

P12

AL NAHDA,
AL RUSTAQ PLAY
OUT GOALLESS
DRAW



P13

\$230 BN REQUIRED
TO UNLOCK
HYDROGEN EXPORT
ECONOMY IN OMAN



P20

A CULTURAL
PERFORMANCE
THAT BRINGS JOY TO
OMANI SAILORS



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, on the Founding Day anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to King Salman. His Majesty also prayed to Allah the Almighty for the return of this and similar occasions as the people of Saudi Arabia achieve aspirations of further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM GREETINGS TO SAINT LUCIA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Cyril Errol Charles Governor-General of Saint Lucia on his country's Independence Anniversary. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes to the Governor-General and the people of his country further progress and prosperity. — ONA

HM MESSAGE TO NETHERLANDS KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to King Willem-Alexander of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The message deals with bilateral relations and means of promoting them. It was handed over by Shaikh Dr Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to the Netherlands, when he was received in The Hague on Tuesday by Paul Huijts, Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry of the Netherlands.

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INSIDE



TUNISIA'S EX-SPEAKER
IN COURT AGAIN

P6



FINANCING GLOBAL
SURVIVAL

P9

Oman and Slovakia agree to boost bilateral cooperation



HH Sayyid Fahd receives Stefan Holly in Muscat on Tuesday.
PHOTO BY MOHAMED AL RASHDI

MUSCAT: As per the Royal directives, HH Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Tuesday received Stefan Holly, Deputy Prime Minister for Legislation and Strategic Planning in the Slovak Republic.

At the outset of the meeting, the guest conveyed greetings and best wishes of the Slovak leadership to the leadership in the Sultanate of Oman, wishing the Omani people further progress. He expressed his country's interest in promoting relations with the Sultanate of Oman in various spheres.

After welcoming the guest and

his accompanying delegation, HH Sayyid Fahd reviewed the existing relations between the two countries.

He affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman has prepared all means to support its relations with friendly countries around the world.

Oman, said HH Sayyid Fahd, has also furnished the appropriate milieu for investments, especially in economic diversification sectors such as industry, trade, tourism and other fields, while offering more investment opportunities for business people.

The meeting reviewed the current issues and developments at the regional and international arenas, as well as the efforts being exerted to maintain security and stability.

On his turn, the Slovak official expressed his pride and that of his accompanying delegation on this visit. He underscored his country's appreciation to the progress achieved by Oman, as well as its positive contributions in promoting understanding and consolidating ties of friendship with all countries.

He said that his meetings with the Omani officials come within the context of boosting cooperation between the two countries.

The meeting was attended by Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy. — ONA

2.9 million tourists visited Oman in 2022

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@afrahbalushia

The numbers issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) indicate a noticeable increase in visitors to the Sultanate of Oman in 2022.

According to NCSI, in 2022, 2.9 million visited Oman, an increase of 348 per cent compared to 2021.

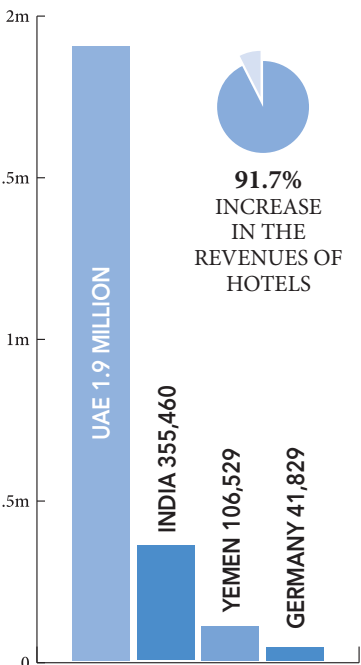
Among the nationalities, the UAE topped with 1.9 million visitors, followed by India (355,460), Yemen (106,529) and Germany (41,829).

The monthly statistical bulletin of tourism indicators issued by NCSI revealed a significant increase in the revenues of hotels with a rating of (3-5) stars by 91.7 per cent until the end of November 2022, to reach RO 161.26 million.

OCCUPANCY RATE

The bulletin indicated that the total number of guests in hotels with a rating of (3-5) stars in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 33.9 per cent to reach about 1.45 million guests by the end

According to NCSI, in 2022
2.9 million visited Oman



of November 2022, compared to 1.08 million guests in the same period in 2021, while the occupancy rate recorded a growth of 18.2 per cent.

It is well known that Oman is ranked seventh in the world as one of the most important tourist destinations in 2022, as per experts' evaluation in terms of destinations, tourist places and adventures that attract visitors, according to the classification of the Australian 'Lonely Planet' website.

SIGNIFICANT RISE

ForwardKeys, an international company based in Spain, which is considered one of the world's leading companies in the field of travel data and analytics, has issued the latest data on airline ticket reservations, especially during the months of November and December 2022.

The data shows that the Sultanate of Oman is recording a significant increase in performance compared to many tourist destinations in the region, as it witnessed an increase of more than 93 per cent from the beginning of September until the end of 2022, compared to the same period the year before in the number of visitors from global markets, especially from European countries and Middle East countries, in addition to an increase of more than 156 per cent in the number of visitors from regional markets.

Putin suspends US nuclear treaty

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday suspended Moscow's participation in a nuclear arms treaty with Washington and accused the West of escalating the conflict in Ukraine, ahead of a key speech by US President Joe Biden.

In his scathing state of the nation address ahead of the first anniversary of the campaign in Ukraine, Putin also vowed that Russia would keep fighting in Ukraine and "sys-



President Vladimir Putin

tematically" achieve its aims. The Russian leader accused Western powers of wanting "to be done with us once and for all", but said increasingly stringent international sanctions on Russia "will not succeed".

He said Moscow would no longer take part in the New START treaty for nuclear disarmament but would not pull out of the agreement altogether. SEE P7



Stone for RO 18.2m Central Public Health Laboratory

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Tuesday celebrated laying of the foundation stone for a world-class Central Public Health Laboratory in the Wilayat of Al Seeb, Governorate of Muscat. The project cost stands at RO 18.2 million and will be built on an area of 18,155 sq metres.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Hilal bin Ali al Sabti, Minister of Health, said that the Central Public Health Laboratory is one of the vital national security pillars, accorded Royal attention by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. He said that the lab aims to develop and promote the health sector in line with the requirements of the times and to foster local sufficiency for lab tests.

The minister added that the world-class central public health laboratory would be a reference and diagnostic laboratory for conducting necessary investigations to support the surveillance and

epidemiological investigation programmes locally and regionally.

Further, the minister pointed out that the new lab will perform diagnosis and investigations using latest technologies and strictly complying with quality and biosafety standards. The lab, he added, will provide training and continuous education for technicians at the national and regional levels.

The project aims to promote the capacity of the current public health laboratories by establishing a new and modern facility to increase the lab's capabilities to collect, register, store and process samples according to the latest international standards.

He said that the lab will also support the increasing demand by public health and academic requirements to strengthen interaction with scientists, clients, lab students and administrators around the world.

TURN TO P2



ICAO Secretary-General lauds Oman’s airports and ports

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmood al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, on Tuesday received Juan Carlos Salazar, Secretary-General of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The ICAO Secretary-General and his accompanying delegation, currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman to attend the 2nd Civil Aviation Legal Advisers Forum (CALAF/2) held in Muscat during February 21 – 23.

After welcoming the guest and his accompanying delegation, HH Sayyid Fahd affirmed that establishing latest airports considered among the major achievements made by the Sultanate of Oman as they constitute a linking point and openness to the world.

He pointed out that the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has placed the project on expansion of airspace among the top priority projects to be implemented due to its positive returns. CAA in coordination with the departments concerned in the country has begun taking approvals as this project is subject to the ICAO approval on airspace sovereignty according to the Chicago Convention

HH Sayyid Fahd underscored the importance of Oman’s host of the 2nd Civil Aviation Legal Advisers Forum (CALAF/2) to explore the best ways of supporting air transport. He also commended the ICAO role in ensuring security and safety of passengers and global aviation traffic.

On his turn, the ICAO Secretary-General expressed his appreciation and that of his accompanying delegation of Oman’s comprehensive renaissance covering many fields. They also lauded Oman’s international airports and ports established as per the latest technologies and global standards. The ICAO Secretary-General pointed out that the host and good preparation of the forum would



HH Sayyid Fahd received Juan Carlos Salazar, Secretary-General of the ICAO, on Tuesday .



contribute in reaching many positive outcomes that serve the international air transport traffic.

The meeting was attended by Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, CAA Chairman and Mohammed bin Mansoor al Ruqaishi, Oman’s Permanent Representative to the ICAO.

Meanwhile, Gen Sultan Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, also received Juan Carlos, ICAO, in his office.

The guest expressed his thanks for the Sultanate of Oman’s hosting

of the 2nd edition of the Civil Aviation Legal Advisers Forum (CALAF/2). He also expressed his appreciation for Oman’s role in boosting cooperation in fields of international civil aviation.

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

Dr Mohammed bin Nasser al Za’abi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence, also received Juan Carlos, Secretary-General of the ICAO.

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

The meeting was attended

by Eng Nayef bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority.

CAA, ICAO INK AGREEMENT

Meanwhile, the Civil Aviation Authority inked a management services agreement with the International Civil Aviation Organization, in support of the Sultanate of Oman’s efforts to ensure compliance with the highest safety standards in the field of civil aviation.

The agreement was signed by Eng Nayef Ali al Abri, CAA Chairman and Juan Carlos, ICAO Secretary-General.

The Sultanate of Oman shall, in accordance with the agreement, seek the assistance of qualified international experts from the International Civil Aviation Organization. The agreement additionally covers staff training to assist all efforts pertaining to civil aviation safety in the Sultanate of Oman.

The significance of signing this agreement stems from the CAA’s attempts to comply with the IACO’s standards and attain the requisite compliance rates.

— ONA

HM sends written message to King of Netherlands



THE HAGUE: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to King Willem-Alexander of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

The message deals with bilateral relations and means of promoting them.

It was handed over by Shaikh Dr Abdullah bin Salim al Harthy, the Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to the Netherlands when he was received in The Hague on Tuesday by Paul Huijts, Secretary-General of the Foreign Ministry of the Netherlands. — ONA

Oman Air strengthens safety standards

MUSCAT: Continuing to set benchmarks for safety and quality, Oman Air has achieved its eighth International Air Transport Association (IATA) Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) certification.

The airline was awarded the renewal for the global accreditation after a successful audit on its operational management and control systems.

Capt Nasser bin Ahmed al Salmi, Oman Air’s Chief Operating Officer, said, “The new certification has once again demonstrated the airline’s adherence to the world’s top aviation safety standards. Safety is a continuous journey and our consistent success in the IOSA audits is a testament to our efforts to remain on track. We continue to foster a robust safety culture and uphold the highest possible

standards in all our operations.”

On his turn, Capt Salim bin Ali al Rashdi, Vice-President Quality Assurance Operations, commented, “At Oman Air, safety and security are always our top priority. We are proud of this latest accomplishment and extend our gratitude to all our employees on their steadfast commitment to the security and safety of our passengers.”

Having established itself as an industry leader in aviation safety, Oman Air maintains a strong safety and security performance track record. In 2018, the airline was named one of the top five most secure and airlines in the world and has continued to uphold its reputation by attaining excellent levels of compliance every year.

— ONA

Stone laid for RO 18.2m Central Public Health Laboratory



From PAGE1
In addition, the minister added that the lab seeks to improve efficiency.

He said that the Central Public Health Laboratory will perform epidemiological surveillance for any health development and conduct surveys in coordination with the concerned authorities. It will also carry out necessary awareness among the nationals and expatriates in cooperation with other authorities in the Sultanate of Oman in areas of public health.

The lab will coordinate with educational institutions in the country and/or abroad in specialised research work to promote health and disease prevention. It will also be prepared to respond quickly to any public health emergency, the minister added.

Dr Hanan bint Salim al Kindi, Director of the Public Health Labs Department in the Ministry of

Health, told Oman News Agency (ONA) that the implementation of the project will take nearly 25 months. She added that the Central Public Health Laboratory is expected to be ready by the first half of 2025.

Dr Ali bin Abdulhussein al Lawati, Adviser to the Minister of Health for Engineering Affairs, said that the main building consists of three floors including biochemistry and toxicology, foodborne disease outbreaks investigation, bacteriological laboratory (antimicrobial resistance reference lab, molecular bacteriology reference lab), quality and risk management (regional external quality assurance scheme provider), public health laboratory affairs, virological laboratory (regional polio laboratory, regional measles and rubella laboratory, national influenza centre, regional Sars-CoV-2 laboratory), national TB laboratory and others. — ONA

Cooperation pact inked to develop Oman-UAE Rail Network

STAFF REPORTER
ABU DHABI, FEB 21

Oman and Etihad Rail Company, the developer and operator of the UAE-Oman Rail Network, signed a cooperation agreement with Mubadala Investment Company, a sovereign investor in Abu Dhabi, to support the development of the 303km railway network, which connects the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE, with an overall investment value of \$3 billion.

The partnership comes in line with the two parties’ efforts to explore investment opportunities in the railway sector and strengthen cooperation to support the Oman and Etihad Rail Company in accelerating the planning and execution process of the UAE-Oman Rail Network.

The signing ceremony was attended by Suhail Mohammed Faraj al Mazrouei, UAE Minister of Energy and Infrastructure,



Chairman of Oman and Etihad Rail Company, along with members of the Board of Directors of Oman and Etihad Rail. The agreement was signed by Ahmed al Musawa al Hashemi, CEO of the Oman and Etihad Rail Company, and Dr Bakheet Saeed al Katheeri, Executive Director of the UAE Industries Unit at

Mubadala’s UAE Investments platform.

Suhail al Mazrouei said: “The establishment of Oman-Etihad Rail network is an extension of the strategic relations and strong historical ties between the UAE and the Sultanate of Oman, and the foundation of the strong partnership between Etihad Rail

and Oman Rail. The joint venture will transform the infrastructure, transport, and logistics sectors, and enhance commercial movement and social cohesion, by linking economic, industrial, commercial, and residential centres through the railway network.”

“The signing of the cooperation agreement between Oman and the Etihad Rail company and Mubadala reflects the commitment of both parties to building strategic partnerships and strengthening cooperation with leading entities to promote investment, economic growth, and comprehensive development in both countries. The agreement will contribute to enhancing and developing the national economy in the UAE and the Sultanate by improving supply chain efficiency, opening new cross-border trade opportunities, and providing safe and sustainable means of transportation via rail for passengers and goods,” he added.



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■ SHURA OFFICE DISCUSSES BRIEFING REQUESTS



The Majlis Ash'shura Office on Tuesday discussed important briefing requests during its meeting held under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura. The main topics of discussion included cancer patients who have used tobacco or its products and the future of coconut harvest in the Governorate of Dhofar. The briefing requests are to be directed to the Minister of Health and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, respectively.

Archaeological sites open doors to visitors as part of tourism push



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) is set to open the visiting centre for Bisya and Salut archaeological sites in the Wilayat of Bahla in a bid to welcome visitors to Oman's archaeological landmarks.

The centre will be launched on Thursday, coinciding with Al Dakhiliyah Festival 2023, and will be inaugurated by the Minister of Heritage and Tourism, Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi.

The centre's gallery is divided into three main halls, with the first showcasing the Bronze Age, the second highlighting the Iron Age

and the Islamic Period, and the third focusing on world heritage. The halls feature 21 boxes of antiques, containing a total of 344 pieces, as well as 28 portraits.

To activate the local community's role in safeguarding Oman's heritage, the newly launched centre has set aside an annual programme.

Haitham al Ghassani, Director-General of Tourism Promotion, stated that the ministry is dedicated to promoting Oman's tourism potential by working closely with the governorates to enhance visitor experiences,

increase hotel occupancy rates and boost economic revenues.

The Salut archaeological site is a significant location, hosting an ancient fortified collection of ruins and fortifications dating back more than 3,000 years. The site reflects Oman's broad network with the world's old civilisations, including Mesopotamia, Persian civilisation, Rome and the Indus Valley. With the launch of the Visiting Centre for Bisya and Salut archaeological sites, the ministry hopes to attract more visitors and promote Oman's cultural and historic legacy.

Oman and Slovakia explore investment diversification, expertise exchange

MUSCAT: Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy received in his office here on Tuesday Stefan Holly, Deputy Prime Minister for Legislation and Strategic Planning in the Slovak Republic.

The meeting reviewed areas of economic cooperation between the two countries and opportunities for exchanging expertise.

It also touched on investment diversification in various fields, including those related to strategic planning for infrastructure, reconstruction, digital transformation and industrialisation by employing the latest systems, technical structures and artificial intelligence.

The meeting also dealt with the



Slovak experience in developing programmes to reduce carbon emissions, promote green industries, stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship and empowering the private sector.

The two sides discussed some regional and international developments of common

interest.

The meeting was attended by Ambassador Yousef bin Issa al Raisi, Head of the East Europe Department, Lenka Mihalikova, non-resident Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to the Sultanate of Oman and some officials from both sides. — ONA

Conference promotes value engineering

MUSCAT: Deliberations of the 4th International Conference on Quality and Value Engineering began here on Tuesday under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat.

The two-day event themed "Value Engineering in the Age of Uncertainty" is organised by the Secretariat-General of the Tender Board, in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour and some private sector's institutions.

The event aims at disseminating awareness on the importance of value engineering, as well as improving quality and raising efficiency through the use of latest



methods in value engineering.

It also seeks to consolidate the role of value engineering in creativity and innovation, and reviewing local, regional and international experiences in this

field.

A number of speakers, engineers, experts and specialists in the field of value engineering from Oman and abroad are taking part in the conference. — ONA

■ CYBER SECURITY FORUM AIMS TO TACKLE DIGITAL FRAUD



MUSCAT: Deliberations of the 3rd Omani Cyber Security Forum began at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Tuesday. The event is organised by the SQU Communication and Information Research Centre, in partnership with the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. The forum included lectures delivered by experts from the SQU, the ministry, the German University of Technology and Ernst and Young Company. The lectures touched on means of developing and strengthening the cyber security industry using Blockchain technology, insider risks of information security and the cyber security in real life, in addition to digital fraud, social engineering, open source methods and information security. — ONA

Activities lined up for Al Dakhiliyah Festival

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, FEB 21

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Al Dakhiliyah Governorate will launch the governorate-level activities for Al Dakhiliyah Festival 2023 on Thursday.

The festival includes several activities ranging from cultural, heritage, entertainment and adventure, presenting several tourism experiences for the visitors. It will also have seminars and dialogue sessions extending for over two weeks, from February 23 to March 4.

The festival's launch will also coincide with the official opening of the Bisya and Salut archaeological sites in the Wilayat of Bahla.

The festival aims to create attractive tourism activities for the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah, increase tourist attraction and introduce tourist destinations and cultural and heritage sites



involving small and medium enterprises and members of the local community.

It is aimed at boosting the local economy and raising the occupancy rate of hotels.

The festival's activities will take place at tourist sites in several wilayats of the governorate. Local flavours include simulating daily life in castles, making Omani sweets, experiencing Omani

barbecue and making pottery. It aims to make the visitors practice these experiences according to a specific schedule.

The festival will also include folklore performances, horse and



camel shows, paragliding and evening events involving art, music and literature. Youth initiatives exhibition, youth dialogue session, traditional and artisan markets, entertainment games for young

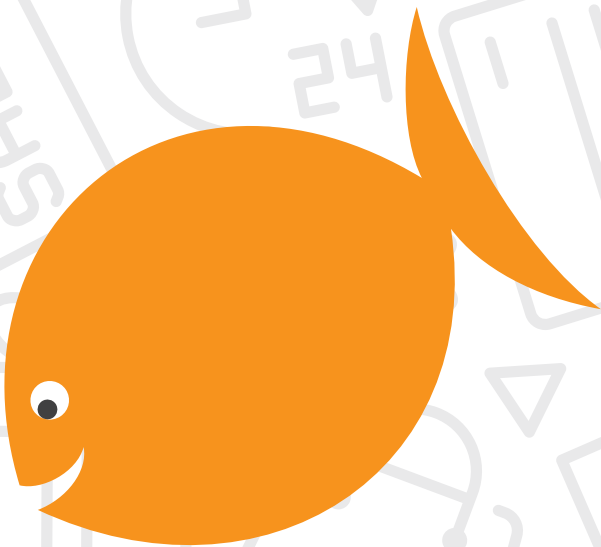
and old, theatre for accompanying events, Omani sweets making, tours, mountain walking, and mountain biking would be other highlights of the festival.

PHOTOS BY SAMI AL HINAI



SMALL BUT SMART

... WITH THE CONSUMER TURNING TO ONLINE SHOPPING, SMALL BUSINESSES HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE CREATIVE AND COMPETE WITH LARGE COMPANIES ...



AHMED AL KAABI

THE rise of e-commerce has brought about significant changes in how businesses operate, particularly for small businesses. The ease of customer access through online platforms has provided small businesses with new opportunities to grow and reach a wider audience. However, they must also be ready to face the challenges and risks of conducting online business. Nevertheless, the rewards can be substantial for small businesses willing to adapt and take advantage of e-commerce.

Nowadays, e-commerce has made a huge change for small businesses. With the consumer turning to online shopping, small businesses have the opportunity with low budgets to be creative and compete with large companies. In addition, online and social media platforms have made it easier

for small businesses to reach customers anywhere in the world and offer their products to a global audience.

INCREASED REACH

The ability to reach a broader customer base has allowed small businesses to increase their sales and profits. Moreover, e-commerce has also made it easier for small businesses to manage their operations, reduce overhead costs, and streamline their supply chain. Automating many business processes has allowed small businesses to operate more efficiently, freeing up time and resources for other business areas.

IMPROVED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

E-commerce has also made it easier for small businesses to provide a better customer experience. For example, online stores often offer more comprehensive product information,

customer reviews, and a wider selection of products than physical retail stores. In addition, customers can shop from comfortable places or their homes.

CHALLENGES AND RISKS

However, with the benefits of e-commerce come some challenges. Small businesses must adapt to the market's changing demands and keep up with the latest technological advancements. They must also be able to protect their customer data and ensure the security of their online transactions.

Despite these challenges, the impact of e-commerce on small businesses has been overwhelmingly positive. It has provided small businesses with new opportunities to reach customers, increase sales, and grow their businesses. As the world continues to embrace e-commerce, small businesses can look forward to a future of increased success and growth.



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5

Designing mine closure from the beginning critical for sustainability, say experts

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

The Sultanate of Oman has been mining since ancient times; now, the sector is part of the national strategy. The history of copper mining dates back to 5,000 years ago.

The mountains of Oman have proven to contain metallic minerals such as gold, copper and chromite in addition to industrial minerals, namely dolomite, gypsum and limestone.

A two-day workshop organised by the Environment Authority Oman has been looking at sustainability in the mining

industry.

The experts, while looking at challenges in the sustainability report in the mining sector, said that corporate-level reporting of mining companies is not meeting the needs of the stakeholders. Yet another drawback they pointed out was too many frameworks, standards, specifications, context and mine site reporting.

According to them, there are many opportunities for further government action and engagement with the mining sector to enhance sustainability and reporting of the sector. They also pointed out that it is time to move away from static

reports only and instead bring about interactive platforms for stakeholder engagement with different communication forums for various stakeholder needs and more real-time reporting of environmental and social impacts.

An appropriate method would be to follow the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 8, 12 and 16. When local resources are used, there is economic development.

A mining company needs to conduct the right activities to make a mine sustainable, safe, stable, non-polluting and healthy for the neighbouring communities with

intergenerational equity so that they do not leave land or water degraded for the next generation.

"In fact, if the company can further add value, then that is a bonus. So it is throughout the life of the mine and designing the closure and making sure you get there," said Dr Corinne Unger, Research Fellow, University of Queensland Business School.

The designing of the closure must be in place from the beginning, pointed out Tania Laurencont, Principal, Fawcett Mine Rehabilitation Services, adding, "The design for the closure has to be thought about when the government or the company

would want to leave the site. So how are they going to leave the site? If it is done properly, it is built into the design."

The stakeholders play a critical role in projects.

"The agreement should also look into what will happen after the mine is gone. There needs to be a genuine engagement with the community so that it accepts what will occur and they agree with the impacts that might result from the mining operations," noted Unger.

Laurencont believes that regulators developing new mines and providing oversight must build the capacity around not only environmental management, but

also rehabilitation and closure from the start.

"Do not just worry about it 20 years down the track when the mine has got five years to go. Do it right up front so the designs, regulatory inputs and oversight are in place from the start. The capacity of knowledge and experience has to be built," suggested Laurencont.

Dr Unger concluded by saying that the advice to any country across the globe would be to understand the impact of the activities that occur to make sure that the activities that are approved and the impact from it are limited and do not leave any negative legacies.

Oman, Iran review mutual military matters and areas of cooperation



MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday Commodore Shahram Irani, Commander of the Navy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) was present at the meeting. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several military matters of mutual interest. They also reviewed various areas of mutual cooperation.

The meeting was attended by Brigadier Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Mantheri, Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning, several senior officers, Ambassador of Iran to Oman and the Military Attaché of Iran's Embassy at Muscat. — ONA

Focus on military curriculum development

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday the preparatory team of the Gulf Academy for Strategic and Security Studies, headed by Rear Admiral Tariq bin Khalfan al Za'abi.

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on matters related to the Gulf Academy for Strategic and Security Studies and means of developing the academy and its curricula. They also discussed several matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by a number of senior officers at the COSAF.

Later, the delegation visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC). The delegation was greeted upon their arrival at the centre by Commodore Adil bin Hamoud al Busaidi, Head of the MSC.

Members of the visiting delegation viewed facilities of the centre. They were also briefed on the roles and tasks carried out by the centre in maintaining the safety of maritime environment.

— ONA

Oman Women Sports Committee participates in Women's World Summit in UAE



ABU DHABI: Sayyida Sana bint Hamad al Busaidi, President of Oman Women Sports Committee and Gender Equality, and Saada bint Salim al Ismaili, Vice-President, participated in the Women's World Summit 2023, which kicked off on Tuesday in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) capital Abu Dhabi, and will continue until Wednesday.

This year's summit bears the title 'The Role of Women Leaders in Building Peace, Social Inclusion and Creating Prosperity' coinciding with the 100th anniversary of women obtaining the right to vote and be elected.

The scientific sessions accompanying the summit aimed to unify the arms of women of different races, religions and cultures in order to face challenges, enhance their contributions with wisdom in building peace and contribute to achieving economic recovery and social integration.

The summit witnessed the participation of a number of prominent global women leaders,

as well as political leaders, entrepreneurs, community workers and prominent cultural, media and scientific figures from more than 100 countries.

The summit included 12 scientific sessions of all the issues and challenges of concern to women in these critical circumstances, in addition to discovering ways to build bridges of peace and achieve integration and prosperity of nations. Theses sessions discussed many topics including, women in education and scientific research, women leaders in the parliamentary and diplomatic field, women in the global technology sector and major trends, women in fine arts and intangible heritage, climate change and gender equality, in addition to the role of women in promoting the circular economy and sustainability, women in media and creative industries, women in thinking and consulting groups in the areas of sustainable development and climate change, women and soft power, and women leaders in the sports field.

56,565 Omanis visited India in 2022



QASIM AL MAASHANI

MUSCAT, FEB 21

The Sultanate of Oman and India are working to significantly expand the scope of cooperation in various fields, according to Amit Narang, Indian Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman.

Speaking to journalists recently

on the sidelines of an Oman-India business forum, Narang said Omanis are eligible to travel to India on an e-visa, the application for which is a "very easy process". It can be obtained within 48 hours by applying online for a fee of RO 16 only and is valid for a full year, he noted.

Around 56,565 Omanis

travelled to India in 2022, he said, citing official statistics.

Commenting on the bilateral relationship, the ambassador said the two countries are prioritising economic and trade ties, with bilateral trade having shown strong growth in recent years.

He explained that the strategic

priorities in Oman Vision 2040 closely align with the well-known strengths of the Indian economy and therefore the two countries can enhance cooperation in many sectors including renewable energy, defence, maritime security, metals and mining, manufacturing, aerospace and logistics.



New quake hits Turkiye and Syria, killing six

ANTAKYA: A 6.4-magnitude earthquake has rocked Turkiye’s southern province of Hatay and northern Syria, killing six people and sparking fresh panic after a massive February 6 tremor left nearly 45,000 dead in both countries.

The AFAD disaster response agency reported the deaths, as well as nearly 300 hospitalisations, while in Syria the White Helmets aid group said at least 150 people were injured in the Aleppo region.

The quake hit the Turkish town of Defne on Monday at 8:04 pm and was strongly felt by teams in the nearby city of Antakya. It was also felt in Lebanon and Cyprus.

Turkiye’s disaster management agency said on Twitter that a 5.8-magnitude quake followed three minutes later, with its epicentre in the Samandag district of Hatay province.

The agency recorded two more tremors with magnitudes of 5.2 around 20 minutes after the first on Monday. “The road moved like waves. The building moved back and forth, the cars moved left to right. It knocked me off my feet,” said Mehmet Irmak, who works at a notary’s office in Antakya.

“Hatay is no longer a safe place. We could hear a lot of buildings collapsing,” said Irmak, who had been sleeping in his car for two



A car drives past collapsed buildings in Antakya, southern Turkiye. – AFP

weeks after the first quake. “We will wait for a new day, but I don’t know what I’m going to do,” he said.

Among the dead were three people who became trapped after returning to their damaged flats to retrieve belongings, said AFAD,

warning people against going back to homes at risk.

On Tuesday, the organisation said it was sending 6,000 extra tents to the region to shelter those in need.

Images from DHA news agency showed a hospital in

Antakya being evacuated, while broadcaster NTV reported that a hospital was evacuated in the city of Iskenderun.

DHA said patients in an intensive care unit were taken by ambulance to field hospitals to continue their treatment.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soyly said rescue workers were trying to find people trapped under rubble.

A journalist reported scenes of panic in Antakya, with the new tremors raising clouds of dust in the devastated city. The

German ministers offer aid, solidarity

GAZIANTEP: Two senior German ministers landed in southern Turkiye on Tuesday to visit one of the areas hit by a devastating earthquake more than two weeks ago, to underscore Berlin’s support for the victims and reconstruction efforts.

Germany, has shipped more than 340 tonnes of aid, including tents, blankets and generators to help the survivors of a quake that killed over 47,000 people in Turkiye and Syria. Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock and Interior Minister Nancy Faeser came “to make it clear to the people that our sympathy is not limited to words and will not diminish even if the catastrophe and its aftermath are pushed away by other headlines in the news”, Baerbock said.

A day before they arrived, another quake had killed six people and injured hundreds on the Turkish-Syrian border. After landing in the city of Gaziantep, the ministers were expected to speak to German aid organisations as well as those affected by the quake, but no talks with Turkish government officials were planned. – Reuters

walls of badly damaged buildings crumbled while several people, apparently injured, called for help.

On a street in Antakya, Ali Mazlum, 18, said: “We were with AFAD who were looking for the bodies of our family when the quake hit. — AFP

Tunisia’s ex-speaker in court on new charges

TUNIS: Tunisia’s former parliamentary speaker Rached Ghannouchi appeared in court on Tuesday on new terror-related charges after being accused of calling police officers “tyrants”, his party said.

Ghannouchi, who leads President Kais Saied’s arch-foes the Ennahdha, had already faced court in late November over allegations his party helped fighters travel to Iraq and Syria.

The latest hearing comes amid a series of arrests of high profile figures that have prompted criticism from rights groups in the North African country and abroad.

The former speaker is also due to be questioned on Thursday after another complaint from a policeman claiming to be in possession of a compromising telephone recording of Ghannouchi, Ennahdha said.

“These charges have been fabricated out of nothing... (and) target the opposition”



The head of Tunisia’s Ennahdha Rached Ghannouchi greets supporters upon arrival to a police station in Tunis in compliance to the summons of an investigating judge. – AFP

without evidence, Ghannouchi said on Tuesday upon arriving at the anti-terrorism court.

He accused the authorities of “instrumentalising justice” and

seeking to “cover up Tunisia’s real problems”.

The leader of Tunisia’s main opposition coalition, the National Salvation Front,

meanwhile denounced the “judicial relentlessness” targeting Ghannouchi.

“It is a short-sighted policy in the face of economic and social failures and the international isolation” of the authorities, Ahmed Nejib Chebbi said outside the court.

“Repression has never stemmed the flow of freedom,” he added. In addition to his previous hearing in November, Ghannouchi had also appeared before a judge earlier that month as part of a case involving alleged money-laundering and “incitement to violence”.

He is still awaiting sentencing in those cases.

Ghannouchi was the speaker of Tunisia’s parliament before Saied dissolved it in July 2021 and went on to seize wide-reaching powers through a series of moves dubbed by opponents as a “coup”.

At least 10 public figures have been arrested since the start of February in the country — the birthplace of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings. — AFP

Sudanese print newspapers decline as readers turn online

KHARTOUM: As an economic crisis deepens and readers grow more attached to their phones, Sudan’s once vibrant newspaper industry is in decline, with publishers shutting down or reducing their print operations, sellers, editors and union officials said.

Newspapers in the East African country have been battered by years of political censorship and economic hardship. Citizens now mainly get their news online, sometimes from online papers, but also through social media, where rumours and disinformation are rife.

“Print journalism is facing existential challenges,” said Mohamed Abdelaziz, Secretary-General of the Sudanese Journalists Syndicate, a union re-established last year.

Abdelaziz said there was a sharp decline both in the number of papers still publishing, and in the quantity they print, which was down by as much as 90 per cent.



A man reads a newspaper near the Al Zikriyat library in Omdurman, Sudan. – Reuters File

As a result, Abdelaziz said, many print journalists have left the industry or been laid off. Sudan has been in political and economic turmoil for years, witnessing a mass uprising and two coups in the past four years.

Sudanese citizens have seen the value of their currency plummet in recent years as costs for fuel and every day goods skyrocketed amid economic reforms that had aimed to re-open the country’s economy to financing and investment. A coup in October 2021 put a stop to new flows, accelerating the decline. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

CAIRO

Egypt unveils renovations of Tahrir Square Museum

Egypt has inaugurated the first phase of renovations on the venerable Egyptian Museum in central Cairo, giving the collection a facelift after many of its objects were relocated to other museums around the country.

The building in Cairo’s Tahrir Square first opened in 1902 and has long ranked as one of the world’s greatest museums, with its vast displays of Pharaonic artefacts that stretch over 3,000 years of history.



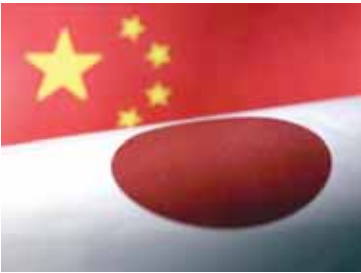
Egypt hopes to grow its tourism industry by 25 per cent to 30 per cent a year, Tourism Minister Ahmed Issa said at the inauguration ceremony.

TOKYO

Japan, China to work towards direct communication line

Japan and China will work towards launching a direct communication line for security from this spring, Japan’s defence ministry said on Tuesday in a statement after talks between senior defence officials from both countries. Japan told China that violations of its airspace by unmanned surveillance balloons were unacceptable, Kyodo news agency reported, citing a Japanese defence ministry source.

Tokyo also urged Beijing to examine the situation and take



preventive steps, the report said. Japan’s Defence Ministry said last week it “strongly suspects” Chinese surveillance balloons had entered Japanese territory at least three times since 2019.

WELLINGTON

Heavy rains forecast for cyclone-hit N Zealand areas

Parts of cyclone-stricken New Zealand could see heavy rains from Thursday as relief and recovery efforts continue and tens of thousands remain without power after Cyclone Gabrielle tore across the country’s North Island last week. The cyclone hit the North Island’s northernmost region on February 12 and tracked down the east coast, inflicting widespread destruction and killing at least 11 people. Prime Minister Chris Hipkins has called Gabrielle New Zealand’s



biggest natural disaster this century. Hard-hit regions across the north east, where 13,000 remain without power and 1,300 are in emergency shelters, are set for heavy rain from Thursday.



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In brief

■ ANTANANARIVO



MADAGASCAR SUSPENDS SCHOOLS DUE TO CYCLONE FREDDY

Madagascar's government suspended schools and transport in the path of tropical cyclone Freddy, which was likely to make landfall in the southeast of the country by Tuesday evening. The cyclone is expected to hit Mananjary district, about 270 km from the capital Antananarivo, with winds of nearly 155 km per hour, Madagascar's meteorological services said. Heavy rains and waves of over 26 feet are expected near the impact zone, the International Federation of Red Cross said on Twitter, issuing a red alert for the area.

All traffic in cyclone Freddy's projected path was suspended overnight from Tuesday to Wednesday, the country's ministry of transport and meteorology said.

■ DAKAR



THREE UN PEACEKEEPERS KILLED IN MALI BLAST

Three United Nations peacekeepers were killed and five were seriously injured on Tuesday when their convoy struck a roadside bomb in central Mali, the UN mission said. "A MINUSMA Force convoy hit an Improvised Explosive Device #IED today," it said in a tweet that gave a preliminary toll. The mission gave no immediate word about the casualties' nationalities.

An impoverished state lying in the heart of West Africa's Sahel, Mali is struggling with an 11-year-old jihadist insurgency that has claimed thousands of lives and forced hundreds of thousands from their homes.

■ BERLIN



LAST GENERATION CLIMATE ACTIVISTS CUT DOWN TREE

Climate activists from the protest group Last Generation cut down a small tree in front of the Chancellery in Berlin. They said they did this to draw attention to the German government's "exacerbation of the climate catastrophe" through the clearing of forests to build "motorways and quarries."

Authorities were at the scene to observe the protest action and take down activists' personal details, said a police spokesman. An investigation has been opened into the action. Last Generation tweeted about the protest: "Business and politics are sawing at the branches on which civilisation is sitting."

Putin issues N-warnings to West over Ukraine

MOSCOW: President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday delivered a warning to the West over Ukraine by suspending a landmark nuclear arms control treaty, announcing that new strategic systems had been put on combat duty, and threatening to resume nuclear tests.

Nearly a year after ordering an attack that has triggered the biggest confrontation with the West in six decades, Putin said Russia would achieve its aims and accused the West of trying to destroy it.

"The elites of the West do not hide their purpose. But they also cannot fail to realise that it is impossible to defeat Russia on the battlefield," he told his country's political and military elite.

Alleging that the United States was turning the war into a global conflict, Putin said Russia was suspending participation in the New START treaty, its last major arms control treaty with Washington.

Signed by then-US president Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev in 2010, the treaty caps the number of strategic nuclear warheads that the countries can deploy.

Due to expire in 2026, it



Russian President Vladimir Putin delivers his annual address to the Federal Assembly in Moscow. – Reuters

allows each country to physically check the other's nuclear arsenal, although tensions over Ukraine had already brought inspections to a halt.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Putin's move "deeply unfortunate and irresponsible". Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said it made the world a more dangerous place, and urged Putin to reconsider.

The Russian leader said, without citing evidence, that some in Washington were considering breaking a moratorium on nuclear testing.

Russia suspends participation in New START nuclear arms treaty as Putin says Russia will resume nuclear tests if US does

"... if the United States conducts tests, then we will. No one should have dangerous illusions that global strategic parity can be destroyed," Putin said.

"A week ago, I signed a decree



Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg speaks during a press conference at the Nato headquarters in Brussels. – AFP

on putting new ground-based strategic systems on combat duty." It was not immediately clear which systems he meant.

Putin said Ukraine had sought to strike a facility deep inside Russia where it keeps nuclear bombers, a reference to the Engels air base.

Russia and the United States together hold 90 per cent of the world's nuclear warheads.

The New START Treaty limited each side to 1,550 warheads on deployed missile launchers and heavy bombers. Both sides met the central limits by 2018.

Putin, who has over the past

year repeatedly hinted that Russia could use a nuclear weapon if threatened, was in effect saying that he could dismantle the architecture of nuclear arms control unless the West backs off in Ukraine.

Putin said the conflict had been forced on Russia, particularly by Nato's eastward expansion since the Cold War.

"The people of Ukraine have become the hostage of the Kyiv regime and its Western overlords, who have effectively occupied this country in the political, military and economic sense," he said.

— Reuters

Four-day week liked by UK employers in world's largest trial



LONDON: Dozens of British employers trialling a four-day working week have mostly decided to stick with it after a pilot hailed as a breakthrough by campaigners for better work-life balance.

Employees at 61 companies across Britain worked an average of 34 hours across four days between June and December 2022, while earning their existing salary. Of those, 56 companies, or 92 per cent, opted to continue like that, 18 of them permanently.

The trial is the largest in the world, according to Autonomy, a British-based research organisation which published the report alongside a group of academics and with backing from New Zealand-based group 4 Day Week Global.

While the findings may be interesting for companies struggling for talent, other surveys show very few other British employers plan a four-day week soon.

The Autonomy trial covered 2,900 staff in total across different sectors, ranging from finance

company Stellar Asset Management to digital manufacturer Rivelin Robotics and a fish-and-chip shop in the coastal town of Wells-next-the-sea.

The majority agreed productivity had been maintained.

Staff said their well-being and work-life balance had improved while data showed employees were much less likely to quit their jobs as a result of the four-day week policy.

"This is a major breakthrough moment for the movement towards a four-day working week," Joe Ryle, Director of the 4 Day Week Campaign, said in a statement.

Paul Oliver, chief operating officer at Citizens Advice Gateshead, said job retention and recruitment had improved and sickness levels had gone down during the trial. "Staff are getting more work done in less time," he said.

For some employees, the extra day off was more important than pay: 15 per cent said no amount of money would induce them back to a five-day week. Some staff had

Wednesdays off, while others had a three-day weekend policy.

Employers from the marketing and advertising, professional services and charity sectors were most represented in the trial. Some 66% of those participating had 25 or fewer employees, while 22 per cent had 50 or more staff. 11 per cent were not for profit.

The trial reflects growing scrutiny of how people work, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic when furlough schemes and mandatory work-from-home periods prompted many to question whether they needed to sit in an office five days a week.

In recent years, some larger global corporates have trialled a four-day approach and also reported successful outcomes. Microsoft piloted it in Japan for a month in 2019 while consumer goods giant Unilever carried out a year-long trial in New Zealand in 2020.

However, corporate Britain as a whole does not appear keen.

— Reuters

DEATH TOLL FROM BRAZIL FLOODS RISES TO 40

RIO DE JANEIRO: At least 40 people were killed after heavy rains caused floods and landslides along the Atlantic coast in the Brazilian state of São Paulo over the weekend, according to officials. Thirty-nine people died in São Sebastião in south-eastern Brazil, the regional government said on Monday. Another person was reported dead in the city of Ubatuba.

Children were also among those killed, according to media reports.

More than 600 millimetres of rainfall were recorded within 24 hours in the state of São Paulo, according to the regional government - one of the largest amounts ever recorded in Brazil over such a short period of time.

In February 2022, more

than 200 people were killed after heavy rainfall caused landslides and floods in the mountainous region near Rio de Janeiro.

More than 500 firefighters and other rescue forces were still searching for survivors along the coast of São Paulo, but blocked roads were hampering the rescue efforts. Forty people are still reported as missing. São Paulo Governor Tarcísio de Freitas ordered three days of mourning.

Some 2,500 people are believed to have lost their homes or were forced to leave them due to the floods. Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who visited the affected region on Monday, said no more houses should be built in high-risk areas.

— dpa



A new system for social protection

In the Sultanate of Oman, there is no dearth of legislation and measures that not only safeguard the citizens’ rights, but also ensure decent living standards. As such the social protection system in the country is established in accordance with the laws that are described as just and equal. The new draft social protection law, which was referred to the Council of Oman last week, is reflective of the priority of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the welfare of Omanis in accordance with the Basic Law of the State and Oman Vision 2040. Social protection is an important element of Oman’s fiscal policies. The main highlight for 2023 is the money allocated to social security, which rose by 22 per cent since 2017 to RO 946 million.

Based on Royal Decree No 33/2021, the new integrated social protection system as envisaged in the draft law has two parts — retirement systems that must be applied to all employees in the public and private sectors, and the social protection part, which deals with the benefits provided to different segments of the society.

The draft social protection law went through several stages, in which the opinion of a number of specialists, stakeholders and international houses of experts was sought, in addition to involving specialised local expertise, to design a social protection system that will keep pace with best practices and international standards.

Accordingly, the draft law includes allocating new social benefits for the elderly, children, orphans and widows, supporting the income of lower-income families, and taking into account elderly retirees. The proposal also aims to design unified retirement programmes for all sectors in the labour market, whether governmental or private, covering the retirement stage, risks of death, disability, work injuries, occupational diseases and job security.

In the new system, there will be a remarkable development as a new approach like the pension law. Previously, there were groups that



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THE DRAFT SOCIAL PROTECTION LAW WENT THROUGH SEVERAL STAGES, IN WHICH THE OPINIONS OF A NUMBER OF SPECIALISTS AND STAKEHOLDERS WAS SOUGHT, TO DESIGN A SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM THAT WILL KEEP PACE WITH BEST PRACTICES AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

were not subject to retirement schemes. Now, it has become important to subject them to the retirement system so as to protect them. This will also open new opportunities for young people and encourage them to be self-reliant and opt for entrepreneurship and self-employment.

Employees who have completed 20 years of service registered with pension funds and who have met the conditions for retirement in their current systems on the date of the issuance of the Social Protection Law are granted without adhering to the minimum voluntary retirement upon completing 30 years of service. If the new social protection system is able to unify the retirement pension for all the groups, it is possible that youths of such sectors will not wait for job opportunities in the government sector only.

The draft law also aims to establish a central administration and a unified community database to provide cash benefit programmes and social insurance programmes, making them easily accessible to the target groups, with clear entitlement terms and unified provisions, in addition to ensuring that the social protection system is able to accommodate economic and social changes.

The insurance programme covers the insured in cases of termination of service for reasons beyond the control of the insured. It replaces the job security system and was developed to deal with some of the challenges facing the current job security system.

And the “social insurance for maternity leave” is a new insurance programme, taking into account the period of childbirth, and aims to cover the income of working women during the period of childbirth under a symbiotic social insurance system to enhance social protection for the family.

The “Social Insurance for Sick Leaves and Unusual Leaves” modifies job entitlement from sick leave and unusual leave to an insurance benefit to protect the insured, and transfer the cost from the employer to the social protection system.

ATOP AN ARMOURED VEHICLE



A Ukrainian soldier sits atop an armoured vehicle as he takes part in military drills simulating a possible attack in the Chernobyl zone a few kilometres from the border with Belarus, on Tuesday. – AFP

Financing global survival...

We must face, and act upon, an inconvenient truth. The impact of human activities on Earth’s geology and ecosystems is threatening the foundations of life on our planet and decades of progress in human development. We are acting counter to the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – a future that guarantees a decent life for all. Our survival and continued prosperity demand structural change and immediate action.

Scientists warn that breaching planetary boundaries will trigger tipping points, leading to irreversible damage and a catastrophic decline of natural systems. Collapsing fish stocks, melting permafrost, rising antimicrobial resistance, and the loss of tropical rainforests are just a few examples of trends that are undermining the foundation of development. While large-scale, acute disasters tend to attract the most attention, the ongoing depletion of valuable natural assets (including aquifers, air and soil) does not generate headlines but has become a chronic burden for the world’s poorest communities.

These global challenges are also deepening economic inequality between and within countries and exacerbating social exclusion. This not only defies the Sustainable Development Agenda’s principle of



Mia Amor Mottley

The writer is Prime Minister of Barbados and a World Bank governor



Svenja Schulze

The writer is Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany and a World Bank governor

leaving no one behind; it also impedes the poverty reduction that comes from inclusive economic growth, undermines the social contract in rich and poor countries alike, and threatens global security.

No country alone can tackle these transboundary problems. Moreover, they are increasingly correlated with other risks, such as massive supply-chain disruptions. All these issues are born of an economic system that has turned out to be more fragile than many thought. Whereas properly functioning systems are able to manage and absorb risks, our current system is doing the opposite.

The world needs a global system that engenders security, promotes sustainability and absorbs shocks. To achieve it, the international community could begin by making a handful of practical changes this year, starting at the Spring Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

First, as part of the World Bank’s “evolution” (which shareholders called for in October 2022), we need to modernise its mission by elevating sustainability and resilience as core institutional goals, and by strengthening its analyses and operations to address new transboundary challenges.

We know that for every \$1

invested in sustainability and resilience today, there are \$4-7 in savings down the line. But to usher in a new paradigm of resilience and sustainability, we must incorporate these principles into operational, lending and debt-sustainability models with appropriate incentives and accounting standards. Many reforms and investments can have positive cross-border spillovers. But we will need new and stronger incentives – both analytical and financial – to promote national investment in global public goods, and to support countries with their conservation efforts.

We also need to explore all our options for boosting multilateral development banks’ financing

capacity. The key, here, is to leverage existing capital while preserving these institutions’ AAA ratings and countercyclical lending capacity. As the G20 Capital Adequacy Review showed, MDBs can increase their risk appetite and boost financing volumes by lowering their minimum equity ratios. Similarly, we welcome proposals calling for an issuance of non-voting hybrid capital to boost lending at still-lower concessional rates – to be provided either by a shareholder “coalition of the willing” or through sales to private investors.

We also need to explore our options for re-channeling special drawing rights (SDRs, the IMF’s reserve asset) to boost the capital stock of international financial

institutions. The IMF’s new Resilience and Sustainability Trust is based on this premise and represents a promising first step towards maximising the effectiveness of SDR allocations. But, given the challenges, the size of the trust is currently too small. We also call on MDBs and development finance institutions to propose additional options – as the African and Inter-American Development Banks have already begun to do. Either way, MDBs must do far more to leverage their balance sheets.

Separately, MDBs must also use their balance sheets to catalyse private investment in the transition to low-carbon energy, transportation and agriculture throughout the developing world. Without efforts to lower the cost of capital of these investments at sufficient scale, global warming will hurtle past 1.5° Celsius, triggering cascading effects.

Finally, we urge all lenders and borrowers — including the development banks and private-sector creditors — to include or accept natural-disaster and pandemic clauses in financing instruments. These provisions are present-value neutral, on net, and they offer valuable support to countries by allowing them to ensure sufficient liquidity when they need it most.

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Scientists warn that breaching planetary boundaries will trigger tipping points.

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Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola during training. – Reuters

Man City fighting fires ahead of Leipzig test

MANCHESTER: Manchester City's quest to finally conquer Europe resumes on Wednesday when Pep Guardiola's men travel to RB Leipzig, but all is not well for the English champions on or off the field.

City appeared to have laid down a marker in the Premier League title race by beating leaders Arsenal 3-1 away last week, only to then throw away two points by conceding late to draw 1-1 at Nottingham Forest on Saturday.

They are also playing under a cloud after being charged with more than 100 breaches of financial rules by the Premier League, dating back to the 2009/10 season.

Defender Kyle Walker described City's sloppiness in relinquishing top spot in the Premier League at the weekend as "unacceptable".

"Sometimes it's football and sometimes it's emotion," he said. "Every game should be treated the same — like a cup final."

A two-point deficit at the top of the table could turn into five should Arsenal win their game in hand against struggling Everton.

A lack of consistency in City's performances is troubling Guardiola ahead of his side's return to action in the competition they most crave.

City have never won the Champions League, while Guardiola, who won the trophy twice as manager of Barcelona, has not done so since 2011, his penultimate season at the Camp Nou.

The signing of Erling Haaland was expected to be the final piece in solving City's puzzle in Europe.

The Norwegian has delivered the goals expected of him, with 32 in all competitions. Yet Haaland's arrival is one of the factors used to explain a dip in City's collective standards this season.

The defending champions have dropped 20 points already



in 24 games — compared with 21 points in the whole of the 2021/22 campaign.

GOING AFTER IT

Despite Haaland's haul, City had scored more goals as a team at this stage last season.

Defensively they also look more exposed -- an issue not helped by Guardiola's willingness to let Joao Cancelo join Bayern Munich on loan, leaving him without a natural left-back.

Nathan Ake, Aymeric Laporte, Rico Lewis and even creative midfielder Bernardo Silva have been shunted out to do a job on the left side of defence in the past two weeks alone.

Guardiola said he was heartened by City's display at Forest despite a lack of killer instinct that cost them two points.

However, he has not been slow to call out his players since the World Cup break for a lack

of hunger and desire to remain on top in England, which is an uncharacteristic approach for the former Barca and Bayern Munich coach.

Finding such motivation for the Champions League should not be difficult. Third-choice goalkeeper Scott Carson is the only member of Guardiola's squad to have won the competition previously, when he was at Liverpool.

"We're coming after it," goalkeeper Ederson said of City's quest to win the Champions League. "I think we're a group of great quality and that shows how much the club has developed over the last five or six years, with Premier League titles, Carabao (League) Cups, FA Cups, Community Shields.

"So this title is what the club needs. It's what we athletes need and it's what Guardiola needs here at the club, too. This year, we're going to try. We're going after it." — AFP



Sultanate of Oman
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O	Grade In Tender Board Registration
Re-tender 17/2021	Services	CONSTRUCTION OF GRASSED FOOTBALL PITCH AT MAJEEES SPORT CLUB	25/-	Excellent & First
2/2023	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	LAYING OF 4C X 240 SQ L. T U/G CABLE AT SEEB SPORTS STADIUM	25/-	First

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 26/02/2023.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 09:00am 06/03/2023.

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24402200 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Al Hilal storm into quarters of AFC Champions League

DOHA: Storied Asian outfit Al Hilal stayed well on course to further enhance their credentials after storming into the quarterfinals of the AFC Champions League on Monday.

The reigning champions from Saudi Arabia saw off Shabab Al Ahli of the UAE 3-1 in their last-16 tie at Qatar's Al Janoub Stadium, as they chase a possible fifth continental title.

Fresh from their exploits barely a week ago in the Fifa Club World Championship in Morocco where they finished runners-up to Real Madrid, they joined compatriots Al Shabab in the last eight -- hoping to win the title for the third time in four years.

Al Shabab had qualified on Sunday, beating Uzbekistan's FC Nasaf 2-0 after Qatar giants Al Duhail pipped domestic rivals Al Rayyan 7-6 via penalties, following a 1-1 draw after extra-time.

Nigerian Odion Ighalo set things in motion on Monday for Al Hilal with a clinical 17th minute strike after receiving a fine assist from Moussa Marega.



Al Hilal's South Korean defender Jang Hyun-soo (L) celebrates scoring his team's second goal against UAE's Shabab Al Ahli at the Al Janoub Stadium in Al Wakrah, south of Doha. – AFP

The match slackened off for a while before Jang Hyun-soo scored with a diving header and Luciano Vietto applied the finishing touch to a deft backheeled pass from Salem al Dawsari to make it 3-0 with 10 minutes remaining.

Syrian striker Omar Khribin pulled one back in the 86th minute but that came a bit too late in the day for Al Shabab Al Ahli to mount a serious challenge.

IRAN'S FOOLAD THROUGH

Earlier on Monday, Iran's Foolad Khuzestan scraped into the quarterfinals of courtesy of a cagey 1-0 over Saudi Arabia's Al Faisaly.

Both sides were meeting for the first time ever in the tournament and aiming to make up for their poor form in their respective domestic leagues where they are struggling to keep pace with their rivals.

While Al Faisaly were relegated from the Saudi Pro League to the First Division after they made the last-16 of the continental tournament, Foolad are in ninth position in the Iran Pro League — a whopping 18 points behind leaders Sepahan.

But with plenty to play for, it was Foolad who made the most of the situation with Sasan Ansari's 64th minute strike proving decisive at the Al Thumama Stadium. — AFP



Azarenka calls for fitting venue for women's tennis finals

DUBAI: Victoria Azarenka said on Monday that she hopes the WTA Finals will find a “deserving” home, after a couple of years of instability after the women's tennis organisation suspended all Chinese tournaments.

The former world number one and two-time Australian Open champion also urged an announcement on this year's venue soon, to allow for better marketing of then tour's flagship event.

The season-ending championships feature the top eight singles players and top eight doubles teams. They were initially meant to be staged in China's southern city of Shenzhen every year for 10 years, starting with the 2019 edition.

The deal with Shenzhen was record-breaking and the inaugural 2019 showpiece awarded singles champion Ashleigh Barty \$4.42 million — which was the highest-ever prize money awarded to a player at any tennis event across both the men's and women's tours.

But the pandemic and the fallout from the disappearance of Chinese player Peng Shuai — which led to the WTA suspending operations in China — have meant that the tour Finals have not returned to Shenzhen since 2019.

The WTA championships were cancelled in 2020 and then found a temporary home in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 2021, and Fort Worth, Texas in 2022. The WTA Finals in Fort Worth witnessed sparse crowds and were only announced late September — less than two months before the event. “We need something that is deserving of the Finals,” Azarenka, an active member on the WTA Player Council, said on Monday. “Last couple of years with such a short announcement, absolutely no time for marketing — in my opinion — it's been undervalued.” — AFP

India ‘confident’ ahead of likely semifinal against Australia

GQEBERHA, South Africa: Indian captain Harmanpreet Kaur said on Monday she looked forward to a likely Women's T20 World Cup semifinal against defending champions Australia.

India qualified for the last four when they beat Ireland by five runs on a rain-adjusted target in their last group match at St George's Park in Gqeberha.

India joined England as qualifiers from Group Two with both sides having won three matches.

England, however, still have to play Pakistan in Cape Town on Tuesday. Victory would guarantee them top spot but they are likely group winners even if they lose because of a superior net run rate.

Australia have already won Group Two, so are almost certain to play India as runners-up in Group One in the semi-finals.

Kaur said India had gained confidence from having played Australia in a series in India last season, despite only winning one game — and that was on a super over.

She pointed out that all teams, including champion sides like Australia, were under pressure in World Cup games.

“The brand of cricket we played (against Australia) gave us a lot of confidence,” said Kaur. “We have a fair idea of how we have to go about the next game and we will make our plans accordingly.”

Smriti Mandhana hit a T20 international career-best 87 as India made 155 for six. Ireland were with 54 for two from 8.2 overs, with Gaby Lewis 32 not out, when rain ended play.

A strong, swirling wind made conditions difficult and Mandhana was dropped four times in the outfield during a 56-ball innings which



India's Smriti Mandhana watches the ball after playing a shot during the Group B T20 women's World Cup match against Ireland at St George's Park in Gqeberha. — AFP

included nine fours and three sixes.

Teenage prodigy Shafali Verma struggled again at the top of the batting order, making 24 off 29 balls, but Kaur said she remained a key player.

“We always encourage her to express herself. Whenever she clicks we are always into the game. In practice she is batting well. We know how important she is,” said Kaur.

Ireland made a disastrous start to their reply when Amy Hunter was run out off the first ball of the innings, attempting a second run after hitting the ball to midwicket.

Four balls later Prendergast was bowled by Renuka Thakur without scoring.

But Lewis and captain Laura Delany, who earlier took three for 33, shared a spirited unbeaten partnership of 53.

Delany admitted that they had been unaware of how close they had been to a possible winning situation.

“The weather changed so quickly,” she said.

Although Ireland lost all their matches, Delany said they had made progress since their first World T20 in 2018.

“We were not on a level playing field then,” she said. “Now we have contracts and things are heading in the right direction.”

Delany said Ireland needed to work hard on several aspects of their game, particularly fielding.

“We need to put ourselves under more pressure in training and to play with freedom and confidence,” she said. — AFP

BRIEF SCORES
India 155-6 in 20 overs (S Mandhana 87; O Prendergast 2-22, L Delany 3-33)
Ireland 54-2 in 8.3 overs (G. Lewis 32 not out)
Result: India won by 5 runs (Duckworth/Lewis method)

Team LTHE emerge Jindal Panthers tourney champions



MUSCAT: Team LTHE (Larsen & Toubro Hydrocarbon Engg) recorded a heroic victory in the final against Al Nadaha to clinch the prestigious Jindal Panthers Corporate Cricket Tournament trophy.

Over 20 corporate teams, including two teams - Jindal Panther A and Jindal Panther - from organisers Jindal Shadede Iron & Steel, vied for the champion's title at the high-octane tournament, which saw LTHE and Al Nadaha make it to the final round with

scores of 34 and 50 respectively in the semifinal.

In its third edition, the popular Jindal Panthers Corporate Cricket Tournament 2023, held over the weekend at the Suhar grounds in Sallan, featured league matches, Super Seven knockout matches and semifinals, followed by an electrifying final match that had the audience rooting for a high-scoring finish.

A large digital screen was in place to broadcast live matches and scorecard, alongside messages from



Jindal Shadede Iron & Steel CEO, Harssha Shetty. The matches were also transmitted live on YouTube for cricket enthusiasts who could not make it to the venue.

As part of the tournament, every participating team was required to play two league matches to qualify for the knockout round, which then picked four teams to fight it out for the semifinal and the grand final match. An exciting women's cricket match was also held on the sidelines between team Jindal Panther Women and the ‘Women

Cricket Sohar.’

Ahead of the tournament, Harssha Shetty said, “We are proud to say that our passion has been contagious enough to gather 21 teams from various companies in Al Batinah.”

He also underscored the company's inclusivity policy, which was the spur behind the exclusive women's cricket match, held on the sidelines of the tournament. He said, “woman's cricket is not just a niche interest; it is a growing sport with lots of fans and great



athletes. And we hope for more participation in the future.”

Following the conclusion of the tournament, he congratulated Team Jindal for their valiant efforts to qualify for semifinals and thanked volunteers for their hardwork in making the event a true success. Further, commenting on Jindal Shadede's sports initiative, he said, “while we are passionate about cricket, we are just as passionate about our company culture and our employees. We want our employees to be able to

enjoy their work and to feel proud of the company they work for. At Jindal Shadede, we are very keen on creating a safe and healthy environment, and we encourage all sports initiatives, and all healthy work-life relationships.”

Jindal Panthers Corporate Cricket Tournament rounds were spread all through the day, with the final, held under flood lights at midnight, adding to the weekend mood, as cricket enthusiasts cheered their favourite team until the end.



Al Nahda, Al Rustaq play out goalless draw

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

The return-leg semifinal match between Al Nahda and Al Rustaq on February 25 at Al Buraimi Sports Complex will decide the winner to the final clash of the 2022-23 His Majesty's Cup football championship as the first-leg match ended in a goalless draw at Al Rustaq Sports Complex late on Monday.

Al Buraimi representatives will have better advantage in the return-leg game as the encounter will take place at their home. The scenario of the later semifinal was same to the earlier match between Seeb and Al Rustaq which ended with no goals. The strong defending and the goalkeepers' performance from Al Nahda and Rustaq spoiled all the attempts inside the box area.

The hosts were the organised side in the first-half of the game and later they missed the active movements of Hatim al Roushdi and Mahmood al Shaqsi due to their injuries in the game.

Al Rustaq missed the services of star player Mohammed al Ghafri due to his injury in the last match at the top-tier league. Al Nahda depended on the speed of striker Al Mundher al Alawi, Omar al Malki and Yemeni player Abdulwasa al Matari, who was very close to register the opening goal in the first-half but his attempt went above the bar.

The best goalkeeper in the last edition of the Arabian Gulf Cup in Basra, Ibrahim al Mukhaini, saved



The hosts were the organised side in the first-half of the game and later they missed the active movements of Hatim al Roushdi and Mahmood al Shaqsi due to their injuries in the game

some scoring attempts to keep Al Nahda team's net clean without any goal as Al Rustaq strikers pressed hard in the deciding half and they were seeking for the first goal. Al Rustaq's Mazin al Saadi tried to send a strong ball from outside the box area but his attempt was saved by goalkeeper Al Mukhaini. In the dying minutes, the result remained the same with no change and later referee Qasim al Hatmi ended the game with a goalless draw.

Bank Muscat opens new Green Sports field in Al Khabourah



MUSCAT: In line with its commitment to social responsibility, community development and the youth, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, continues to hand over new Green Sports Fields to sports teams across the Sultanate of Oman.

The bank recently inaugurated the new Green Sports field for Al Khuwairat Sports Team in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah at an event held under the auspices of

Shaikh Sultan bin Humaid bin Mohammed al Hosni, Member of the Majlis Ashshura and Al Khabourah representative. The event was also attended by Yaqoob bin Abdullah al Hosni, Branch Manager – Khabourah, Bank Muscat, and Ahmed bin Said al Qutaiti, Head of the Al Khuwairat Sports Team.

Speaking on the occasion, Yaqoob bin Abdullah al Hosni, Branch Manager – Khabourah, Bank Muscat, said that the new

floodlighting facility provided under Green Sports support would greatly help the Al Khuwairat team improve its capabilities and talent. He congratulated the team for completing the project on time and requested the

community to make the best use of the facilities, including for social and community events, adding that community and social events would help improve community bonding. Yaqoob bin Abdullah al Hosni also expressed his hope that Al

Khuwairat team would contribute talent at the very top level so as to enhance the sporting talents and capabilities of Omani youth.

On his part, Ahmed bin Said al Qutaiti, Head of the Al Khuwairat Sports Team thanked Bank Muscat for its pioneering role in corporate social responsibility, particularly in Green Sports, which is contributing to the building of quality sports infrastructure across the Sultanate of Oman. He affirmed that the team would continue to work hard

to develop the capabilities and talents of its members as a way to contribute to developing the overall sports sector in Oman.

Bank Muscat's Green Sports programme is one of the leading CSR programmes in Oman, which provides support to local sports teams as part of the bank's efforts to develop sports infrastructure and green spaces throughout the Sultanate of Oman. The support includes greening of football pitches, water desalination and

lighting. It is a matter of great encouragement that the Bank Muscat's Green Sports programme has so far benefitted 163 teams with over 50,000 team members across the Sultanate of Oman.

The bank recently concluded the registration for teams applying for Green Sports support in 2023, with the evaluation process set to start soon. In 2023 too, the bank will support 20 youth sports teams across the Sultanate of Oman through the programme.



ICAO to support Oman’s quest for excellence in civil aviation safety

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) of the Sultanate of Oman signed on Tuesday an Administrative Services Agreement with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to support Oman’s efforts towards achieving compliance with the highest safety standards in the field of civil aviation.

The agreement was signed by Eng Naif bin Ali al Abri, Chairman of the Civil Aviation Authority, with Juan Carlos Salazar, Secretary General of the ICAO.

According to the agreement, Oman will seek the assistance of international experts from the ICAO in achieving international benchmarks in civil aviation safety.

The pact was inked on the sidelines of the launch of the second edition of the Civil Aviation Legal Advisors Forum, which is being hosted by Oman, represented by the CAA, in coordination with the ICAO.

It began under auspices of Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs. Delegates from 63 countries and 3 international organisations are taking part in the three-day forum.

Now in its second iteration, the forum enable the legal advisors to exchange knowledge, insights, and opinions regarding legal matters relating to civil aviation, as well as to discuss the difficulties that the state parties are facing, potential areas of cooperation, and suggested solutions to problems arising from technical, social, and economic development.

Speaking at the event, Eng Naif al Abri of the CAA said: “The Sultanate of Oman is commemorating the 50th anniversary as a party to the 1944



Chicago Convention and has been a member of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) since 1973. It has sought to actively participate in and contribute to the advancement of civil aviation in order to strengthen the bonds of love and civilised and social communication between the peoples of the world.”

In addition, Oman is hosting three related forums this year, including the third Middle East Regional Aviation Security and Facilitation Group (MID-RASFG) meeting and the MIDANBIRG meeting.

Oman, represented by the CAA, hopes to contribute to the forum’s second edition by

fostering greater interaction and collaboration between experts in air law, particularly those working in international organisations, governmental and military supervisory agencies, airport operators, and air operators whose operations are subject to civil aviation law, Al Abri added.

A number of young people from different universities and colleges have joined the forum to connect with the experts and share ideas and experiences in the legal sector.

Oman is keen to continue working with the fellow ICAO members to address any upcoming challenges in the field of international civil aviation, he stated.

Speaking on the outlook for the global civil aviation industry, Juan Carlos Salazar, Secretary General of the ICAO, said: “While global aviation has not yet fully recovered from the impacts of the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, I wish to stress that we have every reason to have confidence in a full, resilient, and sustainable recovery. Our latest forecasts in fact predict a full return to 2019 passenger levels by the end of this year.”

Immediately following the declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the WHO, the ICAO Council had established its Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART), he said.

“The CART developed and provided practical guidance to governments and industry operators in order to maintain essential services, safely restart the international air transport sector, and now accelerate the recovery through coordination at the global level. The first priority for aviation, and therefore this Forum, is now the building of resilience, so that air transport will be prepared to face similar crisis in the future,” Salazar added.

‘We do not recognise cryptocurrency as currency’: CBO

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 21

“[Cryptocurrency] is an asset that we at the Central Bank and many central banks around the world do not recognise as a currency,” shared the Executive President of the Central Bank of Oman, Tahir bin Salim al Amri. In a discussion panel yesterday at the Youth Center in Muscat, Al Amri explained the Central Bank’s stance on the currency.

“It’s not a means of payment, it is a commodity or an asset of some sort that is being traded mainly ...for capital gain.” In addition, he cited the risks associated with it the main reason behind the Bank’s stance.

“We also find the governance around to be very risky and so we always caution people dealing with it, the Central Bank takes no responsibility for it.” According to Al Amri, the Central Bank is keeping an open mind while maintaining caution.

“All the central banks and the regulators around the world are looking at it with an open mind, but we are also institutions that need to control risk and for the time being we see it as a very risk product.”

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) recently announced its plans of establishing a framework to regulate virtual assets in Oman. The Central Bank, according to Al Amri, participated in the creation of this framework.



It’s not a means of payment, it is a commodity or an asset of some sort that is being traded mainly ...for capital gain.

TAHIR BIN SALIM AL AMRI
Executive President, CBO

According to the (CMA), the regulatory framework will include “crypto assets, tokens, crypto exchanges, and initial coin offerings”.

Furthermore, the Central Bank is still in the process of developing its digital currency which was announced last year. “We have already engaged in a specialised forum to help us look at the pros, cons and the applicability of it,” shared Al Amri.

A decision is expected to be made by the end of the year. Al Amri also shared that various fintech services such as Apple Pay and buy-now-and-pay-later services are expected to be available soon in Oman.

\$230 bn required to unlock hydrogen export economy in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 21

Oman’s National Strategy for an Orderly Transition to Net-Zero envisions the need for an additional \$230 billion in investments to help unleash the country’s full potential as a global scale green hydrogen exporter. This is on top of investments to the tune of \$190 billion that will be necessary to fund the nation’s pathway to Net-Zero by 2050.

The National Strategy, unveiled by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, advocates an ‘orderly transition’ to Net-Zero underpinned by five key objectives: environmental sustainability, energy system costs, economic impact, social impact and security of supply.

As a smooth and sustainable transition, it espouses the implementation of the lowest-cost decarbonisation levers first as they become economically viable, followed by the activation of



levers to address harder-to-abate emissions.

“An orderly transition path could help Oman abate 97 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (Mt CO2e) by 2050, with decarbonisation through 2030 and 2040 accounting for 6 per cent and 54 per cent of the total pathway respectively relative to 2021 emissions,” the National Strategy points out.

“Industry, oil and gas and

transport would drive these efforts,” it further explained.

“This pathway would result in a remaining “last mile” gap of ~8 per cent (7Mt) that could be addressed through breakthrough decarbonisation technologies and natural negative emissions (e.g., direct-air capture (DAC) of carbon with storage in depleted reservoirs or planting mangrove trees to absorb atmospheric carbon), and critical behavioural changes

(e.g., substituting carbon-intensive products or materials).”

Importantly, the national strategy identifies the six principal decarbonisation technologies to drive the orderly transition to Net-Zero: Energy and resource efficiency, Electrification and renewables, Battery electric technology, Sustainable hydrogen, Carbon capture and storage, and Negative-emission solutions.

Together, these technologies

AN ORDERLY TRANSITION PATH COULD HELP OMAN ABATE 97 MILLION TONNES OF CARBON DIOXIDE EQUIVALENT (MT CO2E) BY 2050, WITH DECARBONISATION THROUGH 2030 AND 2040 ACCOUNTING FOR 6 PER CENT AND 54 PER CENT OF THE TOTAL PATHWAY RESPECTIVELY RELATIVE TO 2021 EMISSIONS

will help cover around 90 per cent of CO2 abatement by 2050.

Nevertheless, they need to be supplemented by other initiatives, such as long-duration energy storage, building new infrastructure such as electric vehicle charging networks, ramping up adoption of electric vehicles, introducing new policies and legislation, such as policies to incentivise behavioural changes, and rolling out market mechanisms in the form of carbon pricing, for example.

Significantly, the pathway to Net-Zero comes with hefty price-

tags: A ballpark \$190 billion in capital investment is estimated relative to Oman’s ‘business-as-usual’ scenario.

This expenditure will cover allocations towards power and hydrogen infrastructure, including the upgrade and expansion of the country’s electricity grid, hydrogen pipelines and storage, as well as electric vehicle charging infrastructure and deployment of long-duration energy storage.

“If we include investment required to unlock a hydrogen export economy, the capital investment required would increase by an additional \$230 billion (approximately),” it added.

Five sectors – industry, Oil & Gas, power, transport, and buildings – account for around 95 per cent of Oman’s net-emissions estimated at 90 million tonnes of CO2-equivalent in 2021. Without serious interventions, emissions could rise 16 per cent to 104 Mt CO2e by 2050, the document warns.

PDO receives delegation from State Council

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 21

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) hosted on Tuesday, February 21, 2023, a delegation of State Council members on an official visit to its Mina Al Fahal headquarters, headed by the Chairman of the State Council Shaikh Abdul Malik bin Abdullah al Khalili.

A senior PDO management team, headed by Managing Director Steve Phimister, gave an overview of the Company's performance on a range of matters including health, safety and the environment, production, major projects and the creation of job and training opportunities for Omanis, through its pioneering In-Country Value (ICV) and Lean efficiency programmes.

The State Council Chairman commended PDO's efforts, saying: "I was honoured to visit



PDO and learn more about its significant projects and the role of its national workforce to support strategic projects in Oman and its economy. "I praise PDO for its

commitment towards achieving sustainable development in the concession area and supporting government efforts. I also commend its efforts in social responsibility as well as finding collaboration with the government, private sector and civil community towards achieving sustainable development.

He concluded: "We are proud of PDO's endeavours to develop innovative solutions aligned with its business in regards to environment protection, which is aligned with achieving the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, and to create a sustainable and balanced environment."

This is the third time that PDO has hosted visitors from the State Council. The first was in March 2016 when a delegation, consisting of most of the Council's 84 members, paid a visit to PDO's Bait Mina Al Fahal HQ building, and the second was in October

2018, when they visited PDO's landmark projects in the south of its concession area.

PDO Managing Director Steve Phimister said: "It is with great honour that PDO host the esteemed delegation from the State Council for the second time at Mina Al Fahal headquarters. We are thrilled to share with the honourable members a glimpse of our refreshed strategy, newly defined purpose, and how PDO is developing and implementing the Net-Zero Emission plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

"As we adapt to the changing energy landscape, we remain committed to building a sustainable and low-carbon future, not only to ensure our Company's long-term success but also to continue generating oil and gas revenue in a cost-effective, energy-efficient manner to maximise value for the Sultanate of Oman."

Workshop focuses on national AML-CFT system

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 21

The Capital Market Authority organised a workshop on the regulation for implementation of the Security Council's Resolutions issued under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter on the Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism and the Financing of Terrorism and prevention, suppression and disruption of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and its financing issued under Decision No. 1/2022 of the National Committee for Combating Terrorism.

The workshop was presented by Dr Saud bin Mohammed al Farsi, Counsel at the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs.

The workshop, which comes within CMA's endeavours to enhance the Anti-Money



Laundering and Combating Financing of Terrorism (AML-CFT) was held at the CMA's premises and attended by compliance officers and the like in the companies regulated by the CMA in the capital market and insurance sectors.

The workshop focused on a number of topics including introducing the money laundering and terrorism financing crime, historical rapid

terrorism according to law No. 30/2016, and the obligations of the regulators and licensed financial institutions in the legislative structure beside acquainting the participants with the international organisations and regulatory entities in the Sultanate of Oman, and the Regulation of the National Committee for Combating Terrorism and the obligations of the financial institutions thereunder.

The workshop is part of a series of programmes related to combating money laundering and financing terrorism implemented by the CMA represented by the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating Financing Terrorism Department in collaboration with various entities and expertise to achieve the awareness roles of the regulated entities beside its legislative role.

18th edition of Oman Design & Build Week set to commence on March 13



MUSCAT: Revered as the largest trade and exhibition conference catering to the Sultanate of Oman's booming building, construction, design and real estate industry, the 18th edition of the Oman Design & Build Week (ODBW) is scheduled to commence on March 13 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC).

The 3-day event will run until March 15, 2023 and will be organised by CONNECT under the patronage of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning in partnership with the Oman Real Estate Association.

Co-located with ODBW, will be the Oman Real Estate Expo (OREX), which has earned its name as an iconic networking platform that connects local and international property developers and real estate brokers to potential buyers and investors from the local market as well as other relevant authorities and service providers.

Assuming the role of Lead Sponsor will be Wujha, a leading real estate company renowned for promoting modern commercial and residential projects. Meanwhile, Muriya, Oman's largest and most diversified private integrated real estate and tourism developer, will be the Platinum Sponsor at ODBW.

Acting as the Strategic Partner of ODBW is the premium mixed-use waterfront project, Al Mouj Muscat. At the event, Al Mouj Muscat will be showcasing

its unique Golf Business Park which is a distinctive destination that reimagines business in Oman and across the region with unparalleled ocean and golf views while being in close proximity to the Muscat International Airport.

Commenting on the event, Ashley Roberts, Managing Director, CONNECT said, "The construction and real estate industry in Oman has emerged as a stable sector for investments and has attracted significant local and international investors. It has also been identified as a vital industry that will continue to contribute to the revenue diversification goals of the country.

A large-scale event of national importance, ODBW provides an ideal platform to gain insights into the latest trends in the segment, learn about new innovations that have been driving development in the sector and enhance industry knowledge by engaging with key players and experts."

A key highlight of the event will be the ODBW Conference organised in collaboration with the Oman Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and the Oman Real Estate Association.

The 3-day CPD-credited sessions will provide insights into the Oman Spatial Strategy and Oman Real Estate Strategy and their influence and impact on the investment environment and construction industry in the Sultanate of Oman.

Enjoy your drive in the stylish and powerful Kia K5

MUSCAT: The stylish and powerful Kia K5 is designed to turn heads and powered to move you even further on every drive. The stylish K5 has an angular design language that highlights the brands new chapter in boldness and passion.

Adding to this is the K5's low-slung and fastback silhouette from the side, highlighted by a chrome garnish that spans the roofline and wraps around the rear glass. Giving the K5 a distinctive look is the impressive exterior styling that is enhanced with a number of exterior design features that include LED Headlamps, LED Daytime Running Lights, LED Front Fog Lamps, LED Rear Fog Lamps, LED Rear Combination Lamps, 18" Alloy Wheels, Solar Glass, Panoramic Sunroof and Dual LED Headlamps.

For more spirited performances, the K5 is equipped with a powerful 2.5L GDI engine that offers 191 HP and 25.1 KG.M. Torque. The engine is paired to an 8-speed Automatic Transmission. In the K5 a range of features enhance



every experience. They include Drive Mode Select, Auto Cruise Control, Power Driver Seat, Auto AC, Power Passenger Seat, Navigation with 10.25" Display, Premium Music System, Red Leather Seats, Ventilated Front Seats, Paddle Shifter, Aluminium Pedals, Mood Lamp, Android Auto & Car Play and more.

Harmonising the open layout of the cockpit is a newly designed infotainment display that seamlessly stretches into the instrument panel, creating a futuristic, three-dimensional layout and driver-centric space. Creating an inviting and

comfortable interior are a range of features that include Tinted Glass, Tilt & Telescopic Steering, Radio with USB, Audio Remote Control, Driver's Seat Height Adjuster, Rear AC Vents, Leather AT Knob and more.

Like with any other Kia vehicle, safety is an important aspect that contributes to making every drive fun.

The K5 is equipped with a range of advanced safety features like Driver and Front Passenger Airbags, Side and Curtain Airbags, Electro Chromic Inside Mirror, Blind Spot Collision Warning (BCW), Blind Spot View Monitor

Priority on equality in employment remains high



ANDY JALIL
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Fund groups are lagging behind banks and other industry peers in achieving gender parity on their boards, research by EY has found. The worst gender diversity was seen across boards of asset managers and wealth managers, according to the Big Four firm's latest Boardroom Monitor, which tracks companies in the MSCI Europe Financials Index.

Forty per cent of board seats at fund houses belong to women while 60pc are occupied by men. Europe's largest financial services firms are responding to greater pushback from shareholders and anticipated regulatory changes by boosting female director numbers, EY noted in the report.

Half the board appointments made last year were female, up eight percentage points on 2021. "Across Europe, boards and company management are taking clear steps to increase diversity across a range of measures," said Omar Ali, EY Emeia financial services managing partner.

"Progressive businesses are anticipating regulation, and view diversity as a strategic priority, understanding that more diverse views, backgrounds and experience play a role in identifying and responding to risks, and ultimately create more effective boards."

Banks and insurance providers boasted the most gender-diverse boards, EY's monitor said, with women representing 43 per cent of seats at the table. Wim Mijs, European Banking Federation CEO, said banks stand to gain "tangible benefits from greater diversity in their workforce, management and financing activities."

Europe's biggest financial firms have also recruited more sustainability experts to the boardroom. The number of companies with directors that have professional experience or expertise in sustainability jumped from 19 per cent in EY's inaugural June 2022 Boardroom Monitor to 32 per cent now.

Once again, investment banks continued to lead the charge, EY found 43 per cent of bank boards included directors with ESG backgrounds, compared to 32 per cent of asset manager boards.

However, the Big Four firm noted this was an improvement from June when only 11 per cent of fund groups had such expertise on their boards. Insurers were the biggest laggards, with only 17 per cent of boards including directors with ESG expertise.

Sustainability hires have been ramping up recently, EY said. Of the current directors with sustainability experience, two-thirds were appointed in the past three years.

Ali said: "Since June, we have seen a big increase in the number of directors with sustainability experience appointed to financial services boards, albeit from a low base."

He added: "Climate change presents both a systemic risk and significant opportunity for financial services and we expect boards to continue to build expertise at this accelerated pace."

A study of forty thousand workers conducted on pay gap found that gender pay gap can be wiped out when 60 per cent of a company's managers are women and they operate a performance-related pay system.

The social scientists who conducted the research suggested it could be due to women managers being better judges of other female staff's performance, a reduction in pay bias and women "shop-floor" staff feeling more motivated by a "fairer" regime. The academics based their conclusions on 3,200 workplaces, data on their jobs and personal characteristics and more than 400 observed workplaces.

They found that the wage gap disappeared when there were 90 per cent female managers in a firm, of which there are about 10 per cent in the UK.

However, once performance-related pay was introduced the proportion of female managers needed fell to 60 per cent. Prof Alex Bryson, who led the research, said the study suggested that increasing the proportion of female managers could have more of an impact on pay differentials than women appointments to the boardroom.

He said: "We offered a number of hypotheses. One is women are better at recognising the productivity of other women. Second, women might be more likely to challenge discriminatory practices."

Opportunity Oman: WHY NOW



DR YOUSUF HAMED
AL BALUSHI

The author is the founder and CEO of Smart Investment Gateway; email: yousufh@omaninvestgateway.com

Oman is currently implementing a transformational vision based on a participatory approach towards a new path of development; it encompasses how Oman can move forward to a new stage of development.

The vision relies on investment, production and export. Oman with strategic location combined with a robust diversifying economy, world-class infrastructure, a business-friendly regulatory framework, a wealth of natural resources, an outstanding multi-lingual talent pool and political stability make it a highly attractive destination for international investors.

Building on its readiness in different dimensions in terms of infrastructure and educating the people, Oman is moving to a new renaissance towards the best utilisation of its abundant natural resources, as well as ambitious strategies to develop several sectors including: tourism, fisheries, logistics, mining, manufacturing and technology.

Oman has enjoyed a sustainable GDP growth of over 3 per cent for the last 40 years primarily due to the flourishing oil and gas sector.

This does however leave the economy dangerously vulnerable to the decline in production capacity, the increasing costs of production, and fluctuating oil prices hence alternative drivers for economic growth need to be developed.

To be more specific, examples of opportunities to invest in Oman for investors are as follows:

- From a logistics point of view, Oman has open access to the Indian Ocean, hence large market access to the Indian Subcontinent, East Africa and Far east. This means that it is able to serve Asia, Europe and America within 1 day.
- There is already precedent as Oman has been diversifying its strategic partnerships by establishing

investment and trade associations with East Asia.

- Oman has many historical bilateral trade ties, going back to thousands of years.
- Oman has an established and mature manufacturing sector with companies that can be acquired or partnered with, to expand business.
- Companies that can be targeted would be those which manufacture goods which will help decrease the rate of imports in Oman.
- In addition to import substitution, manufactured items could be exported to countries in the region by utilising Oman's deep-water ports and the region's shipping expertise due to the strategic location.
- Numerous incentives given to manufacturing companies under the current Economic Stimulus Plan and the Oman Vision 2040.
- Oman's tourism sector is growing quickly, reflecting the country's appeal to regional and international tourists. This sector can benefit from other successful tourism sectors in the region.
- The fisheries and aquaculture sectors can be promising for the collaboration between both countries. The long coastal line (3,165 km) and

the different seas adjacent to Oman contribute highly to the fish biodiversity and population richness in the country.

Oman has a rich mix of fisheries ranging from high value large pelagic fisheries shared amongst coastal states and foreign flagged nations, to low value straddling stocks such as lantern fish shared with neighbouring countries, to a complex mix of inshore demersal and pelagic stocks fished domestically. Oman's geographical location, bilateral trade relations and aspiring investment goals are only some of its many attributes. It is time to strengthen these attributes through innovative and new channels and with an abundance of opportunities, there is no better time than the present to capitalise them.

From excellent infrastructure facilities with historical routes, an immersive and diverse experience of nature and adventure in tourism, sea life with a wide area of around 3000 SQM and untapped manufacturing opportunities, Oman is truly a unique destination.

Under a very ambitious and visionary leadership, we strongly believe that now is the best time to exploit all opportunities and bridge the gaps. Oman invites you to be part of its extraordinary journey.

2022 Financial Reporting Season: Improvements in most sectors



KARL JACKSON

The writer is an Audit and Assurance Partner with Crowe Oman

The 2022 full year reporting season is now in full swing, with the MSX listed companies all reporting preliminary (pre-audited) results. Only Omantel is yet to report, as they need to wait for the results of their subsidiary in Kuwait.

Overall, we can witness an improvement in most sectors as the financial challenges from the Covid pandemic were replaced by a generally positive impact for Oman from the ongoing conflict between Russia and the Ukraine that has provided a stimulus to oil prices, on which a large proportion of the Oman economy is either

directly or indirectly heavily dependent.

In the Financial sector, we see the banks and leasing companies posting improved performance, primarily as a result of lower loan impairment charges, in addition to improved net interest income.

However, both of these drivers face potential headwinds, as the success of major loan restructures will only become apparent in 2023 and borrowing costs are projected to rise to reflect the global increase in borrowing costs following the US Fed decision to continually hike interest rates to arrest the rise in inflation.

The insurance companies have not had such an easy life.

Although their performance is flat, this masks the fact that increased returns from investment portfolios have compensated for poor returns from core insurance business, as they are finding it challenging to deliver premium income growth in the current operating environment, combined with increasing costs for re-insurance.

The improvement in the other category is due to a combination of DIDIC that benefited from the strong performance of its associate Bank Dhofar and from Ominvest that posted a profit of RO 49 million compared to just RO 29 million in the prior year, similarly as a result of the strong

performance of its subsidiaries and associates.

The Industrial sector, comprising of construction and manufacturing companies posted mixed results. In the lackluster construction sector, with little sign of major new contracts, the majority of companies have posted deteriorating results but the big story of the sector lies with Raysut Cement that was forced by the CMA to reconstitute its Board and restate its Q3 results, culminating in full year losses of RO 90 million, compared to losses of RO 14 million in the prior year.

The manufacturing companies have exhibited a very mixed story

with those escaping high input costs (such as Gulf Mushrooms, Oman Cables, Oman Chromite and Oman Chlorine) posting substantial profit increases, contrasting with those companies that rely heavily on imports that had to grapple with the challenge of higher imported raw materials prices brought about by the conflict between Russia and the Ukraine.

Oman Flour Mills were also detrimentally affected, with increases in wheat prices reducing profits to RO 2.3 million compared to RO 4.7 million in the prior year.

[This article is based on financial data published by the Muscat Stock Exchange]

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Lemdima: A cultural performance that brings joy to Omani sailors

Lemdima is an example of an amazing Omani art that traces back its origin to ancient games interspersed with traditional songs using several musical instruments. It is an art of entertainment for sailors, whether they are on board ships or by the coast... **P20**

Burberry's Lee stages an ode to British heritage in debut runway show

FAUX FUR, OVERSIZED coats and hot water bottles dominated Burberry's runway as Daniel Lee presented his vision for the British heritage label at London Fashion Week on Monday.

Set in a dark marquee in London's Kennington Park, Lee delivered a colourful take on Burberry's classic camel, black and red check as Burberry steps into a new era under his tenure.

The 37-year-old, Bradford, England-born chief creative officer drew inspiration from the brand's affinity

with exploration and the outdoors in his first collection for the fashion house, according to the show notes.

Silhouettes were oversized and soft around the edges across both women's and men's wear. Burberry's mackintosh-style trench coat was reimagined in a muted khaki with green faux fur lapels.

English rose patterned tailoring sat alongside chunky rubber boots with an equestrian twist and cosy square toed shearling and faux fur shoes in the



Autumn Winter 2023 collection.

There were also feather embellished outfits in autumnal tones and pleated tartan-inspired kilts over trousers.

A revamped version of the

Equestrian Knight design was blown up on blankets and dresses in blue and white.

Outfits were accessorised with hot water bottles, fuzzy trimmed bags and

big scarves.

There was a notable absence of big-name models walking, in contrast with previous Burberry events that have seen the likes of Bella Hadid sashay on the catwalk.

Actor Jude Law's daughter Iris, and singer-songwriter Liam Gallagher's son Lennon both walked Monday's runway.

Lee's outfits are key to Chief Executive Jonathan Akeroyd's aim to move the 167-year-old brand more upmarket and attract younger consumers. Monday's show follows the unveiling of Burberry's new logo: a sleeker elongated typeface and a campaign steeped in "Britishness".

The "Burberry Classics" preview campaign released earlier this month, the first under Lee's creative direction, brought back a redesign of the brand's Equestrian Knight motif and featured British celebrities including soccer star Raheem Sterling, rapper and MC Skepta and actress Vanessa Redgrave.

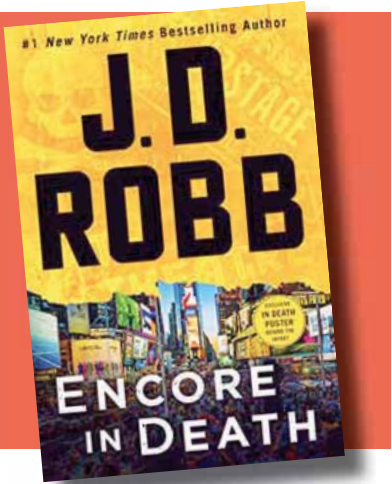
Lee previously created a buzz at Italy's Bottega Veneta with pillowy leather clutch handbags and slip-on heels. He replaced Ricardo Tisci last year. — Reuters

READ

ENCORE IN DEATH

BY J.D. ROBB

The 56th book of the In Death series. Eve Dallas investigates the mysterious death of a well-loved star of stage and screen.



LIFESTYLE

A woman cuts coffee beans at the "El Encanto" farm in a mountain in Siguatepeque, Honduras. The "El Encanto" coffee farm, nestled on a high mountain in central Honduras, is working with half the pickers, mainly due to the migration of many of them to the United States in search of a better life. — AFP



ART

The portrait of Lisa Gherardini, wife of Francesco del Giocondo, known as the Mona Lisa or La Gioconda (La Joconde in French), painted by Italian artist Leonardo da Vinci, is displayed in la Salle des Etats of the Louvre Museum in Paris. Paint throws, flour, soup: recent targets of environmental activists, works of art in public museums are however not insured except in case of loan and displacement, unlike those exhibited in private institutions, according to specialists. — AFP





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AROUND THE WORLD

TRAVEL TALES

Britain returns trove of Angkor crown jewels to Cambodia



DOZENS OF PIECES of Angkorian crown jewellery stolen from Cambodia, many never seen by the public, have been returned after resurfacing in London, the Cambodian culture ministry said on Monday.

The trove includes crowns, necklaces, amulets and other treasures from the Angkor period, which ran from the ninth to 14th centuries AD, when the Khmer empire was a dominant force in southeast Asia.

The ministry said officials in Cambodia received the 77 pieces from the family of British antiquities dealer Douglas Latchford.

Latchford died in 2020 while awaiting trial in the United States for art trafficking, and his family reached an agreement with Cambodia the same year to return his collection of Khmer antiquities.

The collection, which arrived discreetly in Cambodia on Friday, features "gold and other precious metal pieces from the pre-Angkorian and Angkorian period including crowns, necklaces, bracelets, belts, earrings and amulets", the ministry said.



As Cambodia was ravaged by civil wars and a genocide by the Khmer Rouge regime in the 1970s, thousands of antiques were looted and sold through dealers in Thailand and Hong Kong to wealthy buyers and museums in Europe and the United States.

US prosecutors have been pushing to return many of the works in recent years.

In 2021, Cambodia received five lost stone and bronze artefacts from the Latchford family.

Last year, the United States also returned to Cambodia 30 looted antiquities, including bronze and stone statues of Buddhist and Hindu deities that were carved more than 1,000 years ago.

Cambodian Culture Minister Phoeurng Sackona appealed to individuals and museums around the world to return stolen artefacts to the country to contribute to the "reconciliation and healing of Cambodians who went through decades of civil war". — **AFP**

ART

Dutch show brings Escher's mind-bending world to life



A NEW EXHIBITION opening in The Hague on Saturday will make the mind-bending works of Dutch graphic artist M.C. Escher jump off the page into real life.

It comes as the city where most of his art is kept kicks off a year celebrating 125 years since his birth.

Called "Escher — Other World" the show at the Kunstmuseum combines the works of the Dutch master with architectural installations by Belgian art studio Gijs Van Vaerenbergh that 'bring Escher's weird world to life.

There's a sculpture by the duo with upside-down stairs and doors leading nowhere,

another room, there is a blue "tessellation maze" made of frames with layers, creating a pattern to the backdrop of Escher's longest woodcut print "Metamorphosis II".

"I think you'll really experience the themes that Escher loved so dearly," the exhibition's curator Judith Kadee said.

"You really have sort of a physical three-dimensional experience of what Escher loved so much," she said.

Kunstmuseum director Benno Tempel described it "as a mesmerising exhibition".

- 'NEW FORMS OF SPACE' -

The exhibit is divided into

forms of space and experiment, see how far we can push this".

Elsewhere in The Hague, visitors will still be able to visit the Escher in the Palace museum, which has a permanent collection of the Dutch master's work.

But it too has a special exhibition opening Saturday to mark the 125th anniversary of his birth: Escher's work will hang with that of his friend and mentor Samuel Jessurun de Mesquita, who is credited with having convinced him to switch from architecture to graphic art. Mesquita himself was deported with his wife and son to the Nazi death camps in



reflecting the famous columns and steps depicted in Escher's 1947 woodcut print "Other World (Another World)" in one hall. In another, visitors can experience a giant sculpture of a golden Gordian knot, representing the idea of eternity depicted in the knots drawn by Escher.

Elsewhere, visitors can see their reflections distorted by mirrors, representing Escher's depictions of spheres. And in

two categories that feature in M.C. Escher's work: day and night.

"DAY", the first part of the show, is in the museum's large daylight galleries. "NIGHT", the second part, exhibits some quirky themes around Escher's art in its side galleries. Arnout van Vaerenbergh, who with Pieterjan Gijs forms the art studio Gijs Van Vaerenbergh, said the idea was to "confront visitors with new

1944, where they perished.

In the coming months, the city is set to be "dressed up" in Escher's art as part of the anniversary celebrations, which climax on his birthday, June 17. In the autumn, another exhibit called "Just like Escher" will showcase contemporary artists and designers inspired by Escher's work.

"Escher - Other World" runs at the Kunstmuseum until September 10. — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

'Golda' director swats away criticism over casting Mirren



THE DIRECTOR OF "Golda" on Monday dismissed a controversy over casting Helen Mirren as Israel's only woman prime minister Golda Meir, saying the British Oscar winner had "Jewish chops".

Israel's Guy Nattiv told reporters at the Berlin film festival ahead of the movie's world premiere that it took only one conversation with Mirren to convince him she was "authentic" enough to play the iconic political leader.

"When I met Helen I felt like I'm meeting a family member," he said, saying he had been "surprised" by the uproar.

"She's got the Jewish chops to portray Golda. She totally got everything, every nook and cranny, everything in this character. Other than the fact that I adore Helen, I think she's one of the best actresses in the world."

Fellow British actor Maureen Lipman touched off the dispute when she told the Jewish Chronicle last year that she doubted the choice of Mirren, who is not Jewish, because she considered Meir's religion to be "integral" to her character.

- 'ABSOLUTELY TRAUMATISING' -

Mirren, who won an Academy Award in 2007 for her portrayal of Elizabeth II in "The Queen", at the time called the questions about being hired for the part "utterly legitimate".

But Nattiv said Mirren agreed that a focus on identity, a divisive issue in filmmaking, should only go so far.

"Helen said something very smart, she said 'OK so let's say only Jews can portray Jews but what about Jews... portraying (non-Jews) — is this not allowed anymore?'" he said.

"Around the world you can see that Israeli actors are in international shows and so for me as a Jewish Israeli director I had no problem (with Mirren playing Meir)."

Co-star Lior Ashkenazi said the question of authentic casting could be taken to absurd lengths, imagining a biopic about Jesus Christ. "Who's going to play him?"

Mirren quipped: "Well it won't be me."

Nattiv, whose short film "Skin" about American neo-Nazis won an Oscar in 2019, said he had taken care to ensure that most of the cast and crew was Israeli to steep the film in the nation's culture and history.

"Golda" shows Meir during the 1973 Yom Kippur War in which Egyptian and Syrian troops attacked on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. Nattiv called the conflict "Israel's Vietnam".

Mirren, who spent three hours in hair and makeup each morning to look like Meir, said taking the role had been educational.

"I didn't realise until we made the film what was the impact of the loss of this generation of young men on Israel because there were so few young men in Israel — it was a very young country," she said.

It was "just absolutely traumatising for this little country and Golda took the weight of that on her shoulders".

"She never tried to put the blame on anyone else," Mirren said. "She squarely faced it."

"Golda" is screening out of competition at the Berlin film festival, which runs until Sunday. — **AFP**

art & life

Local Scene

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WEDNESDAY | FEBRUARY 22 | 2023



Lemdima: A cultural performance that brings joy to Omani sailors

By Arwa Al Hashimi
Photos by Abdulrahman Al Kindi

Oman's intangible cultural heritage has connected the people of Oman to their past, present, and future giving them a sense of identity, continuity, and community. For the Omanis, there are a lot of cultural traditions that are passed on to younger generations and these practices are usually performed on different occasions.

Under the umbrella of Omani art belongs Oman's rich heritage of traditional songs, games, and music which has been attracting and entertaining a lot of people from countries around the world.

Lemdima is an example of an amazing Omani art that traces back its origin to ancient games interspersed with traditional songs using several musical instruments. It is an art of entertainment for sailors, whether they are on board ships or by the coast. They show off their skill in playing according to the principles, traditions, and systems inherited from their ancestors. It is most popular in South Al

Sharqiyah and North Al Batinah.

In this type of art, the sailors are organised in a circle led by the players of the Msindo drum, as well as the drummers of Al-Kaser and Al-Rahmani, and the drummer of the tank. Those are the most famous kinds of drums in Oman and they are originally and skillfully made by Omani Hands.

The game begins when the colonel points out to one of the sailors who come out of the row to perform a graceful jump after which he returns to his place in the row after pointing to another sailor to try to perform a better jump, and so on until the end of the game.

Dancing Lemdima requires great ingenuity in maintaining balance due to the difficulty of doing it while the ship is at the sea or over the sands of the coast in which the sailors' feet sink while they jump.

During the game, the colonel repeats a wonderful poetic text from one or two verses, and when he ends it, the rest of the participants repeat after him. The song is accompanied by playing traditional musical instruments, and the participants also

clap and enter to dance in the middle of the circle that they formed one by one. The poetic texts repeated in this art are a mixture of the Arabic and Swahili languages which shows the long and deep connection between these two different cultures.

The rhythm of Lemdima art consists of three parts determined by the Rahmani drum, followed by sharp beats of Al Kaser drum and deep beats that fluctuate the tone by Al Msindo drum.

The sailors masterfully diversify the forms of claps they produce, especially when they are divided into two teams, each clapping at a time opposite to the time of the other side. This gives a wonderful sense of excitement and makes the sailors cheered up.

Lemdima art is one of the most enjoyable parts for sailors that shortens their very long and exhausting trips and keeps them entertained. As for now, this art has a distinguished place along with Oman's Most famous intangible heritage forms. It represents the amazing culture of an amazing country that embraces a wide number of exciting arts.

