 2007 in the UAE and 1-0 in this edition. The Omani team has not lost against Bahrain in the last seven matches.

The Croatian coach of Oman national team, Branko Ivankovic, expressed his great happiness at defeating the title holders in the last edition to make a final against hosts Iraq.

Ivankovic praised the performance of the players and their high concentration



throughout the match.

Branko said in the post-match press conference, “I am very proud of the players. I would like to thank the fans who supported us throughout the tournament, whether they were Omanis or Iraqis.”

“Our players have absorbed our thinking and we play in a modern style in order to achieve victories and we are happy that we scored the winning goal at the right time, which allowed us to qualify for the final match,” he added.

“We played our matches in a difficult group and managed to reach the semifinals, before we beat the defending champions and qualified to the final round. I am proud of the players’ performance,” he concluded.

Jamil al Yahmadi, the star of the match, expressed his overwhelming happiness that the Red Warriors qualified for the 25th Gulf Final in Basra.

“I congratulate Oman national team for entering the final match of the tournament. I dedicate the victory to my fellow players and the technical and administrative staff of the national team, and to the loyal fans in the stadium or those who followed us from behind the screens.”

Oman team is looking for the third title at the final match with Iraq at the Basra International Stadium on Thursday at 8 pm (Oman Time). Iraq are aiming to add a fourth title after winning in 1979, 1984 and 1988 editions.

Brown reels in Spratt to win women's Tour Down Under

ADELAIDE, Australia: Australia's Grace Brown surged home to overhaul compatriot Amanda Spratt at the finish of the third stage and win the women's Tour Down Under on Tuesday in scorching conditions. Brown, the world time trial silver medallist, reeled in three-time TDU winner Spratt on the seven-kilometre (4.3-mile) descent off the punishing Corkscrew climb to claim the final stage and become the first World Tour winner of the event. Spratt, who was bidding to add to her 2017-19 TDU wins, held a 20-second gap over Brown after a draining climb up the brutal 24.5 per cent gradient of the Corkscrew.

But she couldn't hold off the sprinter Brown in the downhill dash to the finish line outside Adelaide.

"I am really pleased. The team did an awesome job today," Brown said.

"They led me out into the final climb and I knew Amanda was going to be really good on the Corkscrew.

"But I just kept her within distance, knowing that I could potentially catch her on the descent, and was able to do it."

Brown, leading the French FDJ-Suez team, won the general classification by 10 seconds from Spratt (Trek-Segafredo)



with New Zealand's Georgia Williams (EF Education-Tibco-SVB) on 19 seconds.

Spratt, fighting back from a condition which narrows the artery and restricts blood flow to the legs, was rated the one to beat in the gruelling final stage because of her hill-climbing reputation.

And Spratt, who trailed Brown by six seconds going into the final day, looked on course to win the stage and take the ochre leader's jersey with her commanding lead at the top of the Corkscrew.

But she succumbed to Brown's superior sprinting qualities.

"We sure are making women's cycling exciting, aren't we?" Spratt said.

"I don't have many regrets. My team rode amazingly well, we had a plan, they positioned me perfectly for the Corkscrew and I attacked it the way I wanted.

"It's never nice when you know that Grace Brown is chasing you on a downhill like that, I was hoping I would get there, but she was too strong at the finish."

Overnight race leader Alexandra Manly (Team Jayco-AlUla) dropped well back on the unforgiving climb and finished 40 seconds behind to lose her chance of making the final race podium. — AFP



Oman Olympic team back to training camps

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 16

The head coach of Oman Olympic football team, Akram Habreesh, announced the squad of the team for the forthcoming domestic camp which will take place on Wednesday in Muscat. The short warm-up gathering will run for five days until Sunday as part of the team's preparation for the future assignments including the Asian qualifiers for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games.

The national experienced coach, Habreesh, opted 26 players from different clubs including: Ayman al Khusaibi, Al Faraj Al Kiyumi (Al Basaheer), Yousef al Ghilani (Al Oruba), Hisham al Hilali (Al Rustaq), Nasser al Rawahi, Wael al Harthi (Al Suwaiq), Harib al Adawi, Abdullah al Habsi, Mohammed al Hatmi (Seeb), Mohammed al Balushi (Suhar), Ahmed al Shumosi (Saham), Salim al Abdulsalam (Dhofar), Abdullah al Musharafi (Sur), Mohammed al Araibi, Amer Abed (Dhofar), Said al Salami (Al Khabourah), Omar al Salti, Mahmood al Alawi (Al Oruba), Nooh al Oraimi (Al Musannah), Mohammed Bait Mustahil (Al Nasr), Abdullah al Mukhaini (Al Oruba), Abdullah

al Fulaiti (Al Shabab), Mutee al Saadi (Al Suwaiq), Abdullah al Alawi (Yanqul), Khalid al Abadi (Saham) and Loai al Rawahi (Fanja).

Oman Olympic last official's presence was in the West Asian Under-23 Championship as the team had ended their campaign in fourth place. Oman players suffered a 1-0 loss against Syria in the third and fourth play-off match.

The hosts Saudi Arabian Olympic team had edged past Oman 2-1 in the semifinal and the win took Saudi Arabia to the final match against Qatar. Saudi Arabia were crowned as champions after they had defeated Qatar 3-1 in the final clash.

Oman Olympic team had managed to earn a slot in the semifinal as they had positioned themselves as runners-up in Group A. Oman boys started their campaign with a 4-2 win against Lebanon in the opening match and then suffered a 1-0 loss against Qatar in the following match. Qatar topped the group with four points while Oman came in second with three points. Lebanon were in last place with one point only.

Pocari Sweat school football tourney enters semifinals stage

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

The Pocari Sweat school football tournament which is under the organisation of Oman School Sports Association (OSSA) entered the semifinals stage. The matches of the tournament are being held in the Cheltenham Muscat School from January 15 to 19.

Eight teams are taking part in



the tournament including Hai Al Dhaher School from Muscat, Manbaa Al Khair School from South Al Sharqiyah, Al Ishraq School from North Al Batinah, Al Turath School from Al Dakhiliyah, Al Maarefa School from Dhofar besides the international schools including Muscat International School, Indian School Al Ghubra and hosts Cheltenham Muscat School.

The final match of the

tournament will be held on Thursday morning. Honourable Dr Badriya bint Ibrahim bin Khalfan al Shehiyah, Deputy Chairman of State Council, will be the chief guest in presence of OSSA officials.

The group stages of the tournament featured strong competitions among the participating schools with an aim of securing direct tickets to the finals.

Bidiya to host Oman Desert Marathon from Jan 21

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JAN 17

The Sultanate of Oman will host the Oman Desert Marathon, in its eighth edition on Saturday, from January 21 to 24, in the golden sands of Bidiya.

The event will feature participation of marathon champions from different countries of the world and amateurs from Oman and GCC countries. The marathon distance is 165 kilometres divided into four-stage races that take place in one of the most picturesque deserts in the world.

The four stages of the race with a distance of 47 km, 55 km, 42 km and 21 km respectively provide a wonderful path to the runners, in Bidiya sands in the winter season.

The eighth edition of

the marathon starts from Al Wasl Oasis in Bidiya, and embraces three short-distance tracks.

The first track is allocated for children for a distance of two kilometres namely 'Bidiya Jewel Race', the second cross-country race will be held for a distance of five kilometres, the third race is Al Wasl race for beginners and families for a distance of five kilometres.

It is worth noting that the first edition of the marathon was held in 2013 at Al Wasl Oasis in the Wilayat of Bidiya and the last edition of the Oman Desert Marathon was held in 2019. The ODM was cancelled in the next few years due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. The event is returning with the participation of more than 200 athletes competing in four days.



Dakar Rally winner and MERC legend Nasser Saleh al Attiyah heads field



MUSCAT: The Oman Automobile Association (OAA) has announced an impressive line-up of international drivers and national entries for the Oman International Rally, round one of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC), taking place on January 26-28.

Fifteen international crews and 10 teams taking part in a national event grace the entry list announced by the organising committee. The field includes individuals from nine countries and is headed by the global motor sport stars of the moment, Nasser Saleh al Attiyah and his Andorra-based co-driver Mathieu Baumel.

On Sunday, the duo secured Al Attiyah's fifth success in the world-renowned Dakar Rally and a fourth triumph for his co-driver. The Qatari makes the switch from that all-conquering Toyota Hilux to join forces with Autotek Motorsport in a bid to begin another defence of his regional rally title in a Volkswagen Polo GTi.

Al Attiyah has seven wins under his belt in the Sultanate of Oman and is a clear favourite for victory next week over the 13 gravel stages that make up the challenge in Oman.

Four Rally2 cars grace the entry list, with local hopes resting on the shoulders of the Oman Rally Team's Abdullah al Rawahi and his Jordanian co-driver Ata al Hmoud in their Škoda Fabia. Al Rawahi finished fourth in last year's championship.

Qatar's Nasser Khalifa al Atya – the runner-up in the regional series back in 1993 – again teams up with Giovanni Bernacchini to drive a Ford Fiesta R5. His Italian co-driver took part in the Dakar Classic event in Saudi Arabia over the last two weeks.

Completing the Rally2 line-up will be Petr Kačirek in his Duck Racing Škoda Fabia. The Czech finished second overall behind Al Attiyah in Oman last year with Václav Kopáček. Václav is replaced by Petra Riháková on this occasion, with whom

Kačirek has taken part in numerous Czech events in the past.

Kuwait's Meshari al Thefiri is a multiple former MERC2 champion and will drive a Mitsubishi Evo X in Oman, where he lines up against 10 other Group NR4 cars on the entry list to compete in the MERC2 category.

The defending champion Issa Abu Jamous returns to defend his title in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX and lines up against fellow Jordanians, Ihab al Shorafa, Shadi Shaban, Shaikh Bader al Fayeze and Shaker Jweihan, in addition to Kuwait's Mohammed al Zafiri and Yousef al Dhefiri, Lebanon's Ahmad Khaled and Oman's Abdullah al Zubair and Zakariya al Aamri.

Local drivers dominate the entry for the Oman national event: Haitham al Zadjali and Ghaith al Qasbi wheel out a pair of Mitsubishis and there are two Subaru Imprezas for Faisal al Rashdi and Jarah al Touqi.

UTVs are becoming popular across several FIA motor sport disciplines and rally organisers have received entries from three crews driving Yamaha YXZs - Oman's Mohammed al Mazrui and Mutasim al Balushi and Lebanon's Alain Nawfal.

There are also national entries from Abdullah al Toqi, Musab Soomar and Salim al Toqi.

The former will be partnered by a famous Austrian female co-driver from the FIA World Rally Championship (WRC): Ilka Minor has partnered drivers of the calibre of Manfred Stohl and Henning Solberg to eight podiums and 25 stage wins in the WRC since she made her WRC debut with Achim Mörkl in Corsica in 1997. Her best results were a pair of second-placed finishes with Stohl at the 2005 Cyprus Rally and Wales Rally GB in 2006.

The 2023 Oman International Rally gets underway with a ceremonial start and a timed super special stage on Thursday, January 26.

RUWI RANGERS THUMP BOUSHER BUSTERS



Aiyappa CR - Qurum Thunders



Hannan Rizwan - Ruwi Rangers

QURUM THUNDERS BEAT AZAIBA XI
MUSCAT, Oman : Ruwi Rangers hand defeat to Bousher Busters by 58 runs and Qurum Thunders claim victory against Azaiba XI by 6 wickets in the Oman D20 currently underway at the Oman Cricket Academy Grounds.

Winning the toss and batting first, Ruwi Rangers looked rock solid courtesy of a half century by opener Hannan Rizwan (55 of 37 balls with 6 fours & 2 sixes) and able contribution from Mohammed Zahid (32 of 21) and Zohaib Amanat (28 of 21) taking the rangers to a total of 189/6. Fawad Ali bagged 2/34 in his quota of four overs. In response, Bousher Busters could not take the score well and lost early wickets. Skipper Sufyan Mahmood (50 of 30 with 5 fours & 2 sixes) along with Shubo Pal (47 of 42 with 5 fours & 2 sixes) tried taking Bousher Busters close to the target but fell short with Busters bundling down to

131. Mohammed Rafi (3/15), Muhd Nadeem (3/19) and Nester Dhamba (3/20) bagged the wickets for the Rangers. Ruwi Rangers remain unbeaten in the Oman D20 winning four out of four games.

In the second game, Azaiba XI elected to bat first. Off to a shaky start, the Azaiba batsmen were not able to put up a wholesome show. Rana Naeem (30 of 17) and Muhammed Waqas (30 of 24) along with Rao Waqar (40 of 45) helped the Azaiba XI target to 116. Samay Shrivastav (3/26) , Aiyappa CR (3/12) and Ayaan Khan (2/12) were among the key wicket takers for the Thunders. In response, the Thunders went blazing at the Azaiba bowlers chasing down the target in the 16 th over. Ashish Odedra (38 of 30) was the aggressor to the innings. Hammal Abdulwahab (2/15) and Muhd Imran (2/22) were among the wicket takers for Azaiba XI. Qurum

WVTT Championships 2023 sees the favourites emerge as focus shifts to doubles competition

MUSCAT: The second day of the World Veteran Table Tennis Championships Muscat 2023 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) saw the highest ranked players begin their campaigns in singles, doubles and mixed doubles competition.

Several players made an impressive start to the championship by winning all three of their Group matches. Tay Kee (MAS), Manfred Nieswand (GER), Michael Stadtmüller (GER), Leonid Segal (UKR), Craig Campbell (AUS), Boguslaw Madej (POL), Jin Liang Yang (CHN), Peter Desouza (IND), Jayanta Bhalchandra Kulkarni (IND) and Hock Gee Tan (SIN) are among those still with a hundred per cent record.

Competition then shifted to Men's and Women's Doubles and Mixed Doubles with players ranging from 40 to 91 years of age proving that table tennis is a sport for all ages, and the competitive spark is very much alive at Muscat 2023.

Pawel Stopinski of Poland, competing in the 45+ age category, said, "Today we played in the Doubles competition. We were ready to play, and we want to win – everybody wants to win! This is the first time for us in Oman, it is a very nice country."

Partner Wojciech Tebcio added, "I have played in championships all around the world, and the organisation here is very good."

The pair triumphed 3-0 in both of their matches, firstly beating the pair of Vitho Neikha of India and



Mazen Mazen of Palestine, and then over the Belgian duo of Kris Boogers and Jurgen Michiels.

Mounir Bessah of Algeria said, "Oman is very welcoming. I like the people of Oman. Everyone is very happy here, with the hospitality and the venue. We have even met some friends who we hadn't been able to see or play with in several years. I was ITTF Competition Manager before and organised the first international competition here seven years ago or so, and since then we have spoken about bringing a bigger tournament here – and here we are. The competition is very good, and fortunately we have good conditions for all of the players. We are very happy to compete here and see our friends again."

Mounir and partner Mikael Andersson of Sweden did not fare so well, narrowly losing both of their ties. The Indian pair of Satyanarayana Kandula and Dr Manoj Songara claimed victory in Round 1 and Mohammad Naeini and Farzin Tavakolian of Iran emerged victorious in Round 2.

Mohammed al Jassasi, Board Member and Head of the Umpiring Committee, said that all the umpires are fully prepared to start officiating the World Veteran Table Tennis Championships Muscat 2023.

He commented, "This is a really great occasion for all the local referees to be part of this world-class event in Muscat. Moreover, it is a big step for the new umpires to gain valuable experience from

this championship. There are about 85 Omani umpires and most of them are certified as international umpires. Prior to the event we had more than five workshops to help prepare them for this championship."

Players will be able to enjoy a rest day with the opportunity to explore Muscat and enjoy Omani culture offered by the organising committee. Also on the agenda are tours of Nizwa and Wadi Shab.

The World Veteran Table Tennis Championships 2023 is organised by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Oman Table Tennis Association and the International Table Tennis Federation, with support from Oman Fiber Optic, STAG Sports, Omantel and Belltel.





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GCCIA mulls new power link with Oman at cost of \$660 million

QASIM AL MAASHANI
ABU DHABI, JAN 17

The GCC Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) — the operator of the transmission system linking the grids of the GCC member states — says it is weighing a direct electricity link with the main grid of the Sultanate of Oman — an initiative that could entail an investment of \$660 million.

According to Eng Ahmed Ali al Ebrahim, CEO — GCCIA, the project could enable energy transfers of between 1200 —1600 MW. Speaking to the Observer on the sidelines of the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW), underway in the UAE capital, the official said that a three-year timeframe is envisioned for its implementation.

The roughly 550 kilometre-long link would have a grid station each on either side of the international border between Oman and the United Arab Emirates, he stated.

The Sultanate of Oman is already connected to the GCC grid via an interconnection with the UAE that came into operation in 2012. It links Oman's Main



THE SULTANATE OF OMAN IS ALREADY CONNECTED TO THE GCC GRID VIA AN INTERCONNECTION WITH THE UAE THAT CAME INTO OPERATION IN 2012. IT LINKS OMAN'S MAIN INTERCONNECTED SYSTEM (MIS) WITH THE POWER SYSTEMS OF THE GCCIA VIA ABU DHABI.

Interconnected System (MIS) with the power systems of the GCCIA via Abu Dhabi.

This 220 kV interconnection allows Oman access to the power systems of the five Gulf Cooperation Council member states via this link.

The interconnection is a double circuit link that supports reliable transfers of up to 400 MW and can carry up to 800 MW in

emergencies.

The link has provided emergency reserves on a number of occasions, preventing power failures in the MIS. Interconnects between Oman and the GCCIA have the potential to facilitate firm support during emergencies, as well as open up opportunities for electricity trading and coordinated reserves planning.

First high-grade copper sulphide ore mined at Wash-Hi Majaza mine

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 17

An Omani-Australian joint venture behind the development of a key copper-gold project in Oman has announced the start of mining of high-grade copper sulphide ore at their Wash-hi Majaza mine in the Wilayat of Al Mudhaibi in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

The joint venture, Al Hadeetha Resources LLC, is a partnership between Australian mining firm Alara Resources Limited, which owns 51 per cent stake while the remaining 49 per cent is owned by Omani investors Al Hadeetha and Tasnim.

“The development of Wash-hi Majaza mine is progressing well with stripping of overburden and oxide/gossan ore continuing in Wash-hi pit, at a current depth of 25 metres below surface. High-grade copper sulphide ore exposed at 430 SRL in the pit,” Alara said in a statement.

“Samples from blast holes between 433 SRL and 427 SRL analysed at an onsite laboratory indicated the presence of high-grade copper sulphide ore at shallow levels in the pit,” the



company added.

Alara Managing Director, Atmavireshwar Sthapak said: “We are delighted with the progress already made in the development of Wash-hi mine pit and pleased with high grade copper ore now being excavated in the mine.”

“We look forward to providing further updates on construction activities at the Al Wash-hi Majaza Copper-Gold Project over coming months,” Sthapak added.

Al Hadeetha Resources LLC is the first international joint venture company that has been awarded a copper mining licence in Oman in 2018 for the Wash-hi Majaza project.

Located in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, the Wash-hi Majaza copper-gold deposit has been evaluated under JORC standards for over 16 million tonnes of copper resources and 10 million tonnes of mineable reserves.

Pact signed to support market-making, liquidity solutions for MSX

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Ubhar Capital (U Capital) has signed a business partnership agreement — the first-of-its-kind in the Sultanate of Oman — with FIRST Information Technology (FiT) for Market Making (MM) & Liquidity Providing (LP) solutions for Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX).

This agreement is aligned with MSX strategies and plans to promote public offerings, diversify capital markets solutions, and encourage investment and facilitate it to investors in order to accomplish market upgrade and prompt the return of capital markets to the centre stage of economic development in the Sultanate of Oman.

Through this tie-up, U Capital will be able to provide best in business LP and MM Services to all listed companies in the Sultanate of Oman, which would like to avail this opportunity.

TURN TO P14

Oman LNG discussing 10-year life extension with government, shareholders: CEO

A succession of long-term offtake commitments clinched by Oman LNG over the past month has enabled the company to secure a market for part of the plant's output for up to 10 years starting from 2025.

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Having snagged a flurry of important LNG supply contracts in recent weeks, Oman LNG says it is discussing an extension of the life of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) complex at Qalhat for another 10 years beyond its current mandate, which expires in 2024.

The revelation came in a interview by Hamed al Numani, CEO, featured in Enjaz & Eejaz, the quarterly newsletter of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), which represents the government's stake in Oman LNG.

A succession of long-term offtake commitments clinched

by Oman LNG over the past month has enabled the company to secure a market for part of the plant's output for up to 10 years starting from 2025. This bodes well for the company's hopes to obtain a license to operate beyond its current concession expiring in 2024.

“On new contracts, overall, our commercial strategy for LNG from Oman future volumes is being discussed with the government and shareholders to extend the life of Oman LNG by an additional ten years,” said the CEO.

“We are progressing very well; our teams are worldwide to make the best use of this opportunity. We have highly skilled technical and commercial teams with over 20 years of experience to bring the best value to Oman,” he stated.

Last month, Japanese trading conglomerates Mitsui & Co and Itochu Corp, along with power company JERA, signed long-term pacts for the supply of a total of 2.35 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of LNG from Oman. Supply timeframes span 5 to 10



Long-term contracts are usually set with the investment to protect investors, buyers, and sellers on the significant upfront investment. They also lead to the development and delivery of this business and leverage that with other opportunities.

HAMED AL NUMANI
CEO, Oman LNG

years starting from 2025.

More recently, Shell International Trading Middle East FZE signed a term sheet for the offtake of 0.8 mtpa of LNG from Oman LNG for ten years starting from 2025.

The outlook for further offtake arrangements continues to be bright, say experts, as gas dependent economies scramble for new energy sources in the wake of supply disruptions sparked by the outbreak of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine a year ago.

In the interview, Al Numani highlighted Oman LNG's efforts to capitalise on the strong uptrend in global demand for gas-based resources. In particular, he credited the company's 'rejuvenation' programme that has contributed to the upgrade and modernisation of its 3-train complex at Qalhat.

“This programme, which aimed to maximise the value of our 22-year-old plant, already creates value,” said the CEO. “We all see now the results of this forward-looking decision. We then went

further to enhance our production and environmental performance.

As such, the company implemented various projects, including plant debottlenecking, to boost its efficiency and increase its nameplate capacity by a further 10 per cent,” he stated.

The CEO also sought to explain that LNG supply contracts are underpinned by pricing strategies that are universally applied across the industry. “LNG contracts are often signed as long-term due to the nature of this market and commodity,” he pointed out.

“Long-term contracts are usually set with the investment to protect investors, buyers, and sellers on the significant upfront investment. They also lead to the development and delivery of this business and leverage that with other opportunities. All LNG-exporting countries around the world are following this approach.”

Beyond the long-term contracts, Oman LNG also seeks to optimise value creation through mid-term sales, diversions, swaps or spot cargo deliveries, he added.



Transom Handling, Labour Ministry launch 'Maseer' programme

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Transom Handling, a subsidiary of Oman Airports, launched its training-for-employment (TFE) programme, 'Maseer', in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour yesterday under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources.

"We are pleased today to partner with the Ministry of Labour to introduce the Maseer programme, which is in line with the company's vision to support and empower the youth of Oman to move towards their goals," shared Transom Handling Executive Director Saud Abdulaziz al Azizi.

"This a unique programme, as you all know we are in the existing mode of Covid-19 pandemic and therefore so many trends have been introduced to the aviation sector where we have to be always ready.

That's why we have agreed with the Ministry of Labour to accept a hundred job-seekers at

this stage to be developed and trained to be part of the aviation sector within two years," he added. The two-year training programme will be divided between guest services and other technical skills related to the aviation sector.

"I think this is a national obligation for all government owned, or semi-government owned companies. And we believe that we are part of this community and we thought of adding value and contributing to the society by introducing such programmes in association with the Ministry of Labour," shared Al Azizi.

Under-Secretary for Human Resources of the Ministry of Labour, Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, reaffirmed the Ministry's efforts in combating unemployment, "Through this partnership, we seek to strengthen the efforts of private sector institutions and to support their endeavours and national contributions in providing job seekers with the opportunity to prove their existence."

Pact signed to support market-making, liquidity solutions for MSX

FROM PAGE 13

U Capital, in partnership with UAE based Al Ramz Corporation Investment and Development PJSC (Al Ramz), was earlier appointed by MSX as an advisor to the Exchange for developing the country's capital market in line with Oman Vision 2040.

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Raysut Cement posts RO 93.6 million loss in 2022

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 17

Raysut Cement, the biggest cement manufacturer in the Sultanate of Oman, has posted a post-tax loss of RO 93.686 million for the financial year ended December 31, 2022 – in the first such filing by the company since the Capital Market Authority (CMA) dramatically intervened last month in response to significant reporting discrepancies in its financial accounts.

This compares with a loss of RO 12.924 million incurred by the parent company in 2021, Khalid Ramees al Rawas, Raysut Cement CEO, stated in initial unaudited



financial results disclosed to the regulator on Tuesday.

Total revenue was down 12.17 per cent to RO 45.363 million in 2022, from RO 51.647 million a year earlier. Total expenditure

Oman tops MENA region in sustainable energy regulation

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 17

The Sultanate of Oman's regulations of the renewable and sustainable energy sector have been rated as advanced by 'Regulatory Indicators for Sustainable Energy (RISE)', a World Bank initiative to help policymakers to compare national policy frameworks for sustainable energy and identify opportunities to attract investment.

RISE assesses countries' policy support for each of the three pillars of sustainable energy – access to electricity, access to clean cooking (for 54 access-deficit countries), energy efficiency, and renewable energy.

With over 30 indicators covering 140 countries and representing over 98 per cent of the world population, RISE provides a reference point to help policymakers benchmark their sector policy and regulatory framework against those of regional and global peers, and a powerful tool to help develop policies and regulations that advance sustainable energy goals.

At the GCC level, Oman was ranked first in the RISE index, as well as first in the index for MENA countries, and sixth globally.



THE SULTANATE OF OMAN'S ACHIEVEMENT OF ADVANCED RESULTS IN THE REGULATORY INDICATORS OF SUSTAINABLE ENERGY IS AN INDICATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION TO ACHIEVING ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT GOALS OF THE "OMAN VISION 2040" VISION REPRESENTED IN THE GOAL OF GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS.

The Sultanate of Oman's achievement of advanced results in the regulatory indicators of sustainable energy is an indication

of the contribution to achieving one of the most important goals of the "Oman Vision 2040" vision represented in the goal of global competitiveness.

It also reflects the positive image of the applied policies and regulatory frameworks.

This will contribute to attracting investments in areas related to the energy sector, and creating opportunities for training and employing Omani competencies.

In a statement, the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) said the high scores for Oman are a testament to the government's continuing efforts

to enable the sector's transition to alternative energy resources.

These efforts include liberalising the market through bilateral sales and the spot market, adopting the national strategy for an orderly transition to zero neutrality, and establishing a centre for sustainability, setting regulatory frameworks for non-polluting cars, sector governance, as well as developing the necessary incentives to support and enable areas related to renewable energy and support its initiatives, explaining that work is underway to develop possible regulatory frameworks for the sustainable energy sector.

GCC IPO market activities jump in 2022

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 17

The GCC Initial Public Offering (IPO) market witnessed strong activity in 2022 and surpassed the 2021 achievements, despite volatility in markets. Last year, the GCC recorded 48 IPO issuances compared to just 20 issuances in 2021.

Meanwhile, proceeds from GCC issuers in 2022 went up by more than 300 per cent to \$23.38 billion from just \$7.52 billion in 2021, based on data from Bloomberg and stock exchanges.

The relative resilience and immunity to global geopolitical events such as the Ukraine-Russia war, which drove passive index flows and index compiler weightings in favour of regional stock exchanges in the GCC were some of the reasons why IPO markets in the region



outperformed other geographies, Kamco Invest said in a report.

In 2022, Saudi Arabia maintained its leadership position for IPO issuances in the GCC, as 34 out of the 48 GCC IPOs debuted on its stock exchanges.

The United Arab Emirates, however, dominated in terms of IPO proceeds and types of IPO issuances, raking in almost 59.7 per cent of the issuance proceeds at around \$ 13.96 billion from

its 11 issuances in 2022. Bulk of the issuances came from the government's mandate to bring select state-owned enterprises to UAE's stock exchanges.

UAE also registered the two largest IPOs in the region in 2022 with DEWA (\$6.1 billion) listed on the Dubai Financial Market and Borouge (\$ 2.0 billion) on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange.

The pipeline for 2023 remains strong and the start of the year

the pipeline could range between 27-39 companies between announced and rumoured GCC IPO issuances.

"While the trajectory of interest rate hikes, geopolitics, secondary stock market volatility and oil price volatility to continue to remain risks in 2023, it is worth noting that the prevalence of these factors did not stop strong IPO activity in 2022," Kamco Invest added.

Further, the GCC will continue to generate interest for its strong idiosyncratic businesses and family office listings from international investors, given their strong competitive positioning and established reach in the market. Separately, regulators will look at the performance of the listed IPO vehicles such as SPACs and market maker funds that are aimed at improving liquidity and participation, before providing wider access to such products.

PUBLICLY-TRADED RAYSUT CEMENT IS CURRENTLY ADMINISTERED BY AN INTERIM BOARD OF DIRECTORS INSTITUTED BY THE MARKET REGULATOR FOLLOWING THE DISCOVERY OF "MATERIAL REPRESENTATIONS" IN THE COMPANY'S FINANCIAL REPORTING FOR THE SECOND QUARTER OF LAST YEAR.

2022, up from a net loss of RO 13.585 million in 2021. Group revenue declined 26.12 per cent to RO 69.147 million in 2022, down from RO 93.597 million in 2021.

Publicly-traded Raysut Cement is currently administered by an interim Board of Directors

instituted by the market regulator following the discovery of "material representations" in the company's financial reporting for the second quarter of last year.

Trading in the company's shares was initially suspended by the Authority on November 22. But when the then Board's remedial responses failed to fully address the concerns of the regulator, the latter swiftly stepped in to take corrective action in the public interest. It dissolved the existing Board and appointed a five-member temporary board of directors with powers to remedy Raysut Cement's precarious financial situation.

Part of the new board's remit

was to "organise and restructure" the firm with the goal of restoring its financial stability and also addressing the underlying reasons that contributed to the suspected irregularities.

Justifying its intervention, the CMA said it was necessitated by a desire to restore investor confidence in a leading publicly listed company, as well as in the capital market as a whole. The intervention was only the second time in the Authority's history when it acted to supersede the board of a listed company – the first time being in September 2019 when it dissolved the board of Al Hassan Engineering Co SAOG citing the public interest.

EU rules threaten to block US subsidy to Ireland



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com
The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

A proposed major green manufacturing investment in Ireland has run into problems between the Irish government and the Biden administration over state aid rules of the European Union.

Wicklow company, Cool Planet – run by entrepreneur Norman Crowley – is finalising a joint venture with “two tier-one” vehicle manufacturers to convert thousands of mining industry vehicles to electric.

Asked to comment about the proposed investment and new US subsidies that threaten to lure the facility from Ireland, the Department of Enterprise said that “discriminatory measures” by the Americans “could interfere with the overall intention of working together.”

The manufacturing facility for

thousands of vehicles – likely to involve “high hundreds of jobs” – may now go to the US because of EU state aid rules, said Crowley.

Since US President Joe Biden signed his Inflation Reduction Act into law in August, introducing massive subsidies for green projects, there is now increased appeal for a range of business to locate in the US.

The location of the facility is due to be finalised over the next two months with orders already coming in. Crowley said changes to EU state aid rules would be required to allow the Irish Government to compete with the generous US subsidies on offer. The firm has developed a specialised software platform that facilitates the conversion of light mining industry vehicles – often Toyota-made four-wheel drives – from diesel to electric.

The proposed partnership with two major manufacturers is “a

joint venture on a very large scale to deliver ultimately hundreds of thousands of electric mining vehicles,” said Crowley.

The deal would mark a massive breakthrough for Cool Planet, which is part-owned by a French private equity firm. It suffered pandemic related losses of about 10 million euros in 2020 but since focused on developing a software platform for controlling specialised electric vehicles.

Because of these losses, under EU law the Irish government is precluded from supporting the firm with grants for a number of years. No such restrictions apply to the new US subsidy regime and restrictions are less onerous in other EU states such as Portugal, he said. Both countries are now in the running to win the manufacturing plant, although the software element will still be based in Ireland.

Last month the Financial Times reported that European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had promised the EU would “simplify and adapt” its rules for companies lured by US green subsidies but this may come too late. A Department of Enterprise spokesman said “the Irish Government attaches great importance to a positive EU-US relationship.”

He added: “We welcome the US’s ambitions for climate change with public investment for the green transition. However, some of the discriminatory measures in the Inflation Reduction Act could interfere with the overall intention of working together as like-minded partners to address common challenges. We are hopeful that the EU-US taskforce will be able to address these issues.”

“The EU and US have a long history of friendship and mutual

respect.

As is often the case, friends can have difference of opinion and Ireland is in favour of continued engagement by the commission with the US on the Inflation Reduction Act including through the taskforce, with the aim of ensuring that the EU is not unfairly disadvantaged by the US approach.

“A subsidies race is ultimately in no-one’s interest. Indeed, as a small member state Ireland has benefitted from a robust State aid regime which underpins a level playing field,” said the spokesman.

An Enterprise Ireland spokesman said it was “aware of issues facing Irish companies in relation to EU state aid rules in the context of international industrial policies and are engaging on behalf of our clients with the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment (DETE) who have responsibility for EU state aid oversight in Ireland.”

Chinese GDP surprise sets expectations too high

YAWEN CHEN

The Chinese economy grew 3 per cent in 2022, the government reported, beating forecasts but way below the official 5 per cent target. Ending consumption-suppressing policies is removing drags on growth, but with fiscal coffers low, and debt and inflation rising, China is short on tools to drive growth.

The surprising lift is largely thanks to a rosier-than-expected fourth quarter, when the country took a ride on a pandemic-policy rollercoaster.

As the contagious Omicron strain spread through cities, local officials’ first reaction was to tighten lockdowns, which suppressed consumption. Then Beijing abruptly scrapped its zero-Covid mandate, which wound down quarantine but also unleashed a massive outbreak.

A Peking University study estimated roughly 900 million had been infected as of January 11. There is, therefore, scepticism among some economists that activity really increased 2.9 per cent in the last three months of the year; China Beige Book survey estimates the economy actually contracted during that period.

Regardless, the chaotic end of quarantine coincided with other easing measures, including the softening of crackdowns on real estate developers and private technology giants, respectively, which set the basis for a recovery in 2023.

But it will take more than removing hobbles to get China out of the basement.

The property market, which drives a quarter of output, is still falling; official

ENDING CONSUMPTION-SUPPRESSING POLICIES IS REMOVING DRAGS ON GROWTH, BUT WITH FISCAL COFFERS LOW, AND DEBT AND INFLATION RISING, CHINA IS SHORT ON TOOLS TO DRIVE GROWTH.

data showed investment in the sector fell 10 per cent last year, the first decline since records began in 1999.

As for debt, despite a multi-year deleveraging campaign, credit to the non-financial sector crept up to nearly 300 per cent of GDP by the second quarter of last year, per Bank for International Settlements data.

In that context, monetary and fiscal options are limited. While China’s core inflation is subdued at 0.7 per cent, energy and food prices are not, and the US Federal Reserve is still tightening.

Local governments’ stimulus ammunition is low. Fiscal revenue fell 3 per cent in the first 11 months while income from land sales plunged 22 per cent. Policymakers are merely eyeing a 3 per cent budget deficit for this year, per Bloomberg, compared to 2.8 per cent in 2022.

That’s hardly enough to revive market confidence; Chinese equity indexes fell after the GDP report. That could mean leaning even harder on the state sector. Last year the People’s Bank of China handed over 1 trillion yuan (\$148 billion) to the central government to spend on growth, for example.

Regardless, it won’t take long for the glow from the fourth quarter’s outperformance to fade.

— Reuters

Davos man must pay



JAYATI GHOSH

The author is Professor of Economics at Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in the United States and Member of the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation.

The World Economic Forum (WEF)’s annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, has always been more than a little problematic.

But in recent years, the annual gathering of the rich and powerful has become an increasingly wasteful exercise in vanity.

What is the point of all those private jets, luxury hotels and clinking champagne glasses if they lead to nothing more than handwringing about the state of the world and vague promises to address multiple global challenges?

Ahead of this year’s gathering this month, the WEF once again laid out an ambitious agenda. Recognising that the ‘world today is at a critical inflection point’ and that the ‘sheer number of ongoing crises calls for bold collective action’, the theme this year is ‘cooperation in a fragmented world.’

The many political and business leaders attending these gatherings are indeed in a position to take concrete steps toward cooperation and change. That is why, along with 29 other members of the Club of Rome’s Transformational Economics Commission, I have signed an open letter calling on Davos attendees to join us in demanding higher taxes for the super-rich.

The impetus for this demand is the urgent need to mitigate the worst effects of climate change and prevent social instability.

Last year, the Transformational Economics Commission published the book Earth for All,

which provides a blueprint for eliminating poverty, reducing inequality, empowering women, transforming food systems and overhauling energy systems by switching to renewables.

If we are to achieve these fundamental transformations, all of which require massive increases in public spending, we must raise taxes on corporations and the ultra-wealthy. While central banks and development banks can make significant contributions to this effort, it is not enough.

Enhanced public expenditure, funded by increased tax revenues, is needed to support the green transition, ensure social protections and well-being for all and underwrite private-sector investments.

Most of the world’s tax systems are outdated and regressive and are therefore unable to deliver the necessary revenues or ensure that the rich pay their fair share.

Likewise, our laws fail to recognise the myriad ways corporations and wealthy individuals can evade taxes and how financial globalisation has enabled firms to shift profits and assets to low-tax jurisdictions. Instead of addressing these legal loopholes, governments rely far too heavily on indirect taxation, such as value-added tax (VAT),

which falls disproportionately on the poor.

Over the past few decades, these systemic inequities have led to a massive decline in public wealth and to enormous concentrations of private wealth. As the latest World Inequality Report shows, they have also contributed to ballooning inequality.

Addressing the issue The good news is that it is not too late to change course. In our letter to Davos attendees, we propose several measures to address the breakdown of tax systems around the world and ensure a sustainable future by taxing wealth, incomes and corporate profits, as well as the excessive greenhouse-gas emissions and biosphere exploitation by the world’s wealthiest people.

First, by developing and sharing national asset registries, governments could tax extremely wealthy individuals more easily, even if they hide their wealth in tax havens.

Second, taxing capital incomes would make tax systems more progressive. Third, to weaken companies’ incentives to shift profits to low-tax countries, we propose a global minimum corporate tax rate of 25 per cent (close to the global average) and unitary taxation

based on multinationals’ sales, employment and assets in each country.

Fourth, taxing windfall profits in all sectors, especially profits made during periods of scarcity and speculation, would have positive distributional effects.

Lastly, we call for taxes on luxury carbon emissions and biosphere consumption and for phasing out all tax incentives related to fossil fuels.

These common-sense proposals are not new. Polls show that most people support higher taxes on the rich and that supporters include some of those who would be subject to them.

Last year, for example, a group of 100 billionaires and millionaires signed a letter calling for a ‘moderate wealth tax’ on the richest one-tenth of the top one per cent of Americans and warning that extreme inequality could lead to political instability and violence. Other groups have made similar calls.

But we cannot achieve meaningful change without political will. To this end, it is time for the participants and organisers of the Davos meeting to justify this expensive annual festival of wealth by leveraging their considerable influence to bring about a fairer tax system.

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Participants of the World Economic Forum (WEF) 2023 are seen in a hall at Davos Congress Centre, in the Alpine resort of Davos, Switzerland. — Reuters

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Be Careful. Be Responsible! #Living_with_Covid19

HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

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

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

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and in commemoration of the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Quboo, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month. CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

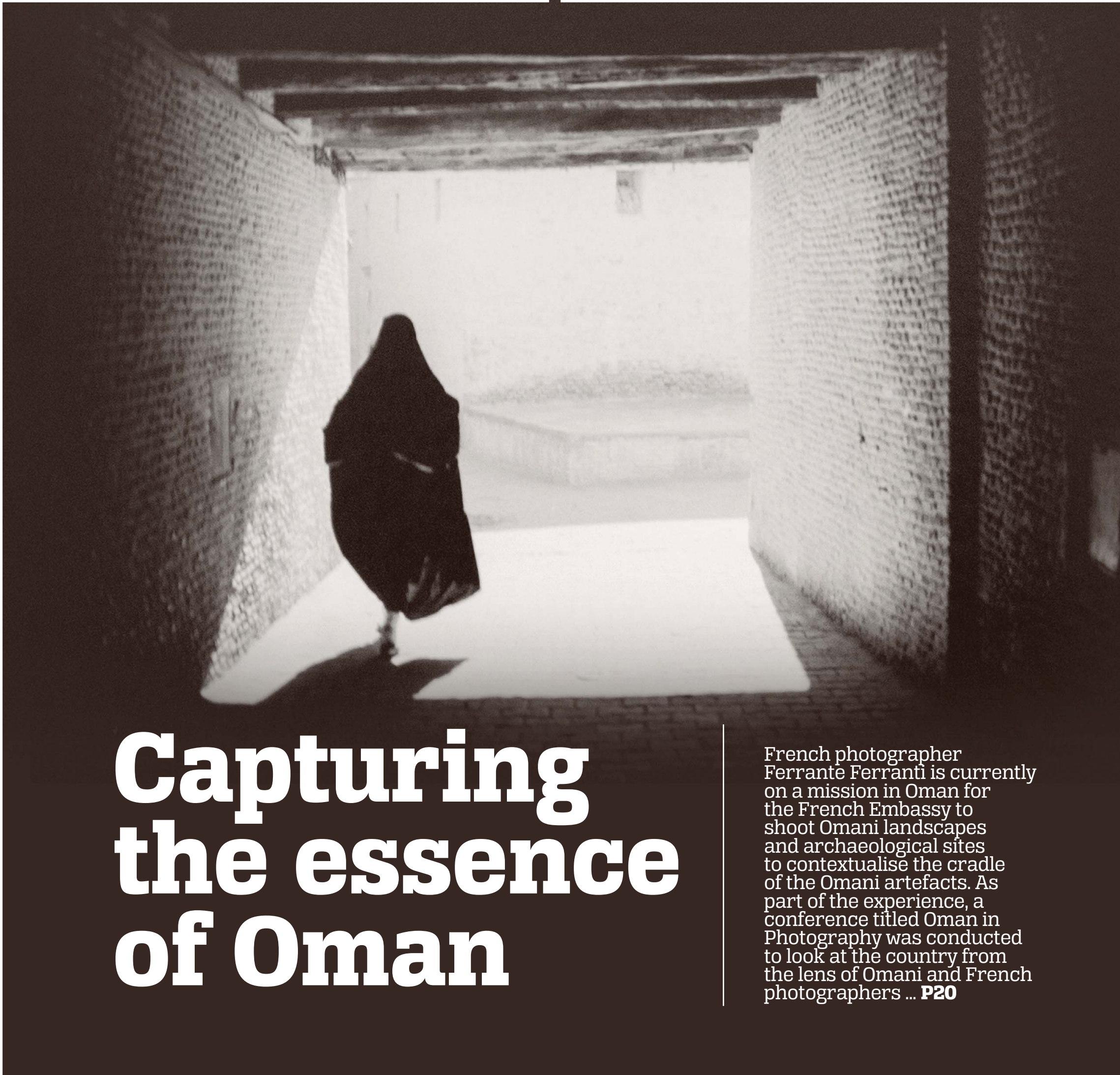
STAY APART AND BREAK THE CHAIN

SAMUEL KUTTY

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



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Capturing the essence of Oman

French photographer Ferrante Ferranti is currently on a mission in Oman for the French Embassy to shoot Omani landscapes and archaeological sites to contextualise the cradle of the Omani artefacts. As part of the experience, a conference titled Oman in Photography was conducted to look at the country from the lens of Omani and French photographers ... **P20**

Auctioneers eye new record for Tintin artwork at sale

KNOWN AROUND the world for his blond quiff and daring adventures, Belgian comic book hero Tintin is setting the art world astir with an original illustration that could set a new record at auction.

The 1942 black-and-white ink drawing by creator Herge for the cover of the third volume in the series, "Tintin in America", is set to go on sale in Paris next month.

The illustration, which shows a Native American chief pointing an accusatory

finger at the tied-up Tintin, has been given an estimate of between 2.2 million to 3.2 million euros (\$2.4-3.5 million) by auction firm Artcurial.

That top figure would see it match an original illustration for the 1936 cover of the Tintin adventure "Blue Lotus" — which became the most expensive comic book art when it sold in 2021.

But there are hopes that the upcoming sale for the cover of one of the most popular Tintin books could go higher and



beat that record.

"We are talking about drawings that belong to the history of art," said Vinciane de Traux, Artcurial's director for Belgium.

"Herge is, along with (surrealist painter Rene) Magritte, the most important figure in Belgian art."

MORE IMPRESSIVE

The illustration — put up for sale by an

unidentified Belgian collector — is the centrepiece of the February 10 auction in Paris.

De Traux said it was a "larger, more impressive composition" than the record-breaking Blue Lotus work, and was a perfect example of the style used by Herge, whose real name was Georges Remi.

The picture has been displayed at

exhibitions in Paris in 2009 and Lausanne in Switzerland in 2010.

"It is totally documented and authenticated," de Traux said.

Tintin's image is closely guarded intellectual property.

The sale of the Blue Lotus illustration originally drew ire from Nick Rodwell, the British husband of Herge's second wife Fanny Vlamynck, who holds the rights to the Tintin works.

The famous picture of the black dragon on a red background was sold by members of the Casterman publishing family, who said their father Jean-Paul had been given it by Herge as a present when he was seven.

The future head of the publishing house reportedly kept the illustration folded up in a drawer for decades.

That was disputed by Rodwell, who criticised the Castermans for not returning the work and said it rightfully belonged in the Herge museum in Belgium.

But relations were eventually smoothed.

"The rights-holders of Herge's works were pleased with the outcome of the sale," de Traux said.

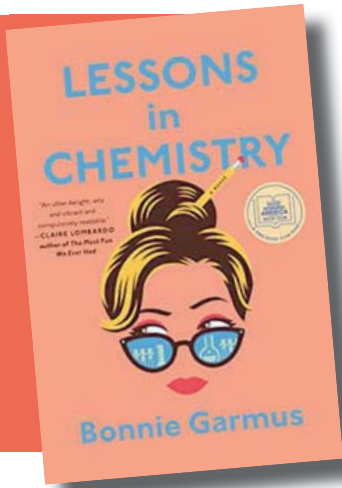
"Everyone is happy that the market is supporting the value of Tintin." — **AFP**

READ

LESSONS IN CHEMISTRY

BY BONNIE GARMUS

A scientist and single mother living in California in the 1960s becomes a star on a TV cooking show.



FASHION TRENDS

A model presents a creation of Giorgio Armani during the Autumn-Winter 2023-2024 Men's fashion show as part of the Milan Fashion Week. — **AFP**



TRIBUTE

In this file photo taken on May 17, 1972, Gina Lollobrigida arrives with four dalmatian dogs at Hotel Carlton before presenting her film "King, Queen, Knave" during the 25th Cannes International Film Festival. Gina Lollobrigida died at 95 on January 16, 2023, according to French Culture Minister. — **AFP**





ROHM's fitting tribute to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

By Georgina Benison

On Sunday and Monday evenings this week the Royal Opera House Muscat presented a fine musical tribute 'On the occasion of the third anniversary of His Majesty, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's accession to the throne', to full houses of fortunate invitees. Guests were attired impressively in traditional Omani dress or colourful costumes, and enjoyed refreshments in the grand lobby as they mingled amongst fellow concert goers, full of anticipation.

The varied programme of uplifting, festive pieces was presented by the Royal Oman Symphony Orchestra under its resident conductor Hamdan Al Shaely, the Omani Opera Choir Group, and the Camerata Musicale Di Parma Choir with a very special guest – Maestro Plácido Domingo.

The programme centred on an Italian Classical section flanked by Omani contemporary works. The audience was delighted with the Overture to Rossini's ever popular, 'La Gazza Ladra' or 'The Thieving Magpie' known for its use of snare drums which give it a ceremonial flavour. Under the capable baton of Maestro Domingo, the military-style opening was utterly appropriate for the Royal occasion. Although the wind players found some tricky intonation challenges early on, the

ensemble gradually warmed up to reach a fine, robust conclusion.

It was followed by Beethoven's celebrated, 'Ode to Joy', performed superbly by the combined guest and home choirs. Opening in the lower strings with the famous theme, the piece gradually built up to a brilliant, resounding and well received 'tutti' climax.

Verdi's short chorus, 'Va, Pensiero' saw Domingo draw suspense and warmth from the choirs and strings, followed by a stunning performance of the 'Triumphal March' from 'Aida'. The trumpets' and choir's clear articulation, at home in the Italian language, and brilliant ensemble playing was magnificent to the end - fitting for His Majesty's anniversary celebration.



The concert opened with Shaely's own Nationalistic composition, 'A Renewed Renaissance Symphonic Suite'. The percussive, 'Sultan's March' was followed by a more lyrical, 'Symphonic Poem' and concluded with a rousing, 'Land of Joy and Peace'.

Egyptian Composer, Omar Khairat's Cavatina-like, 'El Da'eya' for violin and orchestra was performed with breathtaking pathos. ROSO's first violinist, Saif al Kaabi, played the opening solo section superbly, followed by a proud Finale with the Omani Opera Choir Group in splendid

added percussion in an exciting Fiesta Extravaganza!

Elenany's finale Nasheed, 'Omanis' opened in filmic style, then Arabesque with the inclusion of a traditional folk music sextet and chorus. The 'Omani and Proud' conclusion featured a qanoun cadenza and a reappearance of world renowned operatic tenor Plácido Domingo, bravely singing the solo verse in Arabic!

Lasting just an hour, this wonderful pairing provided a joyful, celebratory conclusion to a memorable gift of performance by the Royal Opera House of Musical Arts.

DISCOVERIES

Scientists unearth megaraptors, feathered dinosaur fossils in Chile's Patagonia



SCIENTISTS IN CHILE'S Patagonia region are unearthing the southernmost dinosaur fossils recorded outside Antarctica, including remains of megaraptors that would have dominated the area's food chain before their mass extinction.

Fossils of megaraptors, a carnivorous dinosaur that inhabited parts of South America during the Cretaceous period some 70 million years ago, were found in sizes up to 10 metres long, according to the Journal of South American Earth Sciences.

"We were missing a piece," Marcelo Leppe, director of the Chilean Antarctic Institute (INACH), said. "We knew where there were large mammals, there would also be large carnivores, but we hadn't found them yet."

The remains, recovered from Chile's far



south Rio de las Chinas Valley in the Magallanes Basin between 2016 and 2020, also include some unusual remains of unenlagia, velociraptor-like dinosaurs which likely lived covered in feathers.

The specimens, according to University of Chile researcher Jared Amudeo, had some characteristics not present in Argentine or Brazilian counterparts.

"It could be a new species, which is very likely, or belong to another family of dinosaurs that are closely related," he said, adding more conclusive evidence is needed.

The studies also shed more light on the conditions of the meteorite impact on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula that may have triggered the dinosaurs' extinction some 65 million years ago.

INACH's Leppe pointed to a sharp drop in temperatures over present-day Patagonia and waves of intense cold lasting up to several thousand years, in contrast to the extremely warm climate that prevailed for much of the Cretaceous period.

"The enormous variation we are seeing, the biological diversity, was also responding to very powerful environmental stimuli," Leppe said.

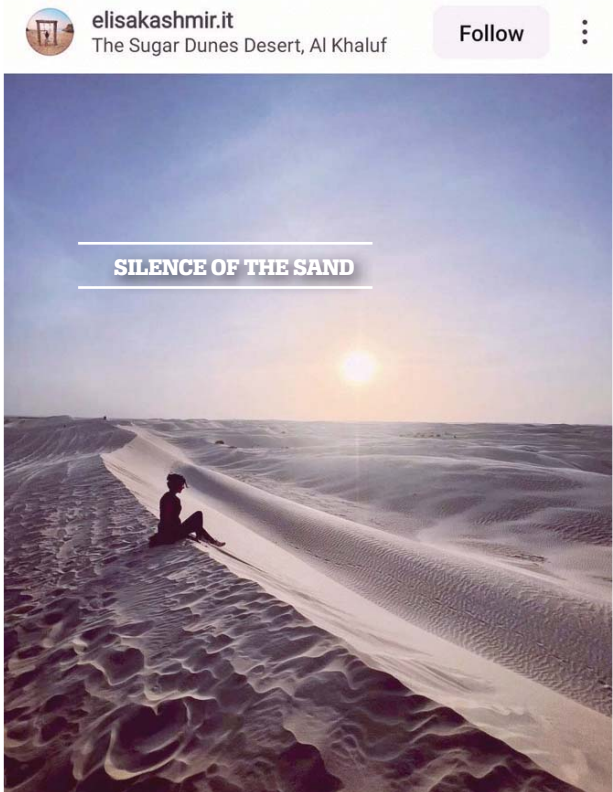
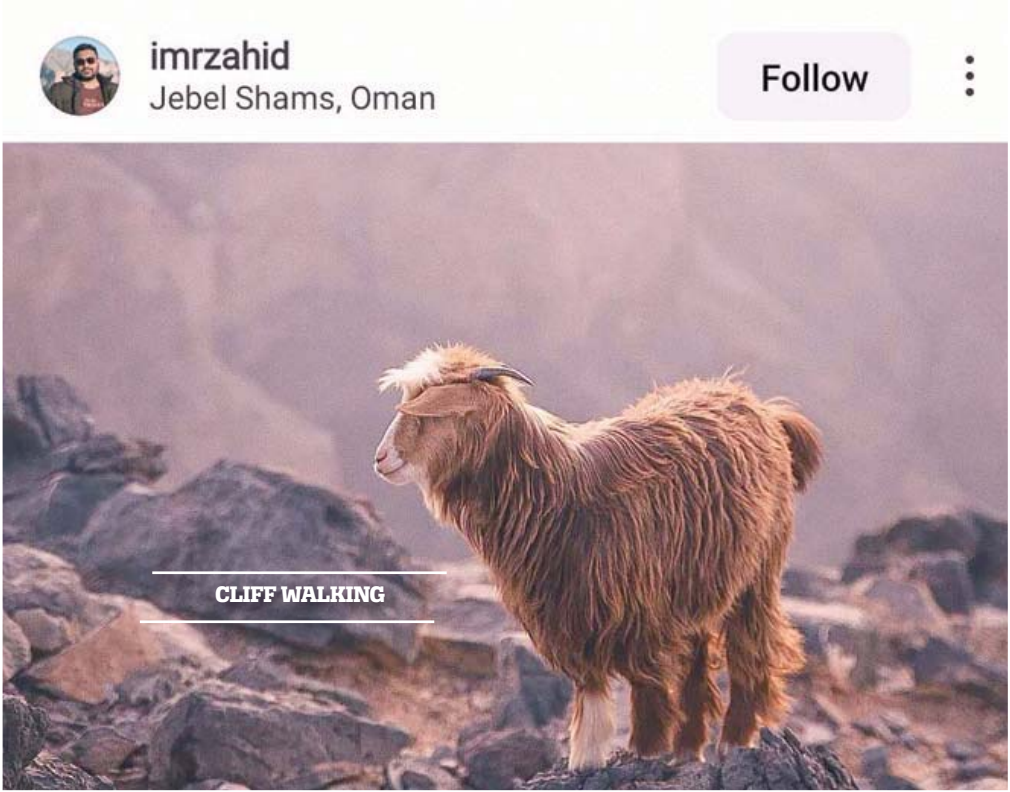
"This world was already in crisis before (the meteorite) and this is evidenced in the rocks of the Rio de las Chinas Valley," he said. — **Reuters**





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AROUND THE WORLD

THAT'S LIFE!

Army of pest-munching ducks keep South African vineyard blooming



FLOCKS OF WHITE, black and brown ducks hunt for snails and bugs as they patrol the grapevines at a vineyard in South Africa's winemaking town of Stellenbosch, helping the owners steer clear of pesticides and synthetic fertilisers.

Around 500 Indian runner ducks work as a natural pest control at the Vergenoegd L w Wine Estate, but also entertain wine-quaffing tourists.

"We call them the soldiers of the vineyards," the managing director of the estate, Corius Visser, said.

Ducks are at the heart of the winery's regenerative agriculture practices, and specifically Indian runner ducks, which have long legs and



an upright posture, meaning they are able to reach for snails between the leaves.

Nutrient-rich manure from the ducks and other animals ensure the vineyard runs as sustainably as possible.

Following their leader, the ducks march in convoy through the vines.

"It's amazing how they behave themselves, walk in a row, and it's like they're in the army," said Merle Holdsworth, a tourist.

The ducks follow a daily routine: In the morning, they go to the vineyards to prevent crop damage, and in the evening they return to their paddocks to peck at pellets of nutritious bird food.

Worker Yodell Scholtz has been rearing the ducks for the past two years.

"It's almost like raising your own children, so I enjoy it a lot," Scholtz said. — Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT

Blanchett slams 'patriarchal' awards shows after accepting best actress prize



CATE BLANCHETT criticised the "patriarchal pyramid" of Hollywood awards shows as she accepted a best actress gong from the Critics Choice Association in Los Angeles on Sunday.

The Australian actor and Oscars frontrunner, whose performance as an ambitious, morally dubious conductor in classical music drama "TAR" is sweeping awards, told a packed ballroom that she wished the whole "structure" of awards shows could be changed.

"It's like, what is this patriarchal pyramid where someone stands up here?" she said, collecting her prize from North America's largest critics organisation.

"Why don't we just say there's a whole raft of female performances that are in concert and in dialogue with one another, and stop the televised horse race of it all?"

"Because can I tell you, every single woman — whether it's television, film, advertising, tampon commercials, whatever — you're all out there doing amazing work that is inspiring me continually.

"So thank you. I share this with you all."

Blanchett has previously accepted two Oscars for her

work in "Blue Jasmine" and "The Aviator."

She won a Golden Globe for her performance as a fictional lesbian conductor in "TAR" last week, but did not attend that ceremony.

Several other awards shows, including the Film Independent Spirit Awards, the MTV Movie and TV Awards, and music's Grammy Awards, have switched to gender-neutral acting prizes.

The Critics Choice Awards, like the Oscars and most other Hollywood shows, still divides its acting prizes between male and female categories.

- 'IN THE WILDERNESS' -

Blanchett's comments came moments after Brendan Fraser gave a highly emotional, choking speech in which he thanked voters for his best actor prize for "The Whale."

Fraser, a major Hollywood star in the late 1990s and early 2000s with hits such as The Mummy, had endured a long fallow period before his performance as a morbidly obese teacher in his new drama drew widespread acclaim.

"I was in the wilderness. And I probably should have left a trail of breadcrumbs. But you found me," Fraser

told director Darren Aronofsky.

"If you — like a guy like Charlie who I played in this movie — in any way struggle with obesity, or you just feel like you're in a dark sea, I want you to know that if you too can have the strength to just get to your feet and go to the light, good things will happen," Fraser said to a standing ovation.

The Critics Choice Awards are one of a raft of major award shows in the build up to the Oscars, which take place this year on March 12.

Surreal sci-fi "Everything Everywhere All at Once" won best picture at Sunday's high-profile critics awards, boosting its hopes for the top Academy Award prize.

The film finished the night with the most film wins on five, including best director for Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, best original screenplay, best editing, and best supporting actor for Oscar favourite Ke Huy Quan.

Among the night's television prizes, the sixth and last season of "Breaking Bad" spinoff "Better Call Saul" finally claimed its first best drama series win, as well as best actor for Bob Odenkirk and best supporting actor for Giancarlo Esposito. — AFP

CULTURE

Bulgarians ward off evil spirits in ancient winter festival



REVELLERS DRESSED in red, some wearing huge masks and belts strung with large copper bells, dance around a fire on the main square of a Bulgarian village to drive away evil spirits and bring in good health and crops for the New Year.

The festival, held every January in the village of Kosharevo, is known as "Surva" and is a mixture of Christian and pagan rituals that can be traced back to Thracian times.

Some of the dancers, known as Survakars, or kukers (mummers), wear hand-made wooden masks decorated with feathers, which can be up to two metres high. The loud clanging of the bells on their belts is believed to ward off evil and diseases.

During the two-day festival, the village, 50 km west of the capital Sofia, is brimming with life as extended families gather to greet the Survakars and offer them traditional dishes.

Georgi Ivanov, 29, has been participating in the celebrations since he was five years old. Determined to pass the tradition on, he makes masks and outfits not only for himself, but for his young children too.

"There is nothing more exciting than Surva. Nothing, neither birthdays, nor Christmas, nor the New Year. Surva is our time, the time when we become better," Ivanov said.

"One-two weeks before it I feel as if I am transforming into someone else, as if some other energy flows in my veins. The whole village starts to shine," he said. — Reuters



art & life

Local Scene

f t i y p v @omanobserver

WEDNESDAY | JANUARY 18 | 2023

Capturing the essence of Oman

By Lakshmi Kothaneth

Oman in Photography, a conference looking at a scenographic experience through the lens of Omani and French photographers, looked at photography as tool of art.

The conference was organized by the French Embassy in the Sultanate of Oman, Museum of Fine Arts Lyon and National Museum of Oman as part of the ongoing cross-exhibition, 'Fragrant Journeys' being held at Bayt Greiza until May 7, 2023.

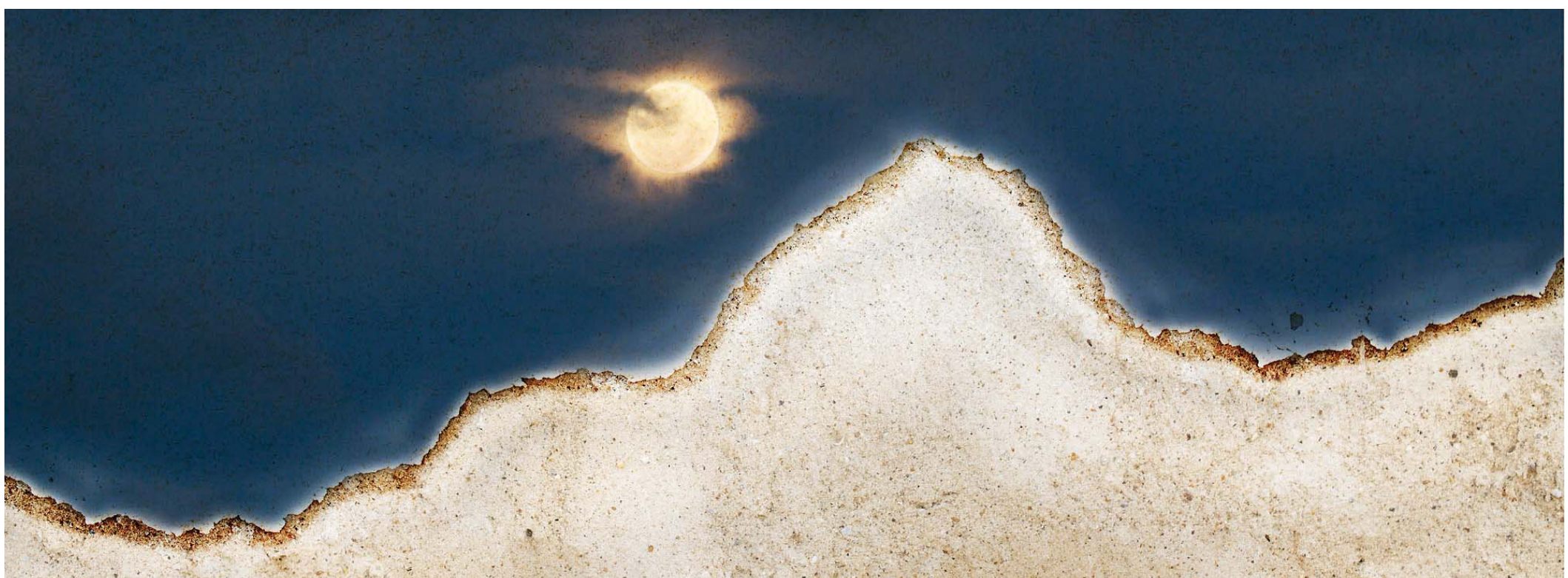
The French photographer, Ferrante Ferranti is currently on a mission in Oman for the French Embassy to shoot Omani landscapes and archaeological sites in order to contextualise the cradle of the Omani artefacts in the space dedicated to the exhibition in Lyon starting in May 2023 highlighting the stenography connections between multiple forms of art and questioning how modern photography can be implemented in an exhibition dedicated to antiquity.

Ferranti's photographic

project will be on display at the Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon in France starting May 2023 and later at the National Museum of Oman in 2024.

He gave glimpses of Oman that would go along with Museum display of Omani artefacts, which would be launched by the National Museum at the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon.

He has already travelled to Qalhat, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Bahla, Al Hamra and Nizwa and will continue his journey. He is working with Dr Genevieve Galliano, Chief Curator at the



Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon.

"Qalhat was one of the main ports and proving that was the finding of Chinese ceramics," Ferranti pointed out.

The photographer shared his insights about capturing the essence of Oman and its artistic and technical portrayal in Photography.

Ferranti, a travelling photographer, has worked in illustrating texts by famous writers such as Dominique Fernandez and Andrea Makine. He has conducted several photography workshops in France and abroad.

At Qalhat he was recollecting the text of Marco Polo who had described Qalhat in his writing.

His photography of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar also looks at structure,

lifestyle and people.

He said ruins make us ask, 'Why?'

"Why did people abandon the instrument of life? What made them move away? Gardens are equally important," he explained.

Showing a photograph of an oasis he explained, "Here we can see how nature could find its own place in the rocks."

He said landscapes of Al Hamra helped in understanding elevations through the strong houses.

"I am interested in living in darkness and small windows and how much it would have helped in letting the light in," he described while looking at old houses of the interior of Oman. In the current session he has also visited Bahla and said he was amazed at

Jabreen Castle.

"Everything need not be new. It is nice to see the renovations. Old forts are so impressive and Nizwa fort was remarkable. It also adds to the geographic context," he noted.

Ferranti culminated the photos of four days with the image of sunset in the dunes enjoying solitude. He will continue to travel for few more days to wrap up his mission in Oman.

During the conference the Omani photographer, Reem al Shaikh, specialising in abstract fine arts, shared the successive steps of her path, the drive behind her work that led her to the photographer she is today, and how her identity built her art and how it reflects her interest from figuration to abstraction.

For their part, photographers Mahmoud al Zadjali and Israa al Balushi represented by the Stal Gallery in Muscat talked about their experience of being young photographers in the Sultanate of Oman, and their missions towards youth. They also presented the objectives of the professional photographers in Oman and their role to represent the Sultanate of Oman in an international dimension.

The conference was accompanied by a mini-exhibition of eight artworks selected by the artists for an inclusive experience of the audience.

The conference helped the public to understand the scope of the art of photography in the region, its challenges, needs and prospects. Building bridges

between French and Omani photographers works, reputed and emerging, the conference raised the questions of identity, memory and legacy.

The 'Fragrant Journeys' exhibition presents 23 artefacts from the Museum of Fine Arts in Lyon, and highlights the frankincense and incense routes during the most prominent eras dating back to the Pharaonic era all the way to the avant-garde art. Those include a masterpiece of glazed pottery by the international artist Pablo Picasso, which is the first time a work by this international artist is displayed in Oman.

The conference was sponsored by Amouage, Givaudan, Veolia, Khimji Ramdas, JCDecaux, Lalique France and Oman Air.