

P12

AL RAWAHI CLINCHES TITLE AT MENA KARTING



P13

OMAN RANKED 3RD IN ARAB REGION IN HYDROGEN RACE



P20

BAIT AL LAMBAH A RENOVATED ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECE



MUSCAT

HM RECEIVES THANKS FROM PHILIPPINES

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik received thanks from President Ferdinand Marcos Jr of the Republic of the Philippines in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable on victims of tropical storm Nalgae. President Ferdinand expressed his appreciation for His Majesty's heartfelt sympathies to him and the people of the Philippines.

SULTAN QABOOS AWARDS BOARD MEETS

The Board of Trustees of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature held a meeting on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Award.

The meeting reviewed the march of the Award through a presentation highlighting its editions, fields, winners, the accompanying media campaigns, events, activities, and cultural, artistic and literary programmes.

The meeting also discussed the mechanism of work progress during the upcoming period, as well as the areas of the 10th version 2023, which will be an Arab edition during which all Arabs will be able to compete for the Award.

SEE P2



INSIDE



No VAT increase, no income tax in 2023

ECONOMY TO GROW 4.5 PER CENT DESPITE GLOBAL HEADWINDS

VINOD NAIR & ONA

Muscat, Dec 20

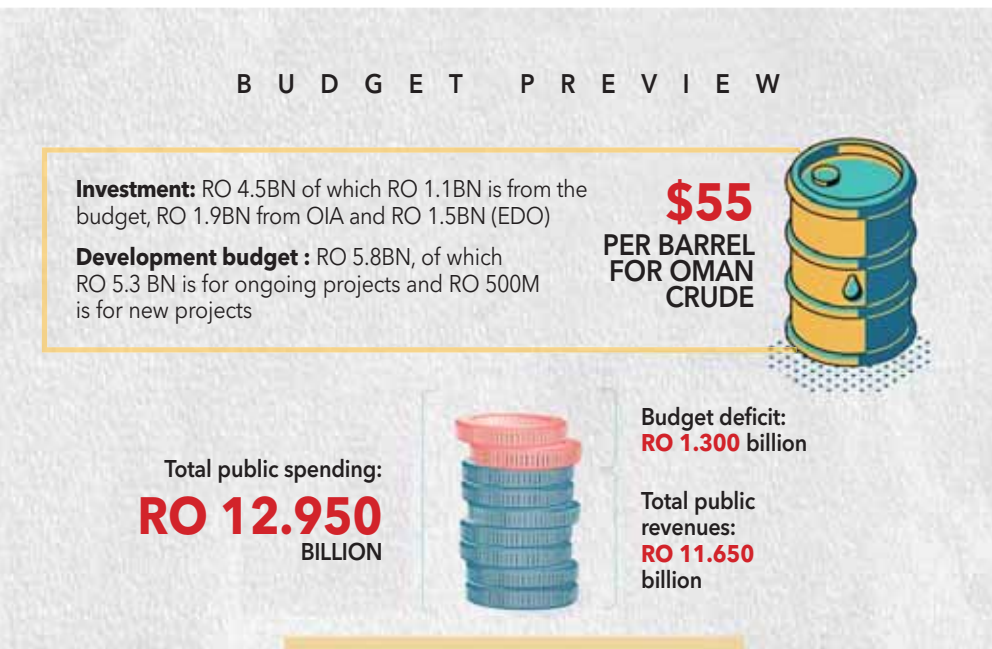
The government is neither planning to slap income tax in 2023 on high salaried individuals nor it will raise the value-added tax (VAT) beyond 5 per cent, Minister of Finance Sultan bin Salim al Habsi said on Tuesday.

The establishment of the Integrated Natural Gas Company is under consideration, which will operate on the lines of Energy Development Oman.

The public spending in 2023 budget to go up 7 per cent at RO 12.950 billion with deficit is estimated to be about RO 1.3 billion constituting 11 per cent of total revenues and 3 per cent of GDP.

Al Habsi said that global economic and geopolitical developments were taken into consideration when drafting the general state Budget 2023. He pointed out that Oman utilised the gains from excess in oil prices to cut down the public debt. As a result, the public debt was slashed from 70 per cent in 2020 to 43 per cent in 2022, he explained.

The government will begin implementing a programme of fiscal sustainability and the development of the financial sector through the creation of initiatives and projects, Al Habsi affirmed. He added that these initiatives and programmes will be conducted jointly with the Central Bank



of Oman (CBO) and the Capital Market Authority (CMA) to bolster the role of the banking sector in funding and investment—which will serve the goals of the National Programme for Achieving Fiscal Balance.

The minister pointed out that Oman managed to keep inflation within safe boundaries not exceeding 3 percent, thanks to a raft of policies designed to stem the impacts of the phenomenon.

He said that total subsidy in 2022 stood at RO 1.6 billion.

The state's general budget for 2023 has pegged oil price at \$55 per barrel.

The details were unveiled during a media presentation of the state's general budget for the year 2023, with the participation of several departments, including the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, and Oman Investment Authority.

Speaking at the briefing, Dr Nasser al Maawali, Under-Secretary, Ministry of Economy, said that the economy achieved remarkable growth rates due to the economic policies, structural reforms and the rise in prices of crude oil.

The Ministry of Finance said that the

total initial public revenues for the year 2023 will be about RO 11.650 billion, up 10 per cent from the approved budget for the year 2022.

The average rate of oil production is expected to rise to 1.175 million barrels per day, at an average price of \$55 per barrel for Oman crude. The oil price has been fixed considering the uncertainty facing global oil markets due to supply issues, the slowdown in the Chinese economy due to Covid-19 restrictions, and the potential global recession.

The government was able to control inflation and provided support for basic services, which was around RO 1.6 billion last year, and it will continue in the coming year. Despite the expectations of a decline in the growth of the global economy, the national economy is expected to grow by 5 per cent, driven by oil and non-oil activities.

The estimated investment expenditure for the year 2023 is RO 4.5 billion, of which RO 1.1 billion is from the budget, RO 1.9 billion is from the investments of the Omani Investment Authority, and RO 1.5 billion is from Energy Development Oman (EDO).

Estimates of the state's general budget until the end of 2022 indicate that the average price of oil is expected to reach \$94, bringing revenues to RO 14.234 billion and spending RO 13.88 billion, to record a financial surplus of RO 1.146 billion.

TURN TO P4

Jabal Shams registers sub-zero temperature

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

Jabal Shams recorded the lowest temperature in the Sultanate of Oman at less than 0.3 degrees Celsius on Monday night, according to Oman Meteorology.

Saiq (6.6 degrees Celsius), Maqshan (11.8 degrees Celsius) and Haima (13.6 degrees Celsius) also recorded low temperatures during the same period.

Night temperatures in Muscat, Suhar and Sur will continue to have temperatures under the 20s in the coming days.

Meanwhile, rain clouds continue to flow over parts of the governorates of Al Wusta, Dhofar, and South Al Sharqiyah, with chances of sporadic rain and clouds condensing on the coasts of the Sea of Oman and neighbouring areas, with the presence of fog on parts of the desert areas of the governorates of Al Dhahirah

and Al Buraimi. The Sultanate of Oman will experience winter solstice from Thursday, considered the first day of the winter season in the northern hemisphere.

LONGEST NIGHT

The phenomenon begins at 1:48 pm, Oman time, and it is thus the longest night and the shortest day of the year.

Speaking about the phenomenon, Rayan bint Said al Ruwaishdiyah, a member of the Oman Astronomical Society, said that Thursday is the shortest day of the year, and the night is the longest night in the calendar.

“The sun will rise in Muscat at 6:44 am and set at 5:25 pm Oman time.

THURSDAY SHORTEST

The day will be just 10 hours and 41 minutes long and it will be the first day of the winter season, which lasts 88 days, 23 hours and 36 minutes,” she added.

30 projects qualify for second round of Bilarab Award

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said presided over a meeting of the main committee of Bilarab bin Haitham Award for Architectural Design, in the presence of the jury panel, to follow up the latest developments in the second round of the award.

HH Sayyid Bilarab was briefed through a presentation on the work progress of the award. He also listened to a detailed explanation about the award's plan in a manner that contributes to achieving its goals and aspirations.

The jury panel reviewed during the meeting the projects participating in the second round of the award, which compete to design the Maritime History Museum in the Wilayat of Sur in the Governorate of South Al Sharqiyah.

HH Sayyid Bilarab was also briefed on the participating projects' most prominent artistic features, architectural perceptions, details and concepts.

Nominations submitted by the jury for the 30 projects that could qualify for the second sorting stage and means for their improvement



were also discussed.

He also expressed his satisfaction and admiration for the level reached by some projects. He praised the ideas and concepts that the youth relied on while building their perceptions. He also expressed his observations on some projects, and instructed the study of ways that enable their designers to develop their ideas within the project.

Later, HH Sayyid Bilarab also endorsed the 30 projects for the second stage of sorting.

Next week, the finalists will join a technical workshop with the aim of providing them with necessary architectural skills that can guide them to develop their current participation architecturally, and enabling them to reach the second sorting stage among the top 10 projects to compete for the first three positions in the second round of the Award. — ONA



Board of Trustees of Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture holds meeting

MUSCAT: The Board of Trustees of the Sultan Qaboos Award for Culture, Arts and Literature held a meeting on Tuesday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Award. The meeting reviewed the march of the Award through a presentation highlighting its editions, fields, winners, the accompanying media campaigns, events, activities, and cultural, artistic and literary programmes. The meeting also discussed the mechanism of work progress during the upcoming period, as well as the areas of the 10th version 2023, which will be an Arab edition during which all Arabs will be able to compete for the Award.

— ONA

Symposium on food security begins



MUSCAT: The national symposium titled “Food Security in the Sultanate of Oman in Light of Global Changes” began at Al Shafaq Club in Muscat on Tuesday. The three-day symposium is organised by the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, represented by the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies. Government, civil and private institutions are taking part in the event. The symposium comes as a continuation of the national efforts, strategic plans and previous executive initiatives aimed at ensuring the smooth flow of food supplies. It also comes in response to the current global situation and the changes that require careful foresight based on more serious, prudent discussions and well-thought studies at the national level. The opening ceremony of the symposium was held under the auspices of Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Head of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies. — ONA

Inflation at 2.06% in Nov

MUSCAT: The inflation rate of the Consumers Price Index (CPI) in the Sultanate of Oman stood at 2.06% during November 2022, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The data indicated a rise in the prices of main groups in November 2022 compared to November 2021, such as food and non-alcoholic beverages by 5.01%, restaurants and hotels by 4.02%, health by 3.82%, furniture, household equipment and routine household maintenance by 2.14%, miscellaneous goods and services by 1.65%, clothing and footwear by 1.48%, recreation and culture by 1.26%, housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels by 0.84%, transport by 0.55% and education by 0.05%. Meanwhile, inflation declined in the group of communications by 0.06%. Prices also went up for oils and fats by 19.98%, meats by 9.24%, milk, cheese and eggs by 7.24%, fruits by 5.75%, non-alcoholic beverages by 5.23%, bread and cereals by 4.59%, other foodstuff by 2.71% and sugar, jam, honey and sweets by 2.41%. Prices dropped in the main groups of vegetables by 3.48% and fish and seafood by 3.38%. As far as governorates are concerned, Al Buraimi recorded the highest inflation rate of 3.38%, followed by Al Dakhiliyah by 2.75%, Al Dhahirah by 2.21%, Muscat by 2.02%, North Al Batinah and South Al Batinah by 1.95%, North Al Sharqiyah and South Al Sharqiyah by 1.72% and Dhofar by 1.68%. — ONA



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SEASON 2022-2023

جهاز الضرائب
TAX AUTHORITY

Announcement

In order to facilitate the transactions of **all taxable persons**, the Tax Authority draws your attention to the need of issuing a valid tax card when contracting or dealing with Units of the Administrative Apparatus of the State and state-owned companies at more than **(40%)**. Taxpayers can get and renew the tax card through the Tax Authority's website:

www.taxoman.gov.om



Oman hosts GCC panel meet on Intl health regulations

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 20

The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Health, in coordination with the Secretariat-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council, is hosting a three-day 11th Meeting of the GCC Committee responsible to follow up the implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005).

The committee conducts scheduled field visits at airports and entry points at gulf countries in coordination with the authorities concerned in each country and does assessment of the basic capacities and the requirements of health regulations related to prevention, early warning and public health emergency response as per the World Health Organization checklist.

The meeting commenced on Tuesday at the Muscat International Airport. GCC Committee members joined the 'Implementation of the International Health Regulations and the Gulf Centre for Communicable Diseases Control in Gulf Health Council'. Representatives from MoH, Civil Aviation Authority, Royal Oman Police and Oman Airports attended the meeting.

The opening session was inaugurated by a speech of Dr Saif al Abri, MoH's Acting Under-Secretary for Health Affairs and Director-General of Disease Surveillance and Control, where he highlighted the preparedness and response efforts exerted by the country during Covid-19 pandemic, commending meanwhile the collaborative work observed from both the health sector and civil aviation sector in this regard.

Dr Al Abri called upon fostering joint actions among gulf countries and exchanging expertise and success stories.

The meeting further identified prominent pillars in the airport that will be evaluated according to WHO checklist.



Hospitality industry prepares for festive season boom



KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

With Christmas and New Year around the corner, hotels in Oman are geared up to tap the festive season, which will see several flights carrying tourists from regional and other destinations.

Hotels are ready with plans to woo the guests with offers ranging from price advantage to value addition and other benefits, shuttle service, pick and drop, hop-on and hop-off buses, etc.

Leading hotels in the Sultanate of Oman have reported a surge in online bookings for rooms of various grades.

"To name a few, we have a Christmas Eve Dinner where one can enjoy a dazzling celebration of culinary delights, from Gaucho Steakhouse assortments and international specialties to a delectable array of heavenly desserts and the New Year's Eve Gala Dinner that allows our guests to have an opulent gala dinner and enjoy the very best of our chef's shortlist both at a very reasonable price," said Samir Messaoudi, General Manager of Sheraton Oman Hotel.

For the hotels in Oman, Christmas decorations have been a part of the festive season tradition for many decades. This year the chefs had lots of fun when decorating the winter market at Sheraton Oman, using the recycled materials that one would

normally just put in the bin.

"We are currently 40 per cent busy but come next week, our occupancy will be 80 per cent, a double-digit growth, thanks to the festive season and better active economy and people's preferences for Oman's destinations," said Udayan Moodadi, MD of Golden Oasis Hotel in Wadi Kabir.

Avani Hotels, one of the newest additions in the hospitality sector, has already announced its exclusive offer with 30 per cent savings on spa and 20 per cent savings on dining, besides a complimentary one-time afternoon stay for a minimum of two continuous stays.

"We will also upgrade reservations made for a standard room to a superior room, and reservations made for the studio, one-bedroom apartment, two or 3-bedroom apartment will be honoured with 24-hour check-in flexibility instead of the standard check-in timing after 2 pm. Check-out timing will be based on a maximum of 24 hours from the time of check-in," said a representative from Avani Hotels.

In Salalah, hotels have several offers, including exciting benefits for residents who are looking to discover hidden gems across Salalah and rally their way into a world of adventure.

In celebration of the sparkling season, Alila Hinu Bay introduces 'Festive Journey', an invitation to collect beautiful memories over a

span of 12 days, blending natural discovery with indulgent dining, signature pampering treatments at Spa Alila and dazzling winter celebrations.

"Guests can escape the hustle and bustle of city life and head to a harbour of undisturbed luxury and adventures at Alila Hinu Bay," Juan Paulo Alphonso, General Manager of Alila Hinu Bay resort, said.

He further added that this Xmas and new year season, guests can also savour festive international dishes with a modern twist and enjoy unrivalled gastronomy at The Orchard Restaurant or embark towards the flavours of South-East at SeaSalt Restaurant.

"For families, there is plenty to keep the little ones entertained including Festive Cookie Decoration Workshops, Paper Aeroplane Competition, Sack Race Games, Musical Chairs and Tug-of-War, among others," he added.

DOMESTIC TOURISM

Keeping pace with the international tourism hype, Oman's domestic tourism too is all set to welcome a large chunk of tourists moving domestically from one tourist spot to the next and from one destination to the other.

Citizens and residents are looking forward to visiting the various local destinations, which are a short drive away, immersing in the historical museums and

basking in the sunlight of Jabal Shams, taking a dip in the blue turquoise water of Sharqiyah, and spending a holiday in the misty Dhofar.

"Domestic tourism will be highly benefited during the first festive season, Xmas and New Year as there is a sense of 'revenge travel' happening across the world," said an IATA representative.

"This great demand for domestic tourism which is visible across the globe will too be complemented by the people's reluctance to travel to some other countries which are reporting Covid eruption again," she added.

Underlining what experts said, the local destinations are readying themselves to the expectations of local tourists comprising different nationals.

All the amenities located around the major tourist destinations, from deserts to caves, from sand dunes to beaches, and from parks to taxis to coffee shops, are sprucing up to embrace the festive season and offer unmatched value-added services to the yearning visitors.

"We are excited to welcome the first batches of domestic tourists from different parts of the country. We are all decked up, and the services will be unique," a representative of a themed restaurant on the Muttrah Corniche, which is frequented by hundreds of domestic tourists, said.

SAI participates in anti-graft meeting of OIC

JEDDAH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Audit Institution (SAI), is participating in the first ministerial meeting of anti-corruption law enforcement authorities in the member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the ministerial meeting of the GCC anti-corruption law enforcement institutions, which are being held in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Oman's delegation is headed in the two meetings by Shaikh Ghosn bin Hilal al Alawi, SAI Chairman.

Shaikh Ghosn al Alawi delivered Oman's speech at the meeting during which he expressed Oman's appreciation for all efforts at the regional and international levels to enhance integrity, exchange experiences and cooperation in the areas of enforcement of anti-corruption laws.

He also stressed Oman's keenness to effectively contributing with the international community in aspects related to the relevant joint action.

Al Alawi underscored the importance of international conventions in coordinating efforts and achieving complementarity in cooperation activities and exchanging information. He also reviewed some aspects related to Oman's efforts in the areas of enhancing integrity.

The two-day meetings review ways of cooperation among anti-corruption agencies, evaluate the efforts made in this regard and identify the deficiencies and challenges. Recommendations for development and improvement will be put forward during the meetings. — ONA



Focus on improving standing in Global Innovation Index

MUSCAT: The technical committee tasked with the project for improving Oman's performance in the Global Innovation Index held its first periodic meeting on Tuesday during which it discussed various aspects of the project and cooperation with the departments concerned, including the National Competitiveness Office and Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Hadabi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry



of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation, Head of the committee, chaired the meeting,

which also considered devising a national plan for the improvement of Oman's performance in the Global

Innovation Index.

The Global Innovation Index, issued by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

since 2007, is aimed at helping policy makers around the world improve their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of

their national innovation systems. It also seeks to define ways to draft informed approaches to national policies.

Outcomes of the Global Innovation Index for the year 2022 shows that Oman ranked 79th globally among 132 countries evaluated in the report. Oman's highest performance was in the "human capital and research" segment, while the country's lowest performance was in the "business environment" category. — ONA

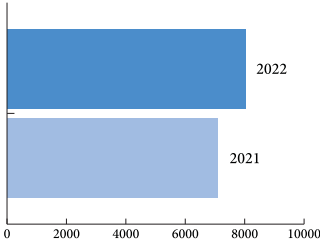


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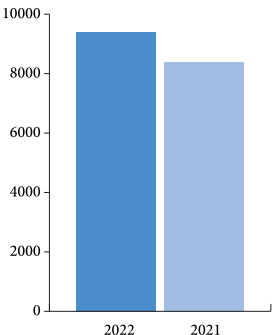
DEVELOPMENT BUDGET ESTIMATES
AMOUNT TO RO 5.8 BILLION



 Natural gas activities increased by 4.7% from RO 1,302.6 million to RO 1,364.1 million



Crude oil activities contributed to the GDP by RO 8,040.5 million by the end of September 2022 compared to RO 7,091 million by the end of September 2021



Oil sector grows 12% to stand at RO 9,404.6 million compared to RO 8,393.6 million as at the end of September 2021.



Service activities went up by 5% from RO 11,474.5 million by the end of September 2021 to reach RO 12,048.3 million by the end of September 2022

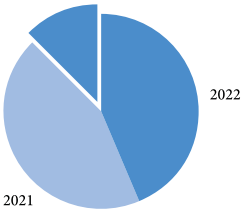
 Agriculture, forestry and fishing, and industrial activities decreased by 8.2 per cent and 4.7 per cent respectively



Construction activities recorded a decline by 24.8% from RO 2,311.5 million by the end of September 2021 to RO 1,738.1 million by the end of September 2022



Residency and food services followed with a surge by 21.3 per cent, to stand at RO 503,100,000 by the end of September 2022 compared to RO 414,800,000 by the end of September 2021



The growth in non-oil activities recorded the highest increase during the first 9 months of 2022, going up by 28.4 per cent from RO 1,093.4 million to RO 1,403.2 million.

GDP GROWS 4.5%

THE Sultanate of Oman's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at fixed prices increased by 4.5 per cent by the end of September 2022 to hit RO 26,279.2 million compared to RO 25,156.9 million during the corresponding period in 2021, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Statistics indicated that this rise is attributed to the growth in oil activities at the end of September 2022 by 12 per cent to stand at RO 9,404.6 million compared to RO 8,393.6 million as at the end of September 2021. Among oil activities, crude oil activities constituted the largest growth (13.4 per cent).

Crude oil activities contributed to the GDP by RO 8,040.5 million by the end of September 2022 compared to RO 7,091 million by the end of September 2021. Natural gas activities increased by 4.7 per cent from RO 1,302.6 million to RO 1,364.1 million.

Non-oil activities rose by 1.6 per cent from RO 17,430.6 million by the end of September 2021 to stand at RO 17,703.4 million by the end of September 2022.

Service activities went up by 5 per cent from RO 11,474.5 million by the end of September 2021 to reach RO 12,048.3 million by the end of September 2022.

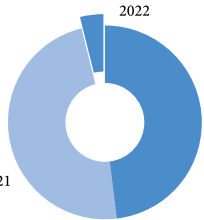
Meanwhile, activities of agriculture, forestry and fishing, and industrial activities decreased by 8.2 per cent and 4.7 per cent respectively.

The growth in non-oil activities is attributed mainly to the activities of transport and storage, which recorded the highest increase during the first 9 months of 2022, going up by 28.4 per cent from RO 1,093.4 million to RO 1,403.2 million.

Moreover, activities of residency and food services followed with a surge by 21.3 per cent, to stand at RO 503,100,000 by the end of September 2022 compared to RO 414,800,000 by the end of September 2021.

Activities of mining and utilising quarries rose by 7.8 per cent from RO 188,100,000 in September 2021 to RO 202,700,000 by the end of September 2022.

On the other hand, construction activities recorded a decline by 24.8 per cent from RO 2,311.5 million by the end of September 2021 to RO 1,738.1 million by the end of September 2022. Fishing activities also dropped by 23 per cent from RO 280,200,000 to RO 215,700,000 by the end of September 2022. — ONA



Activities of mining and utilising quarries rose by 7.8% from RO 188,100,000 in September 2021 to RO 202,700,000 by the end of September 2022.

FROM PAGE 1
Foreign direct investments in the Sultanate grew to reach about RO 17.9 billion by the end of Q2 2022, benefiting from the initiatives and procedures established to attract investment.

The Ministry of Economy said that the total development expenditures from the beginning of the tenth five-year plan (2021-2025) until the end of November 2022 amounted to RO 2.029 billion.

The Ministry of Economy said the most prominent new projects for the year 2023 are the construction of 15 schools in various governorates, the construction of health centres in some wilayats, the implementation of a few dual and service roads, natural parks and dams, and the establishment of a fishing port in the Wilayat of Mahout.

Oman Investment Authority will spend RO 1.9 billion for business ventures in 2023, including expanding and enhancing existing projects, completing under-construction projects, and developing new projects.

The Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) said that 35 new regulations have been issued to improve the business environment during the 2020-2022 period.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, said: "Inflation is expected to be in the range of three per cent, due to government measures to subsidise the fuel prices, basic services and foodstuffs, and to secure basic food commodities."

The Strategic Programmes approved as part of the 10th five-year plan are being implemented at an accelerated pace and development allocations in 2022 were directed to Musandam Gas Plant, construction of a passenger terminal at Muscat International Airport and new hospitals, and financing scholarship and housing programmes.

The development budget estimates for the year 2023 amount to RO 5.8 billion, of which RO 5.3 billion is for ongoing projects (with an overall completion rate of 60 per cent as of November 22) and RO 500 million is for new projects.

Infrastructure projects had the largest proportion of the development allocations for the 10th five-year plan until November 2022.

This includes the allocations directed to governorates' development projects and the Al Batinah Coastal Road project.

The Ministry of Finance is embarking on restructuring Oman Development Bank (ODB) so that it could play a greater role in terms of volume of funding rendered to private sector companies and small and medium enterprises (SMEs).



Oman supports stable Iraq

AMMAN: Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, headed Oman's delegation participating in the 2nd edition of Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership, which was held in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, in the presence and patronage of King Abdullah II Ibn Al Hussein of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, President Emmanuel Macron of the French Republic, and Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani, Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq.

The conference aims to consolidate cooperation side by side with the Republic of Iraq in facing challenges, enhancing security and stability, combating

terrorism, and backing its efforts in achieving economic development and reconstruction.

Sayyid Badr underscored in his speech the importance of the conference in exchanging views and consultations on the over-all challenges facing the region and the world at large in a bid to achieve the desired positive cooperation among countries. He also affirmed the solidarity and support of the Sultanate of Oman to the Republic of Iraq.

The minister also touched on the importance of cooperation in climate change issues as well as the efforts of Oman within the framework of the national strategy to combat climate change and pressing ahead to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. — ONA

RAM launches Public Policies and Strategic Planning programme

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) on Tuesday launched a programme titled "Public Policies and Strategic Planning", which is aimed at preparing national leaders and executives in the field of drafting, implementing and drawing up strategic policies. The programme targets under-secretaries and general managers at units of the State's Administrative Apparatus.

Dr Ali bin Qasim al Lawati, Chairman of the Royal Academy of Management, said that the programme seeks to contribute to establishing an innovative administrative apparatus that is capable of devising smart future policies.

On his turn, Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, said that the programme offers an opportunity to explore the experiences of top executives tasked with strategic



planning and drafting general policies of relevance to Oman Vision 2040.

The programme has been initiated in conjunction with international institutions like the Civil Service College, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in

Singapore and the International Institute for Management Development in Switzerland.

The programme operates in two parallel tracks. The first is dedicated to under-secretaries and it comprises eight units in the formulation of public and

strategic policies. It will run until March 2023.

The second track, which targets general managers, comprises nine units in the formulation of general policies and strategic planning. It will run till May 2023. — ONA

Oman and Jordan review military matters

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 Murtafa'a on Tuesday Brig Kayid Jamal al Ja'arat, Head of Military Training of the Armed Forces at the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The two sides exchanged views and reviewed several military matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by the military attaché of the Jordanian Embassy in Muscat and several SAF senior officers.

MEETING WITH NDC COMMANDANT

Rear Admiral Ali bin Abdullah al Shidi, Commandant of the National Defence College (NDC) at the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, also received Brig Al Ja'arat.

The two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest.

The guest was briefed on



the college's facilities and equipment, as well as its various departments and halls designed according to the latest specifications and equipped with the best educational systems, training aids and multi-purpose electronic network systems.

The meeting was attended by Brig Nasser bin Rashid al Kalbani, Deputy Commandant of the NDC, the military attaché of the Jordanian Embassy in Muscat and several NDC officers.

Meanwhile, Maj Gen Hamid bin Ahmed Sakroon, Head of the Academy for Strategic and Defence Studies, also received in his office at Bait Al Falaj Brig Al Ja'arat.

The two sides discussed several matters of mutual interest.

The meeting was attended by officials from the academy and the military attaché of the Jordanian Embassy in Muscat. — ONA

MoC signed to improve design skills of Omani youth

MUSCAT: The National Employment Programme (NEP) signed a memorandum of cooperation (MoC) with Bara'ah Academy for the qualification and skill development in designing.

The MoC is aimed at the training and qualification of Omani graduates of designing, architecture, internal designing, graphic designing and associated disciplines.

As per the MoC, Bara'ah Academy should provide specialised training courses for the graduates in the fields of industrial design, commercial design, designing of products, analytical services of lighting and power jewellery and furniture design all of which are part of the specialised commercial sectors of the



Omani local market.

The MoC was signed by Khalid bin Salim al Ghammari, head of capacity-building at NEP, and Said bin Sultan al Shethani, CEO of Bara'ah Academy.

Within the framework of the MoC, the NEP, in

collaboration with Bara'ah Academy, conducted a specialised technical workshop in interior design for a number of job-seekers. During the workshop, the participants presented artworks inspired by the Omani nature and culture

utilising local materials.

Commenting on the signing of the MoC, Khalid bin Salim al Ghammari, head of capacity-building at NEP, affirmed that the MoC is part of efforts being made by the NEP in the training and qualification of Omani youth to keep pace with the modern technological developments to enable them to join the labour market.

Said bin Sultan al Shethani, CEO of Bara'ah Academy, explained that the academy is seeking to improve the capacities of Omani youth by training and qualifying them in various fields of design in line with the national plans to foster the principles of governance, sustainability, leadership and innovation.

Workshop on improving efficiency

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology today held a workshop to review the performance of the transport sector for 2022.

The workshop aims to discuss and review performance features for 2022, as well as improvement initiatives and goals for 2023.

During the workshop, internal challenges related to the progress of work, follow-up and management of project performance were discussed, in addition to reviewing the internal work procedures in the transport sector and how to overcome work bureaucracy. Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, and Eng Khamis bin Mohammad al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport participated in the workshop. — ONA

MOORE STEPHENS LLC
NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF GRAND AUTO SERVICE WORKSHOP LLC
(AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1472)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Grand Auto Service Workshop LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1045510, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Members on 29 November 2022. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

Office No.41, 4th Floor, Building No. 1022, Way No. 1013; Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within six months from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Grand Auto Service Workshop LLC
(Under voluntary liquidation)

**Sultan Qaboos University**
ANNOUNCEMENT

Sultan Qaboos University announces their desire to sell used furniture and their in sealed envelopes. Those wishing to enter the auction must adhere to the following conditions:

- Interested parties can view used furniture in auction stores and receive the bidding on Sunday and Monday 25-26/12/2022 from 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.
- Deposit of (200) Omani riyals in cash as an insurance. This amount will be refunded to the unsuccessful bidders.
- Submitting the offer in a sealed envelope after viewing the used furniture, entitled by the name of the head of the committee for selling used furniture, and put the envelope in bid box.
- The presented offer is binding on its owner if it is placed on it, and in the event that the buyer does not pay the purchase price on time, the insurance amount will be forfeited, and the sale will be awarded to another applicant.
- Those who win the bidding will be contacted. They must pay the remaining sum, and they are responsible for moving their items on Wednesday and Thursday 28-29/12/2022 from 09:00 am to 03:00 pm.
- The used furniture are sold in their current condition, and SQU is not responsible for any loss or damage to the sold material if the moving is not completed after the end of the sale, and (10) Omani riyals will be imposed for each day after 01/01/2023.

Notes:

- Prices are sorted according to groups and the higher price is taken.
- Funds will be collected electronically through visa cards.
- Entering the auction stores through Gate No. (2).
- For more information, please contact 24141272.





Six dead as Thai navy continues search for missing marines

BANG SAPHAN: Thailand's military mobilised helicopters, warships and unmanned drones off its central coast on Tuesday as rescue teams raced against time to find survivors after a navy corvette sank at the weekend in choppy waters.

One marine was rescued alive on Tuesday from the waters of the Gulf of Thailand, the navy said, among dozens who were forced to abandon the HTMS Sukhothai late on Sunday after it was knocked over by four-metre waves and strong winds. Five were found dead.

There were 24 marines still unaccounted for by Tuesday evening. Some were without life vests.

"The latest person was found 41 hours from when the ship sank and he was alive. So we believe that there are those still alive out there... we will continue to search," said Admiral Chonlathis Navanugraha, the navy's chief of staff.

Vice Admiral Pichai Lorchusakul, the regional navy commander, said finding the men on Tuesday would be critical given their time exposed to the elements.

Helicopters, two unmanned surveillance aircraft, four warships and a C130 transport plane were deployed to find the marines as weather conditions improved.

The vessel had suffered an engine malfunction as it took on water and went down about 20



Royal Thai Navy Commander-in-Chief Choengchai Chomchoengpaet and Rear Admiral Chonlathis Navanugraha (R) at a press conference in Bangkok as military rescue teams continued their search for survivors after the sinking of the HTMS Sukhothai warship in the Gulf of Thailand. — AFP

Helicopters, two unmanned surveillance aircraft, four warships and a C130 transport plane were deployed to find the marines as weather conditions improved

nautical miles off Prachuap Khiri Khan province.

The US-made corvette, in use since 1987, was carrying 105 military personnel.

Most on board were rescued before the boat sank but dozens had to abandon ship in rafts and life jackets.

Lieutenant Colonel Pichitchai Tuannadee, captain of the sunken ship, said he was in the sea for two hours before he scrambled on to a raft and was found by search teams on Monday.

"To see something as small as a life ring or a person's head above the surface of the water, it's very hard to see with the big waves," he said, adding that the missing sailors were likely to be fatigued by now from having to tread water and make sure those without vests stayed afloat. "He was floating in the water for 10 hours.

He was still conscious, so we could take him out of the water safely," said Captain Kraipich Korawee-Paparwit, commander of the HTMS Kraburi, one of search vessels. Relatives of the missing gathered at rescue centres awaiting news of loved ones.

Malinee Pudphong, aunt of missing marine Saharat Esa, said she spoke to her nephew by phone before the boat went down and was shocked to hear he did not get a life jacket. — Reuters

Pakistan army frees hostages, kills all fighters, says defence minister

PESHAWAR: Pakistani security forces on Wednesday killed all fighters who had taken over a counter-terrorism centre two days after they had held security officers and detainees hostages at the northwestern facility, defence minister said.

Khawaja Asif told parliament that all the hostages had been rescued by the Pakistani army, who also lost two elite services commandos in the operation.

Security forces had earlier launched the operation to free the hostages from the Pakistani Taliban who snatched interrogators' weapons and took them captive on Sunday.

Six security officials and several detainees had been inside the centre, multiple sources told Reuters. They declined to be identified because they were not authorised to speak to the media.

Several army soldiers were also wounded in the operation, Asif said.

Security forces had surrounded the military district in which the centre is located, where about 20 fighters from the Pakistani Taliban, known as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), were holed up.

Pakistani authorities on Monday opened talks to try to resolve the stand-off. — Reuters



Pakistani soldiers stand guard on a road leading to the cantonment area in Bannu. — Reuters

Jordan hosts ME summit in bid to defuse regional tensions

SWEIMEH: Jordan was hosting a Middle East summit on Tuesday, bringing together regional and international players hoping to help resolve regional crises, particularly in neighbouring Iraq.

The "Baghdad II" meeting, which also includes officials from France and the European Union, follows an August 2021 summit in Iraq's capital organised at the initiative of French President Emmanuel Macron.

Iraq only recently arrived at a fragile compromise government after a year of political stalemate.

The summit, held at Sweimeh on the shores of the Dead Sea, was aimed at providing "support for the stability, security and prosperity of Iraq", the French presidency said in a statement, adding it hoped this would benefit "the entire region".

The meeting takes place as



Dignitaries pose together in a family photo at the start of the 'Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership' in Sweimeh by the Dead Sea shore in central-west Jordan. — AFP

several countries in the region are mired in unrest.

The meeting was also being attended by the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, who has been mediating talks aimed at reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Borrell met with Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Tuesday ahead of the summit's official launch.

The European diplomat tweeted that the meeting was "necessary... amidst deteriorating Iran-EU relations" and that they agreed to keep communications open.

Baghdad II will see Jordan host Iraq's new Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani, Iran's foreign minister and delegations from Turkey and Saudi Arabia.

"This summit has great ambitions but no one expects miracles," says Riad Kahwaji, director of the Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis.

France's role as a mediator is crucial, Kahwaji said, with Paris "keeping the thread of dialogue on behalf of Westerners with Iran, especially as the Vienna nuclear negotiations are currently in stalemate".

In its statement, the French presidency said it hoped for "continuity" from the new Iraqi leader.

Hamzeh Hadad, a visiting scholar at the European Council on Foreign Relations, believes the first summit in 2021 had been intended to allow Kadhemi to show he could "gather neighbouring leaders, in particular the Gulf states, in Baghdad".

During this meeting, Sudani will have to demonstrate "he can maintain these relations and show that they do not depend on personal ties", Hadad said. — AFP

SYDNEY

Fiji has new govt after three parties form coalition

Fiji will have a new leader for the first time in 16 years after a national election resulted in three parties joining up to form a government in the Pacific island nation, dislodging Frank Bainimarama's Fiji First party.

The Social Democratic Liberal Party (SODELPA), a power-broker holding three seats in the hung parliament, announced it had decided to form a coalition with Sitiveni Rabuka's People's Alliance and the National Federation Party. The decision



came deliberations and rival presentations by former Prime Minister Bainimarama and the People's Alliance party, after an election resulted in a deadlock.

— Reuters

BARMAL DISTRICT

Afghan survivors get new homes after quake

Labourer Rasool Badshah has moved into a new home six months after a deadly earthquake rocked eastern Afghanistan, but without his mother, who was killed by collapsing walls.

More than 1,000 people were killed and tens of thousands made homeless after the 5.9-magnitude quake — the deadliest in Afghanistan in nearly a quarter of a century — struck the impoverished province of Paktika on June 22.

"When I reached here, my



mother, brothers, everyone was already buried," Badshah, 21, said explaining how he rushed back to his village from Pakistan, where he was working. — AFP

BEIJING

China's crematoriums struggle as Covid cases soar

Crematoriums across China said they were straining to deal with an influx of bodies, as the country battles a wave of Covid cases that authorities have admitted is impossible to track.

Hospitals are struggling and pharmacy shelves have been stripped bare in the wake of the Chinese government's sudden decision last month to lift nearly three years of lockdowns, quarantines and mass testing.

In Chongqing — a city of 30 million where authorities this



week urged people with "mild" Covid symptoms to go to work — one crematorium said they had run out of space to keep bodies. — AFP



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In brief

■ RAMALLAH/GAZA



SENIOR PALESTINIAN FIGHTER DIES OF CANCER IN JAIL

A senior Palestinian activist jailed for life by Israel, and who was cited by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in a speech to the United Nations, died of cancer on Tuesday.

Nasser Abu Hmaid, co-founder of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed wing of Abbas's Fatah movement, had been convicted of killing seven Israelis and planning other attacks. He was serving multiple life sentences and had been in prison since 2002.

In Ramallah, armed members of Abbas's Fatah faction rallied in the streets, some firing rifles into the air before they announced the formation of a new armed group. — **Reuters**

■ ABUJA



GERMANY HANDS OVER 20 LOOTED BENIN BRONZES TO NIGERIA

Germany has handed over 20 Benin Bronzes from its museums to Nigeria, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said on Tuesday, making it the latest European country to return cultural artefacts to their African homeland.

The handovers are the clearest sign yet of growing momentum towards the return of artefacts taken away from Africa by Europeans. Germany had agreed to start returning Benin Bronzes held in its museums last year. Earlier this year, Germany signed a declaration with Nigeria to release all 1,130 Benin Bronzes.

— **Reuters**

■ FERNDALE



STRONG QUAKE RATTLES NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

A strong 6.4-magnitude earthquake that struck off the coast of northern California rocked people awake, damaged a bridge, caused gas leaks and left thousands without power. The earthquake struck at 2:34 am local time and was about 16.1 km deep, the US Geological Survey (USGS) said.

It struck about 12 km west-southwest of Ferndale, California, a Humboldt County town that is home to about 15,000 people. Local media and others on social media reported numerous gas leaks, downed powerlines and at least one structure fire in Ferndale.

— **Reuters**

Three dead as blast shuts part of Russia-Ukraine gas pipeline

MOSCOW: A blast ripped through a gas pipeline in central Russia, killing three people and disrupting some of the limited amount of Russian gas that is still reaching Europe, local officials said on Tuesday.

The flow of gas through a section of the Urengoi-Pomary-Uzhhorod pipeline that takes gas from Russia's Arctic to Europe via Ukraine had been halted as of 1:50 pm, the local officials said on the Telegram messaging app.

Oleg Nikolayev, governor of the Republic of Chuvashia, told state TV that three people, who were carrying out servicing work, has died in the accident, while another, a driver, "was in a state of shock".

He said it was unclear when gas supplies via the pipeline could resume, and authorities were trying to work that out.

The Chuvashia regional Emergencies Ministry said an explosion had ripped through the pipeline during planned maintenance work near the village of Kalinino, about 150 km west of the Volga city of Kazan. It said the resulting gas flare had been extinguished.

The pipeline, built in the 1980s, enters Ukraine via the Sudzha metering point, currently the main route for Russian gas to reach Europe.

Europe's gas prices have surged this year after Russia cut exports through its main gas pipeline route into Germany, leaving only pipelines via Ukraine to ship Russian gas to European



Blaze from a ruptured gas pipeline near the village of Yambakhtino in the Chuvash Republic. — **Reuters**

consumers.

The head office of the state-owned gas producer Gazprom and its local branch did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Gazprom said earlier on Tuesday it expected to pump 43 million cubic metres of gas to Europe via Ukraine through Sudzha in the next 24 hours, a volume in line with recent days.

Ukraine President Zelensky visited troops in the frontline city of Bakhmut and thanked them for their 'courage, resilience and strength'

Forward prices on the Dutch TTF hub rose following the news. The benchmark TTF front-month contract was up 1.10 euros at 108.10 euro per megawatt hour by 1347 GMT.

It had traded around 105 euros/MWh earlier in the day.

Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin said the situation in Russian-held parts of Ukraine was "extremely difficult" while

his Ukrainian counterpart drove home the message by visiting a frontline town that Russia has long tried and failed to capture.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky visited troops in the frontline city of Bakhmut on Tuesday and thanked them for their "courage, resilience and strength" in one of the main hotspots of the war in Ukraine.

— **AFP/Reuters**

UK ministers warned as healthcare staff strike

LONDON: British health sector bosses warned the government on Tuesday of the risk to patient safety from a wave of industrial action as ambulance workers prepared to walk out and nurses threatened further strikes in a dispute over pay.

Around 100,000 nurses went on strike on Tuesday for the second time in a week as their union issued an ultimatum to the government to respond to pay demands within 48 hours or face another round of industrial action in January.

Ambulance staff in England and Wales are set to follow suit on Wednesday and December 28, leaving those with all but the most life-threatening conditions to make their own way to hospital.

"We cannot guarantee patient safety, we cannot avoid risks in the context of this industrial action," Matthew Taylor, chief executive of the NHS Confederation which represents national health service organisations, told BBC Radio.

"We are worried about the risks tomorrow but with the possibility of further strikes developing as winter unfolds ... we are entering into a very dangerous time. This is why we are upping even more our call to the government and to the trade unions to try to find a way of resolving this dispute."

The strike by nurses is unprecedented in the Royal



NHS nurses hold placards during a strike amid a dispute with the government over pay outside St Thomas' Hospital in London. — **Reuters**

Patient safety cannot be guaranteed, industry body says as striking nurses seeking above-inflation pay increase

College of Nursing (RCN) union's 106-year history, but it says it has no choice as the soaring cost of living leaves workers struggling to make ends meet.

The RCN says its members' real-term earnings have fallen by 6 per cent in the last decade and has called for a pay rise of 5 per cent above the RPI rate of inflation, which stood at 14 per

cent in November.

The government awarded nurses around 4 per cent on average, on the recommendation of an independent pay review body, and has declined to discuss pay further. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak says the nurses' demands are unaffordable.

"I will negotiate with him at any point to stop nursing staff and patients going into the new year facing such uncertainty," RCN head Pat Cullen said. "But if this government isn't prepared to do the right thing, we'll have no choice but to continue in January."

A YouGov poll published on Tuesday found two thirds of Britons support the nurses' strike, with 63 per cent backing action by ambulance staff. — **Reuters**

US Congress to advance \$1.66 trillion govt funding bill

WASHINGTON: Democrats and Republicans in the US Congress were moving forward with a \$1.66-trillion government funding bill, scrambling to pass the measure, which includes record military spending, before temporary funding runs out at the end of the week.

The total funding proposed by the bill is up from the approximately \$1.5 trillion appropriated the previous year.

The sweeping bill includes other measures agreed on by negotiators from both parties, including a ban on the use of TikTok on government-owned devices and of Congress's role in certifying elections, an attempt to avoid a repeat of the violence of January 6, 2021.

Leaders in the Senate and the House of Representatives aim to pass the bill and send it to Democratic President Joe Biden by the end of the week to ensure no interruptions to the government's activities.

Failure to pass the package could bring a partial government shutdown beginning on Saturday, just before Christmas, and possibly lead into a months-long stand-off after Republicans take control of the House on January 3, breaking the grip of Biden's Democrats on both chambers of Congress. Included in the bill



is \$44.9 billion in emergency assistance to Ukraine and Nato allies and \$40.6 billion to assist communities across the United States recovering from natural disasters and other matters.

This would be on top of the record \$858 billion in military spending for the year, which is up from last year's \$740 billion and also exceeds Biden's request.

Democrats and Republicans alike had aimed to tuck as many legislative wish-list items as possible into the "omnibus" bill funding the government through the end of this fiscal year on September 30, 2023, without derailing the whole package.

Negotiators worked through the weekend to put the finishing touches on the bill, which still could be amended by the full House or Senate. — **Reuters**

Myths and benefits of frankincense



Dr Nisma Haris

The writer is a general physician and content creator

Without a peck of doubt, Dhofar is a place where nature has rolled out its bounties splendidly and abundantly to benefit from. Frankincense, being one of those bounties gets this region attributed as “The Land of Frankincense”. One who lives in Dhofar or even visits cannot keep himself aloof from the tremendous health benefits frankincense has to offer. Frankincense, is a resin or milky white sap derived from the frankincense or Boswellia trees smelling like pine, woody, or lemon scents. After the sap has dried for a few days, it is scrapped to be processed into frankincense oil. Various studies conducted so far indicate the role of frankincense in maintaining gut health by reducing

inflammation. Likewise, because of its anti-inflammatory properties, it also helps to alleviate symptoms of arthritis as it contains a potent anti-inflammatory compound (Boswellic acid). Frankincense also has a role to play in certain respiratory conditions such as asthma and bronchitis. As per the study published in the European review for medical and pharmacological sciences, “people who took a daily supplement of 500 mg Boswellia extract in addition to their standard asthma treatment were able to take fewer inhalations of their regular medications during the 4-week study.” Frankincense besides, enhances

THERE ARE VARIOUS TYPES OF RESEARCH GOING ON WORLDWIDE THAT SHEDS LIGHT ON THE ANTI-CANCEROUS PROPERTIES OF FRANKINCENSE

oral health due to the presence of constituents that has anti-bacterial properties. Moreover, there are various types of research going on worldwide that shed light on the anti-cancerous properties of frankincense. In addition, frankincense oil too is loaded with numerous advantages and is used widely cosmetically and

topically. Because of its therapeutic properties, frankincense oil help in speedy wound healing, relieving itchiness, redness, and swelling. Are there any myths related to frankincense? The list is quite long when it comes to the pluses of frankincense. However, not all claims are true and the absence of proper scientific backing turns these claims into myths. no concrete piece of evidence suggests that frankincense help prevent diabetes or heart disease. Likewise, reducing stress, anxiety, and depression levels have shown to decrease in mice but more evidence is needed to showcase this in humans. In enhancing fertility, regulating hormones, or relieving

PMS (Premenstrual Syndrome) symptoms, the studies are limited and cannot be solely relied upon. How to use it? It can be ingested as a supplement, inhaled as an essential oil in aromatherapy, or can be applied on the skin in the form of creams or lotions. Oils should not be directly inhaled or ingested but diluted with carrier oils like coconut oil etc. Generally, it is safer to use. However, in pregnancy or under some drug therapy it is better to consult a health professional. Irrevocably, no household in Dhofar has ever been exclusive of frankincense that has been burned profusely as a natural disinfectant and deodoriser.

London Arabic bookshop to shut after 45 years

MARIE HEUCLIN

Salwa Gaspard gazes fondly at the hundreds of Arabic-language books displayed on dark wooden shelves, putting some back in place while exchanging a few words with customers. In just a few days’ time, her London bookshop, known to literary enthusiasts throughout the Middle East, will close for good. Al Saqi Books is another victim of the pandemic, and the economic upheaval in the UK and Lebanon, from where Gaspard and her husband Andre’s publishing house prints and ships most of its books. Since they opened the bookshop in a white colonnaded building not far from Paddington railway station in west London in 1978, it has become a must-see for visitors from the Middle East. “They would go to Oxford Street (the main shopping street), to Knightsbridge (the area around the famous Harrods shop) and to Al Saqi,” she said. In Arabic, Al Saqi means a water carrier in the desert, the 74-year-old bookseller said, describing it as a “perfect name”. “We thought it was a very nice name for a bookshop, because we were carrying Arabic culture,” she added. The bookshop also sells English-language publications on the Arab world “to give them a different idea of the Middle East, which is not about the violent images they see on TV, or they read in the newspaper”, she said. The bookshop’s success helped the couple to set up a publishing company, initially translating Arab works into English, such as “The Crusades Through Arab Eyes” by French-Lebanese author Amin Maalouf. For more than 40 years, many writers have come to the London bookshop to present their works, including Syrian poet Adonis. It also became a meeting place, even a “refuge”, for those uprooted by conflict and turmoil in the Middle East. But Al Saqi Books always fiercely defended its independence and open-mindedness. “It was like a safe haven. But also it was like they felt they were with friends who could understand them, because we all understood what was happening,” said Gaspard. Even though the owners have always been careful to stay out of politics, the bookshop has not escaped the jolts of geopolitics. In 1988, when Salman Rushdie’s “The Satanic Verses” was published, the bookshop’s window was smashed. But Gaspard said: “We never believed in censorship... we didn’t want to ban anything.” The couple were also attacked when they published Abba Eban’s translation of a work by the Egyptian author Tawfiq al Hakim. — AFP

Ukraine says Russia is training soldiers for possible new offensive



Andrew E Kramer

The author is a reporter covering the countries of the former Soviet Union

Ukraine is bracing for the possibility that Russia will sharply escalate the war in a winter offensive as Moscow tries to turn the tide on the battlefield and limit political backlash at home, a senior adviser to President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Sunday. Despite suffering severe setbacks over the first 10 months of war, the Russian military is now laying plans for mass infantry attacks akin to the tactics employed by the Soviet Union during World War II, the adviser, Mykhailo Podolyak, said in emailed responses to questions. Podolyak’s comments came as Ukraine’s top military and political leaders have been warning in a series of recent interviews that Russia is massing troops and armaments to launch a renewed ground offensive by spring that very likely would include a second attempt to seize Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital. Russia has already drafted and is training soldiers who might be deployed in mass infantry attacks, Podolyak said. It is one of several possible threats that Ukraine faces from Russia over the winter months, he said, as officials in Kyiv see little sign that President Vladimir Putin of Russia is seeking an end to the war. “Russia’s political leadership clearly

UKRAINIAN OFFICIALS HAVE SAID THEY BASE THEIR ASSESSMENTS OF RUSSIA’S WAR AIMS ON THE FINDINGS OF THEIR MILITARY AND FOREIGN INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES AND ON CONSULTATIONS WITH ALLIES

refuses to acknowledge the tactical defeats that already took place and grasps at any, even the most illusory, chances to change the situation in its favour,” Podolyak said. Ukrainian officials have said they base their assessments of Russia’s war aims on the findings of their military and foreign intelligence agencies and on consultations with allies. In his comments, Podolyak said that Ukraine takes the risk of a fresh Russian offensive seriously and emphasised that its allies should understand this,



Parents and children take photos with Yevhen Vorobyov, who dressed as Saint Nicholas for a celebration in Mykolaiv, Ukraine.

too. As Western governments plan for future weapons transfers to Ukraine, he suggested, the equipment should match the future threats. “It is extremely important that our partners take these risks no less seriously,” he said. “Russia is not interested in ending the war until it suffers a significant military defeat and is forced to focus on its own internal political transformation.” Ukraine’s supreme military commander, Gen Valeriy Zaluzhnyi, said in an interview with the Economist published last week that Ukraine is training and outfitting reserves to defend against a new Russian offensive that might come in January, February or March. “The Russians are preparing some 200,000 fresh troops,” he said. “I have no doubt they will have another go at Kyiv.” The statements by senior Ukrainian officials appeared to be part of a coordinated campaign to guard against complacency among Ukraine’s allies as the Russian army struggles on the battlefield. Since launching its full-scale attack on Ukraine in February, Russia has fallen back in three major retreats — from the territory around Kyiv, in the northeastern Kharkiv region and, last month, in the southern region of Kherson. In parallel with the fighting along the front lines, Russia has bombarded civilian infrastructure targets throughout the country, knocking out heating, water and electricity for millions of Ukrainians. In his nightly address to Ukrainians on Saturday, Zelensky said that electricity had been restored to 6 million people who lost power after a salvo of missile strikes on Friday. The mayor of Kyiv, Vitali Klitschko, said that neighbourhood heating systems damaged in the strikes had been fully restored. Military analysts say that this campaign is intended to demoralise Ukrainians and push the Ukrainian government into a cease-fire that might allow Russia time to regroup and rearm for future offensives. — The New York Times

Qatar shows way to North America

No scriptwriter could have envisioned a better final than what took place at the Lusail Stadium in Qatar last Sunday when Lionel Messi and company concluded the finest script by clinching the Fifa World Cup in fashion.

With all the elements of a Hollywood movie, including superstar rivalries, penalties, iconic goals, shoot-outs, and masterclass goalkeeping, the final ended with the superhero Lionel Messi crowned as the world champion.

The nail-biting final left fans across the world on the edge of their seats as they saw Argentina script history after it won the world cup in 1978 and 1986.

Although arguments may arise about whether this was the greatest football, Argentina's penalty shootout victory over France will remain as the greatest World Cup final for generations to come!

However, in a match that witnessed Argentina's superiority, France deserves credit for the way it executed its comeback engineered by Kylian Mbappe who left a deep-rooted impact in the hearts of football lovers all over the world.

Although for 70 minutes, Mbappe was ineffective, for the rest of the game, he dragged France back into the game with his magnificent skills and scored two goals in a space of 97 seconds. His performance was as impressive as Ronaldo's authoritative display in 2002 in Germany 20 years ago.

No doubt, Mbappe who left Qatar in Golden Boot, is the person who salvaged the game and brought grace to his country despite its defeat!

As the FIFA World Cup 2022 season came to a close, what the World Cup has proved is that the Gulf countries have emerged as a top sporting destination. Qatar showed the world how financial resources combined with effective altruism and administrative efficiency could quieten the critics.

The Qatar administration also exhibited to the world that it is not the system of government or religion that matters, but leadership disposition,



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyp

The writer is a senior journalist, author and columnist

THE QATAR ADMINISTRATION EXHIBITED TO THE WORLD THAT IT IS NOT JUST THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT OR RELIGION THAT MATTERS, BUT LEADERSHIP DISPOSITION, RIGHT IDEAS, AND NATIONAL INTEREST AND VALUES

right ideas, and national interest. But the small country in the Gulf region did it without compromising or sacrificing any of its values and principles.

Another major and significant outcome, I observed is, despite its many differences, the Qatar World Cup has made the Gulf countries feel united, primarily because of the shared value system, including their deep respect for each other.

Countries like Japan have never failed to impress the world with their unique values that are deeply ingrained in their social character. Ahead of the match between Germany and Japan, its fans won the hearts of people around the world for their goodwill.

A video of Japanese fans cleaning the garbage from the stadium after a match went viral on the internet.

Similarly, the 2022 edition also taught the sporting world that the biggest name does not mean big gains! The team with the biggest stars does not mean that their delivery is the best. Portugal comes to mind, as does Belgium.

On the other hand, Japan and Morocco come to mind, in terms of their ability to make the best of the talent available and regularly punch above their weight.

As it happens with all the world cups when the world's greatest football players of our time say adieu to the game and many new stars emerge, the Qatar final was also no exception.

The 35-year-old Lionel Messi made history before hanging up his boots for the national team as his last dance turned will be termed as iconic for many.

In a surprising move, we found that 37-year-old Cristiano Ronaldo was benched during the game against Switzerland in this year's World Cup. His replacement, 21-year-old Goncalo Ramos stunned fans by scoring a hat-trick.

With lessons from the Qatar football field, the world will see new professional horizons when the next World Cup kicks off in North America in 2026, with a record 48 teams vying in 80 games in 16 cities spread across the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

CHRISTMAS TREAT



Young children watch a diver feeding various fishes during a show at Africa's largest marine park, the South African Marine Biological Research (SAMBR) Sea World based at the uShaka Marine World in Durban on Tuesday. uShaka Marine World is home to more than 150 marine species and attracts over 100,000 local and international tourists during the Christmas holiday season. – AFP

Why petulant oligarchs rule our world

Some years ago — I think it was 2015 — I got a quick lesson in how easy it is to become a horrible person. I was a featured speaker at a conference in Sao Paulo, Brazil, and my arrival flight was badly delayed. The organisers, worried that I would miss my slot thanks to the city's notorious traffic, arranged to have me met at the airport and flown directly to the hotel's roof by helicopter.

Then, when the conference was over, there was a car waiting to take me back to the airport. And just for a minute I found myself thinking, "What? I have to take a car?"

By the way, in real life I mostly get around on the subway.

Anyway, the lesson I took from my moment of pettiness was that privilege corrupts, that it very easily breeds a sense of entitlement. And surely, to paraphrase Lord Acton, enormous privilege corrupts enormously, in part because the very privileged are normally surrounded by people who would never dare tell them that they're behaving badly.

That's why I'm not shocked by the spectacle of Elon Musk's reputational self-immolation. Fascinated, yes; who isn't? But when an immensely rich man, accustomed not just to getting whatever he wants but also



Paul Krugman

ENORMOUS PRIVILEGE CORRUPTS ENORMOUSLY, IN PART BECAUSE THE VERY PRIVILEGED ARE NORMALLY SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE WHO WOULD NEVER DARE TELL THEM THAT THEY'RE BEHAVING BADLY.

to being a much-admired icon, finds himself not just losing his aura but becoming a subject of widespread ridicule, of course he lashes out erratically, and in so doing makes his problems even worse.

The more interesting question is why we're now ruled by such people.

For we're clearly living in the age of the petulant oligarch.

As the Times' Kevin Roose recently pointed out, Musk still has many admirers in the technology world. They see him not as a whiny brat but as someone who understands how the world should be run — an ideology that writer John Ganz calls bossism, a belief that the big people shouldn't have to answer to, or even face criticism from, the little people.

And adherents of that ideology clearly have a lot of power, even if that power doesn't yet extend to protecting the likes of Musk from getting booed in public.

But how is this possible? It's not really a surprise that technological progress and rising gross domestic product haven't created a happy, equitable

society; downbeat visions of the future have been staples of both serious analysis and popular culture for as long as I can remember. But both social critics such as John Kenneth Galbraith and speculative writers such as William Gibson generally imagined corporatist dystopias that suppressed individuality — not societies dominated by thin-skinned egomaniac plutocrats acting out their insecurities in public view.

So what happened? Part of the answer, surely, is the sheer scale of wealth concentration at the top. Even before the Twitter fiasco, many people were comparing Elon Musk to Howard Hughes in his declining years.

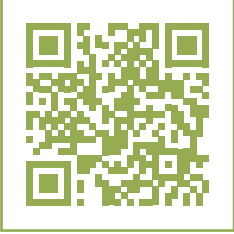
But Hughes' wealth, even measured in today's dollars, was trivial compared with Musk's, even after the recent plunge in Tesla stock. More generally, the best available estimates say that the share of total wealth by the top 0.00001 per cent today is almost 10 times what it was four decades ago.

And the immense wealth of the modern super-elite has surely brought a lot of power, including

the power to act childishly. Beyond that, many of the super-rich, who as a class used to be mostly secretive, have become celebrities instead. The archetype of the innovator who gets rich while changing the world isn't new; it goes back at least as far as Thomas Edison. But the big fortunes made in information technology turned this narrative into a full-blown cult, with wannabe or seem-to-be Steve Jobs types everywhere you look. Indeed, the cult of the genius entrepreneur has played a large role in the rolling debacle that is crypto. Sam Bankman-Fried of FTX wasn't selling a real product nor, as far as anyone can tell, are those of his former competitors who haven't yet gone bankrupt: After all this time, nobody has come up with significant real-world uses for cryptocurrency other than money-laundering. What Bankman-Fried was selling, instead, was an image, that of the mussy-haired, scruffily dressed visionary who grasps the future in a way normies can't. Musk isn't in quite the same category. His companies produce cars that actually drive and rockets that actually fly. But the sales and especially the market value of his companies surely depend at least in part on the strength of his personal brand, which he can't seem to help himself from trashing ever more with each passing day. In the end, Musk and Bankman-Fried may end up doing a public service, by tarnishing the legend of the genius entrepreneur, which has done a great deal of harm. For now, however, Musk's Twitter antics are degrading what had become a useful resource, a place some of us went for information from people who actually knew what they were talking about. And a happy ending to this story seems increasingly unlikely. Oh, and if this column gets me banned from Twitter — or if the site simply dies from mistreatment — you can follow some of what I'm thinking, along with the thoughts of a growing number of Twitter refugees, at Mastodon. — *The New York Times*

sport

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EUPHORIC ARGENTINES PARTY WITH MESSI

BUENOS AIRES: Thousands of Argentines began massing in the capital from dawn on Tuesday preparing to shower their World Cup heroes led by Lionel Messi with adulation.

The new world champions were due to head to the iconic Obelisk monument in central Buenos Aires in an open-top bus parade at midday (15:00 GMT), the Argentine Football Association (AFA) said on Twitter.

And they were given a taste of what was to come when they returned home from Qatar in the early hours of Tuesday morning when tens of thousands of people lined the route from the Ezeiza international airport, where they landed at 2:40 am, to the Argentine Football Association (AFA) training complex a short distance away.

"Good morning," wrote Messi

on his social media accounts, alongside a picture of him lying in bed hugging the World Cup trophy at the AFA complex, where the team spent the night.

A massive security operation has been planned with millions expected on the streets of Buenos Aires to celebrate Sunday's thrilling World Cup final victory over France.

Tuesday has been declared a public holiday for the celebrations.

Fans wearing the national team's blue and white replica shirts and draped in flags sang, danced and set off fireworks as they began camping out at night to secure spots along the planned route.

"We will be here all night and tomorrow as well," student Ayrton Kerdocas, 25, said outside the airport while waiting for the team to arrive.

"Tomorrow we are not working, we won't do anything and we'll go directly to the Obelisk with Argentina."

Argentina won the final in Qatar 4-2 on penalties after a rollercoaster 3-3 draw over 120 minutes of unparalleled drama for their first world title in 36 years.

Messi, who scored twice in the final, was the first player to emerge from the plane, holding the World Cup aloft, with coach Lionel Scaloni right behind him.

Forward Julian Alvarez, a revelation in Qatar with his four goals, was one of the next players out of the Aerolineas Argentinas Airbus A330.

A picture of Messi was emblazoned on the plane's tail with the words: "one team, one country, one dream" on its side.

The players made their way from the plane along a red

carpet straight to a white open-top bus with the words "world champions" and three stars on its side as their World Cup theme song "Muchachos" by ska band La Mosca blared.

BETTER THAN 86

Excitement had been brewing since the party that began after Sunday's final ahead of the players' arrival.

"I came because of my passion for Argentina. I love Messi, I love the entire team," Alejandra Diaz, 55, a kindergarten teacher said outside the airport.

Welder Javier Merina, 41, said he was "a Messi fanatic" and had come to the airport to try to get the star to sign a picture.

Messi, 35, finally crowned his record-breaking career with football's biggest prize as he produced one of the greatest

World Cup final performances, scoring a first-half penalty and netting again in extra time.

In doing so he emulated his predecessor as Argentina's idol, Diego Maradona who inspired the country to their second world title with a series of match-winning displays at Mexico 1986.

"I remember '86 but this victory yesterday was much more emotional and much more stressful," architect Ricardo Grunfeld, 65, said.

Argentina had led 2-0 with 10 minutes of normal time left and 3-2 with only two minutes of extra-time to go but Kylian Mbappe completed only the second World Cup final hat trick in history to take the gripping final to penalties, before Gonzalo Montiel swept home the decisive spot kick.

Despite the huge numbers of revellers during Sunday's

festivities fewer than 20 people were arrested for isolated incidents of violence or theft, authorities said.

IT WARMS THE HEART

France's beaten players were given a rousing reception by fans in central Paris on Monday after their return from Qatar.

They appeared on the balcony of the Crillon Hotel overlooking the Place de la Concorde.

"Frankly, it's magnificent, it warms the heart, it's a great pleasure to see that we were able to make so many French people proud and happy," forward Marcus Thuram told TF1 TV.

Goalkeeper and captain Hugo Lloris told TF1 that it was a chance to "greet them (the fans), to thank them for their support and, after yesterday's pain, to seek their consolation." — AFP

South African cricket great Gary Kirsten to visit Oman

MUSCAT: Oman cricketers, young and senior, will have a lifetime opportunity to interact with a South African legend when Gary Kirsten will visit Oman in February, 2023.

Confirming the visit of the World Cup-winning coach, Oman Cricket (OC) said that Kirsten will be visiting the Oman Cricket Academy (OCA) facilities to supervise a four-day camp that will target grassroots development and also include a high-performance camp from February 1-4.

This would be the second camp organised by Gary Kirsten Cricket (GKC) Academy following their

success in the inaugural edition in October.

Evert Laubscher, Oman Cricket Academy manager, said: "We are delighted to receive the confirmation that Gary Kirsten will visit Oman in February when the GKC will hold their second camp.

"We had got an encouraging response during the first camp in October. Oman Cricket has been constantly working to ensure that the domestic coaches, young cricketers and beginners are provided top-class facilities to learn, train and improve their skills sets."

Kirsten will be accompanied by



couple of GKC Academy coaches and will begin the programme with a grassroots camp on February 1 followed by a high-performance camp from February 2-4, aimed at under-14 and under-19 age-groups.

A coaches educators' workshop will also be held during Kirsten's stay.

Oman Cricket has opened registrations for interested beginners and young cricketers with a fee of RO 50 for the three-day high-performance camp. RO 10 will be charged for the grassroots camp with the youngsters getting an opportunity to interact with the legend at the OCA premises.

All the participants will receive a certificate of participation and will also be given a branded shirt from OC and GKC.

A Q& A session is also being planned with the South African batter, who achieved glory as a cricketer and later as a coach.

Kirsten is a household name among cricket fans across the world. Since his retirement in 2004, the former South African opener has devoted his time running GKC, coaching international teams and franchises and tasted tremendous success, leading India to a World Cup title in 2011 and as a mentor of Gujarat Titans who won the IPL title 2022.

England inflict first-ever Test whitewash on Pakistan



SCOREBOARD	
Pakistan 1st innings -----	304
(Babar Azam 78, Agha Salman 56; Jack Leach 4-140)	
England 1st innings -----	354
(H Brook 111, B Foakes 64; Nauman Ali 4-126, Abrar Ahmed 4-150)	
Pakistan 2nd innings -----	216
(Babar Azam 54, Saud Shakeel 53; Rehan Ahmed 5-48)	
ENGLAND 2ND INNINGS	
Z Crawley lbw Ahmed	41
B Duckett not out	82
Rehan Ahmed b Ahmed	10
B Stokes not out	35
Extras (lb1, nb1)	2
Total (for two wks, 28.1 overs) -----	170
Fall of wickets: 1-87, 2-97	
Bowling: Ahmed 12-0-78-2, Nauman 5-0-38-0, Wasim 9.1-1-40-0, Ashraf 2-0-13-0	

KARACHI: England beat Pakistan by eight wickets in the third and final Test in Karachi on Tuesday to sweep the series 3-0 and hand the Pakistanis their first home whitewash.

“It won’t really sink in until we get home or in the new year,” skipper Ben Stokes said after securing what was only England’s second series whitewash in the subcontinent, following a similar result in Sri Lanka in 2018.

Resuming on 112-2, England reached the modest 167-run target in just 38 minutes, with Ben Duckett and Stokes finishing unbeaten on 82 and 35 respectively.

England won the first Test in Rawalpindi by 74 runs and the second in Multan by 26 runs.

This was England’s first Test tour of Pakistan since 2005, having refused to tour the South

Asian country in the years since because of security concerns.

Duckett cracked his 12th boundary off fast bowler Mohammad Wasim to seal the victory on the fourth day, with England finishing on 170-2.

Agha Salman dropped Stokes off spinner Abrar Ahmed on 22 and with just 19 needed for victory.

With nine wins in their past 10 matches, England have vindicated their newly adopted freewheeling approach to Test cricket dubbed ‘Bazball’, after the nickname of coach Brendon McCullum.

England played power-packed cricket right from the start of the Pakistan tour, smashing 506-4 in Rawalpindi to set a record for the most team runs on the opening day of a Test.

Four batters — Zak Crawley, Ollie Pope, Harry Brook and

Duckett — scored hundreds that day, another record.

Stokes was also bold in his captaincy, setting a tantalising 343-run target for Pakistan in Rawalpindi and then setting unusual fields to get wickets.

STUCK TO THE TASK

Stokes praised England’s adaptability on slow pitches.

“We’ve got a process we want to play but the challenge was the different pitches for every Test,” he said. “I know it’s a cliched thing, but being out in the subcontinent is one of the hardest places to do it.”

Stokes said his bowlers stuck to the task well.

“We were particularly good with the ball,” he Stokes.

“Whoever I threw it to they seemed to deliver. The commitment and mindset has been top drawer.”

Stokes singled out Brook, the man of the match in Karachi and player of the series.

“Every person has stood up at some point, but Brook has been unbelievable for us. He’s set Pakistan on fire, the calmness and belief is high class.”

Brook finished with 468 runs that included three hundreds -- the most in the series.

Pakistan’s Babar Azam said he has no intention of giving up the captaincy despite overseeing the whitewash. “Definitely, it’s a big disappointment as a team,” said Azam. “We are not good enough to fight back. We lost back-to-back wickets here, were good in patches only and that cost us.”

Asked if he would quit the captaincy to concentrate on batting, Azam told a news conference he still enjoyed the challenge. — **AFP**



Oman Sailing Festival 2022 heads north for final stop in Musandam

MUSCAT: Organised by Oman Sail, the Oman Sailing Festival will kick off at Bassa public beach in Musandam from December 20-24 as the nationwide tour concludes.

Visitors will have the chance to enjoy free sessions and Try Sailing, Try Windsurfing and Try Kitesurfing by learning from Oman Sail’s professional instructors. There will also be a beach clean-up run in partnership with Environment Society of Oman (ESO) to remove waste from the shores and preserve the natural habitat for native wildlife.

The event will take place from 10am to 5pm on each day and also includes a daily market featuring local SMEs.

Ali al Sheheimi, Oman Sailing Festival Project Manager, said, “Musandam is an exciting destination for the final stop on this year’s Oman Sailing Festival and we are looking forward to returning here for the second year. The potential for Oman’s next sailing or surfing champion to come from Musandam, a city so closely linked to the sea, is huge, and our professional instructors will teach the basic techniques and safety measures to get sailors of all ages out on the water for fun or, perhaps, for even more!”



marine life across our beautiful country,” he added.

For more than two months, the Oman Sailing Festival organised by Oman Sail has travelled across the country to introduce communities to the opportunities to learn how to sail, windsurf and kitesurf, as well as sharing the possibilities in the sport for people with disabilities.

So far, more than one thousand and six hundred people have received lessons from professional coaches and thousands more have visited the festival sites to enjoy local food, arts and crafts. The beach clean-up programme has been incredibly successful in removing of waste from shorelines across Oman, showing how a small act can make a big difference.

INDIAN EMBASSY CLINCH APL TITLE

MUSCAT: Embassy of India won the Awadh Premier League (APL) 2022 title after beating Indian Social Club (ISC) by 7 runs in the final on December 17.

The Indian Social Club Oman Awadh Wing conducted its second edition of Awadh Premier League on December 16 and 17 at Al Hail Cricket Ground.

An exhibition match was played between Indian Embassy and Indian Social Club Oman on December 17.

Embassy of India won the toss and elected to bat first. The Indian Embassy put up a huge total of 116 in 12 overs and it was not easy for ISC to chase the target and fell 7 runs short.



Karamjeet Matharoo, Vice-Chairman of ISC Oman, handed over the winners trophy to captain Praveen. Saji Abraham of ISC received the runners-up trophy.

Individual gifts hampers were provided to all the members of winners and runners-up teams sponsored by WJ Towell.

Sameer of Indian Embassy was selected as the man of the match and the award was sponsored by Arms Computers.

The sponsors were presented mementos by Madhulika Gupta, founder and Co-Convenor of Awadh Wing, who was also the main commentator for the event

with Shital Kumar and Seema Chaudhery.

Maanas Kapoor, Sports Secretary of Awadh Wing, mentioned it was a great tournament. “I am happy to announce that the third edition of APL will be conducted in March 2023,” he said.

Sponsors for the event were Al Yam Enterprises LLC, Wassan Speciality Dental Center, Oman Observer, Sunshine International SPC, Sai Trading and Contracting, Oman Oasis, Image Muscat International LLC, Owais International LLC, GCTC, Bahwan Automobiles & Trading LLC, Cleopatra, WJ Towell, Nabil and Arms Computers.

OEF to give three cars for Ibri Endurance Race winners

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, DEC 20

The Oman Equestrian Federation, in cooperation with the Al Dhahirah Equestrian Committee of Ibri, will organise the Oxy Endurance Race for the second year in a row on Friday, under the auspices of Najeeb bin Ali al Rawas, Governor of Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The event will include 100 km as local race for the public with the participation of 61 horses, as well as two qualifying races for a distance of 40 km with the participation of five horses, and nine horses in an 80 km qualifying race and 30 horses will take part



Ahmed bin Saif al Abri

in traditional sports and tent pegging.

Valuable prizes will be allocated to the winners in the 100 km race, including three cars for the first three positions in the race, and cash prizes for the top ten.

Ahmed bin Saif al Abri, Secretary-General and Chairman of the Competitions Committee of

the Oman Equestrian Federation, pointed out, “It is no secret to anyone that the success achieved last year in holding the Oxy Endurance Race in the Wilayat of Ibri is an event that deserves to continue.”

“The event will start at three o’clock in the afternoon on Thursday with the arrival of the horses. They will undergo a veterinary examination until five o’clock in the afternoon, and the race will start at 6 am on Friday. At 4 pm, the traditional horse sports event will begin with the participation of the local people of Al Dhahirah Governorate, in addition to the tent pegging activities,” he added.



The Oxy Endurance Race will be run for a distance of 100 km. The race includes four stages, starting at 6:30 in the morning and ending at 3:48 in the afternoon. The age of the horse must be 6 years and above, the heart rate of

the horse is 64 beats/minute, the minimum speed of the horse is 14 km/h, and the weight of the rider should not exceed 65kg.

Oxy Endurance race for the first time allocated three cars as prizes for the top three, and cash

prizes from the fourth to the tenth place, which are RO 1,800 for the fourth place, RO 1,000 for the fifth place, RO 700 for the sixth place, RO 600 for the seventh and RO 500 for the eighth, ninth and tenth places.

Lebanon overall champions, Oman runners-up at Nations Cup



AL RAWAHI CLINCHES TITLE AT MENA KARTING



ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, DEC 20

Oman's racing star Abdullah al Rawahi claimed the DD2 honours in the Mena Karting Championship Nations Cup 2022 which concluded in Muscat on December 17.

Lebanon clinched the overall champions crown in the Mena Karting series 2022 and Oman claimed the runners-up trophy in the championship organised by the Oman Automobile Association (OAA). Saudi Arabia took the third position.

Other Omani racers to bag honours in the intense five-day karting tournament include Adam Awan (third in Micro Max category), Mohammed al Balushi (runner-up in DD2 Master), Faisal al Raisi (third in RD1 Elite Sprint) and Wadee al Kharusi (runner-up in RD1 Elite Endurance Category as well).

UAE's Faris Haroun emerged champion in the Micro Max category while Joe Mourad of Lebanon came second and Oman's Awan finished third.

Al Rawahi said he waited for his opportunity in the race to take the win.

"I started off with a lead in the first few laps then I got side tracked and didn't feel I was up to pace but kept hanging on and waiting for a miracle. I saw the opening gap in the second-last lap due to the collision between the other two drivers, and so I took that opportunity



and managed to take the win," the Omani driver said. When asked on how he felt about his win, champion of the Micro Max category, 9-year-old Faris Haroun said: "I feel so good. I feel like I want to explode. We should appreciate how much OAA spent time on Mena to make this come true because this is sincerely one of the best days of my life."

Rotax World Karting Champion, Christopher Feghali, 13, winner of the Junior Max Category, said: "It's crazy to think that we won the Grand Final almost three weeks ago and now we've won the Junior Max of the Mena cup, so it's a really nice feeling."

PROUD MOMENT FOR OAA

The closing award ceremony was held at the Rozna Boulevard for the winning members and teams.

Chief guest Brigadier Dr Mohammed

al Rawas (ROP Director of Traffic), OAA Chairman Brigadier (retd) Salim bin Ali al Maskari, and Vice-Chairman Brigadier Jamal al Taie were present.

The OAA presented the awards to the winners who came out on top from amongst a total of 137 drivers from 16 different countries participating in this championship.

Managing Director of OAA, Suleiman al Rawahi, said: "When we took the responsibility to organise this event, our aim was to bring everybody together to develop karting in the region and we can see in this series that the level of competition is very high."

"There are drivers who started off their first karting competition here and have gone onto win and earn high rankings at international events. And this is what we set out to do and the reason behind this Mena championship."

MENA KARTING 2022 RESULTS

Micro Max Category
Champion - Faris Haroun (UAE)
Runner-up - Joe Mourad (Lebanon)
3rd Place - Adam Awan (Oman)

Mini Max Category
Champion - Maxim Bobreshov (UAE)
Runner-up - Darek Rivera (Bahrain)
3rd place - Omar Sindi (KSA)

Junior Max Category
Champion - Christopher Feghali (Lebanon)
Runner-up - Georges Nassar (Lebanon)
3rd place - Luca Houghton (Bahrain)

Max Category
Champion - Theo Kekati (UAE)
Runner-up - Lewis Smith (Bahrain)
3rd place - Zack Scoular (UAE)

DD2 Category
Champion - Abdullah al Rawahi (Oman)
Runner-up - Kayne Cherian (UAE)
3rd place - Omar al Dereyanne (KSA)

DD2 Master Category
Champion - Nadir Kabbage (Morocco)
Runner-up - Mohammed al Balushi (Oman)
3rd place - Patrick Sarraih (Lebanon)

RD1 Elite Sprint Category
Champion - Tarik Almou
Runner-up - Wadee al Kharusi
3rd place - Faisal al Yafei

RD1 Elite Endurance Category
Champions - Team 2 Lebanon (Matthias Najjem and Christopher Najjem)
Runners-up - Team 2 Oman (Faisal al Raisi and Wadee al Kharusi)
3rd place - Team 1 Morocco (Ilies Foquet and Tarik Almou)

"I feel so good. I feel like I want to explode. We should appreciate how much OAA spent time on Mena to make this come true because this is sincerely one of the best days of my life"

FARIS HAROUN
Micro Max champ





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US poised to become net exporter of crude oil in 2023

HOUSTON: The United States has become a global crude oil exporting power over the last few years, but exports have not exceeded its imports since World War II. That could change next year.

Sales of US crude to other nations are now a record 3.4 million barrels per day (bpd), with exports of about 3 million bpd of refined products like gasoline and diesel fuel. The United States is also the leading liquefied natural gas exporter, where growth is expected to soar in coming years.

But the US consumes 20 million barrels of crude a day, the most in the world, and its output has never exceeded 13 million bpd. Until recently, the idea that it would be anything but a big crude importer was folly.

Last month, data showed net US crude oil imports fell to 1.1 million barrels per day (bpd), the lowest since record keeping began in 2001. — **Reuters**

Hydrom issues Request for Proposals for first green hydrogen projects in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 20

Hydrogen Oman SPC (Hydrom) has released the Request for Proposals (RFP) to qualified applicants for the first round of its public auction process to award large-scale integrated green hydrogen projects to developers.

Oman aims to award the first land blocks in 2023 in order to meet its 2030 production target of at least 1 million tonnes of green hydrogen per annum. The release of the Request for Proposals (RfP) constitutes a key milestone in the auction that started on November 6, 2022 with the release of the Request for Qualifications (RfQ).

Qualified applicants will now have two months to prepare and submit their bids, which will then be evaluated by Hydrom with the goal of awarding a first project by Q1 2023.

Since the launch of the bid round, Hydrom has received very positive feedback from the market



on the steps Oman is taking to accelerate the development of its green hydrogen economy.

This was reflected in more than 180 registrations, and more than 50 applicants granted access to RfQ, till date and the numbers

keep on progressing forward.

Green hydrogen constitutes a strategic opportunity for the country to ensure its energy security and diversify its economy while supporting the decarbonisation efforts of hard-

to-abate sectors both in Oman and around the world.

Oman is blessed with abundant renewables resources, positioning it as one of the most attractive locations on earth to produce green hydrogen competitively and

OMAN IS BLESSED WITH ABUNDANT RENEWABLES RESOURCES, POSITIONING IT AS ONE OF THE MOST ATTRACTIVE LOCATIONS ON EARTH TO PRODUCE GREEN HYDROGEN COMPETITIVELY AND AT LARGE-SCALE.

at large-scale.

Hydrom is a fully owned subsidiary of Energy Development Oman SAOC (EDO) and is regulated by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MEM).

Hydrom's mandate includes the delineation of government-owned land areas and structuring of associated large-scale green hydrogen projects, managing the process for their allocation to developers, facilitating the development of common infrastructure and connected ecosystem industries and hubs, as well as promoting investment opportunities in this promising sector, and facilitating investment-related processes.

PDO, OQ conduct hydrogen-based heavy mobility feasibility study

DECARBONISATION GOAL:
Oilfield heavy duty vehicles account for 65 per cent of PDO's transport-related emissions

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 20

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the nation's biggest Oil & Gas producer, is collaborating with OQ Group – the integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman, in exploring the feasibility of utilising hydrogen to power the sizable fleet of heavy duty vehicles involved in oilfield operations.

The hydrogen-powered Heavy Mobility Feasibility Study seeks to initially leverage excess (mainly grey) hydrogen production from OQ operations to develop a mobility value chain catering to heavy vehicles operating in PDO's concession area. Thereafter, upon the availability of green hydrogen in Oman, the transition to zero-carbon hydrogen is envisioned, according to key project member.

Ahad al Ghaithi (**pictured**), member of PDO's Hydrogen



Team, said the study – currently in a preliminary stage – aims to support the decarbonisation of PDO's heavy vehicle operations which account for around 65 per cent of total emissions from the energy company's mobility operations.

Presenting details of the study at the recent Green Hydrogen Summit Oman forum, Ahad said the initiative comes against the backdrop of an exponential increase in the adoption of hydrogen-powered fuel cell technologies in heavy haulage

around the world.

Hydrogen demand in the transportation industry climbed around 50 per cent during the 2019 – 2021 timeframe. The share of hydrogen consumption for mobility solutions is projected to account for 38 per cent of total hydrogen demand in 2040, rising to 43 per cent in 2050.

In 2021 alone, the growth of hydrogen fuel cell trucks increased 60-fold, underscoring the strength of hydrogen demand in the mobility sector, she stated. "Yes, the technology has some positive attributes, but it's not available on the market yet.

And so through such joint collaboration, we thought PDO is positioned to enable this in the local market because it's got the rationale and the mass to go ahead with it," Ahad remarked.

In her presentation, Ahad highlighted examples of a number of advanced economies that are going ahead with the construction of hydrogen refuelling stations to drive their respective green energy transitions.

But she stressed the need for "harmonised solutions" particularly in relation to interconnectivity between gaseous high-pressure trailers and hydrogen refuelling stations.

Other aspects of the hydrogen mobility value chain that need to be streamlined are operating procedures, transfer protocols and controlled schemes, she said. "The end goal here is to determine to what extent standardising this interface is achievable, as well as desirable," she added.

Oman ranked 3rd in Arab region in hydrogen race

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 20

The Sultanate of Oman has been ranked third among Arab countries with the most number of hydrogen projects during the Q3 2022. Oman has set an ambitious goal to become one of the largest green hydrogen producers and exporters globally, targeting production of 1 million tonnes to 1.25 million tonnes annually by 2030 and to increase production to 3.25 million to 3.75 millions tonnes by 2040.

In May this year, OQ — Oman's leading integrated energy group — ACWA Power and Air Products signed a joint development agreement (JDA) toward a multibillion-dollar investment in a world-scale green hydrogen-based ammonia production facility powered by renewable energy in Dhofar Governorate.

In a report titled "Development of LNG and Hydrogen in the second and third quarters of 2022" by the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), the Arab countries are in a race for the hydrogen market, which is regarded as the 'fuel of the future.'

The report said that during 2022, Arab countries showed unprecedented activity in order to increase international cooperation and partnership in the field of hydrogen.

The Arab countries seek to



implement mega projects and signed several agreements, which include the production of green hydrogen and green ammonia, expansion of the production of blue hydrogen or its derivatives such as blue ammonia and hydrogen applications in land, sea and air transport.

Several Arab countries have set specific targets with timeframes for hydrogen production and a target share in global trade, reflecting their desire to enter a promising market in the future and gain an important market share.

The number of announced projects for the production and use of hydrogen in the Arab countries increased to 61 projects, as of Q3 2022, the report added.

The Sultanate of Oman has 9 hydrogen projects in the pipeline, behind Egypt with 23 projects and the UAE with 12 projects. Saudi Arabia came 4th with 8 projects, followed by Morocco (3), Mauritania and Iraq (2), while Algeria, Djibouti, Jordan and Qatar each announced one project.

MSX signs MoUs to enhance cooperation in tripartite governance



MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) signed yesterday three memorandums of understanding (MoUs) with a number of government agencies with the aim of enhancing in the areas of tripartite governance (environmental, social and corporate governance).

The first MoU between the MSX and the Ministry of Social Development came with the aim of laying the foundations for integrated cooperation and coordination between the two parties to exchange data, information and experiences in the social field by adopting socially sustainable governance mechanisms.

The second MoUs was with the Environment Agency aimed to enhance cooperation and integrated coordination between the two parties to exchange data, information and experiences in the environmental field.

The third MoU came with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion with the aim of discussing and cooperating on mechanism for preparing laws and legislation related to spreading awareness among companies the



importance of disclosing tripartite governance and its effectiveness on sustainable investment.

Haitham bin Salem al Salmi, CEO of the Stock Exchange, signed the agreements on behalf of MSX, while Shaikh Rashid bin Ahmed al Shamsi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development, signed on behalf of the Ministry of Social Development, and Dr Ahmed bin Abdullah al Sayari, Adviser to the Chairman of the Environment Authority for Environmental Affairs, signed on behalf of the Environment Authority, while Mubarak bin Mohammed al Dohani, Director-

General of Commerce, signed on behalf of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

On the sidelines of signing the memorandums, the MSX organised a workshop entitled “Tripartite Governance Principles and Sustainability”, which focuses on the feasibility of companies applying tripartite governance standards and their relationship to developing the role of the investor relations officer.

The experiences of Ominvest, Bank Nizwa and National Finance in employing the principles of tripartite governance and sustainability were also reviewed.

The signing of the MoUs comes as a continuation of the MSX’s accession to the United Nations Sustainable Capital Markets Initiative, which aims to encourage stock exchanges, in cooperation with investors, capital market regulators and companies, to adopt sustainable development standards.

The initiative is concerned with paying attention to sustainable development issues that focus on preserving the environment and supporting the role of social responsibility and governance, which have been developed to be among the main factors for measuring sustainability in companies and businesses.

The Muscat Stock Exchange has put tripartite governance, diversification and inclusion among the priorities of its strategic plan for sustainable investment for companies listed on the stock exchange, as its adoption of this initiative comes in line with its endeavours and efforts to follow the best international standards and practices and consolidate investor confidence to advance the capital markets.

ahlibank wins Bank of the Year 2022 award

MUSCAT: ahlibank’s unwavering commitment to excellence has earned it one of the most prestigious awards in the industry, “Bank of the Year 2022” by The Banker.

Bestowed on only the best banks that meet a list of stringent criteria that include product mix, financial performance, asset and revenue quality, customer satisfaction and digital offerings, this title is a highly sought-after recognition in the banking and financial realm.

The award was received by Said bin Abdullah al Hatmi, Chief Executive Officer of ahlibank. Taking a holistic approach to sustainable growth, ahlibank has diligently expanded its footprint in the local sector. Its balanced business model has helped it remain resilient in periods of market stress and deliver strong results when opportunities arise.

ahlibank’s keen focus on redefining the banking experience for customers and exceeding expectations while delivering outstanding shareholder value has also contributed to making the bank a preferred financial partner.

Commenting on receiving the award, Said bin Abdullah al Hatmi said, “We always strive to meet and surpass the demands and expectations of our expanding customer base through research into and application of global industry trends.

“The worldwide shift towards digitalisation has been a major force behind ahlibank’s transformation, enabling us to enhance our local services and deliver a high standard of quality across all our operations. We are firm believers in the role digitalisation plays in the banking sector, and we are constantly evolving to remain aligned to the local and global banking trends, and deliver excellence to our investors and stakeholders and corporate sector.”

“Due to the adaptability and flexibility of our services, ahlibank has managed to truly make a difference in the local banking landscape, and our current goal is to be at the forefront of the Omani digital transformation. We will continue investing in our robust suit of digital services in order to set a new benchmark of excellence in the banking sector.

“These investments will cater to its growing customer base, especially the youth, who are Internet savvy and prefer to conduct their banking businesses from their mobile phones.

“Aiming to enhance its business banking experience and enrich the local digital business environment, the bank currently offers ahliB2B to transact secure single, bulk payment locally and salaries transfer (WPS), ahliNET for safe and secure transactions, and ahliRDC for bulk and remote deposits of cheques,” Al Hatmi added.



Omantel to distribute tourist SIM cards on Oman Air flights

MUSCAT: Omantel has inked an agreement with Oman Air to provide passengers flying to the Sultanate of Oman with Tourist SIM Cards on board their flights.

The one-year partnership emerged from a shared vision between the two companies to enrich the digital experience for travellers through hassle-free and efficient solutions to attract tourists to Oman and allow them to experience the effective process of subscribing through the Omantel application, benefitting from the unique services the widest 5G network in town offers.

Eng Aladdin Baitfadhil, Chief Commercial Officer at Omantel,



said, “We are thrilled about our partnership with Omar Air, and we are all set to provide passengers

flying to the Sultanate of Oman with seamless and hassle-free connectivity even before landing,

while we increase our customer base.”

Aboudy Nasser, Chief Commercial Officer at Oman Air, said, “We are delighted to join hands once again with Omantel, and we will all benefit from the spillover effect of this great buzz happening around the region. I am confident that our year-long partnership will be a success, and it will bring convenience to our passengers and save them time and effort upon arrival.”

In addition to this partnership, Omantel has another partnership with Oman Air in which customers can convert their Makasib points to Sindbad miles.

Sohar International signs pact with Fortescue Future Industries

MUSCAT: In line with its aspiration to bring the best of the world to Oman, Sohar International signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Fortescue Future Industries (FFI), a global leader in developing green energy and renewable energy projects across the world.

The MoU, while non-binding, reflects the shared focus by both parties to explore business opportunities locally, with Sohar International facilitating FFI’s entrance into the Omani market by mutually identifying potential projects that meet FFI’s investment criteria. In addition, Sohar International will arrange

the required financing including equity, debt or syndication for such projects.

The MoU was signed recently at the Green Hydrogen Summit. The MoU was signed between Ahmed al Musalmi, Chief Executive Officer at Sohar International, and Julie Shuttleworth, Head of Global Growth at FFI, in the presence of Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, and Abdulwahid al Murshidi, Chief Islamic Banking Officer at Sohar International.

Commenting on the initiative, Ahmed al Musalmi said: “Green hydrogen has seen increasing demand in recent years and



has been recognised as a key investment area to meet the nation’s energy transition goals.

“By joining hands with FFI,

Sohar International seeks to give further impetus to transitioning Oman’s energy sector, and continuing to support Oman’s

BY JOINING HANDS WITH FFI, SOHAR INTERNATIONAL SEEKS TO GIVE FURTHER IMPETUS TO TRANSITIONING OMAN’S ENERGY SECTOR, AND CONTINUING TO SUPPORT OMAN’S VISION 2040 AND NETZERO 2050 COMMITMENT.

Vision 2040 and NetZero 2050 commitment.

“The bank, through meaningful partnerships with international organisations, will continue to take the required efforts to aid in the scalable development and

deployment of Oman’s energy sector inclusive of green hydrogen value chain. Leveraging its excellent track record in the industry and years of market knowledge, the bank will remain at the forefront of change and act as a critical catalyst to drive development of Oman’s green hydrogen market.”

Al Musalmi added, “As a bank, we are on the right track to implement sustainability-related practices into the way we conduct our business. We are delighted to partner with such a reputable international company and are certain that this collaboration will be instrumental in driving socio-economic progress in the country.”

Central bankers will shift inflation goalposts

Central bankers spent the decade after 2008 worrying about deflation. Now they are once again trying to stop prices from rising too quickly. The Federal Reserve, European Central Bank and others are determined to limit annual price increases to around 2%, in line with their targets. Stubborn inflation may force them to shift the goalposts.

Most developed-world central banks define price stability as a 2% annual increase: low enough for most people not to notice while leaving wiggle room before deflation sets in.

After the 2008 financial crisis, economists worried the targets were discouraging authorities from launching aggressive economic stimulus.

In 2010 International Monetary Fund economists argued a higher target would give central banks more firepower when battling a slump.

Today, monetary authorities are facing price increases they have not experienced since the early 1980s. Inflation in the euro zone was five times the ECB's target in November. In the United States the increase in the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index, the Fed's preferred measure, has been 6% or higher for almost a year.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell and ECB President Christine Lagarde say they are determined to restore price stability. Yet while inflation was under control for several decades, their record of hitting the 2% target is mixed.

Take the Fed: During the 1990s, PCE inflation was at or below 2% in just 49 out of 120 months. Between 2000 and the beginning of 2010, monthly inflation met the Fed's goal just over a third of the time. These figures suggest it would make more sense for central banks to set a higher target range for inflation, allowing them to tolerate annual increases of 3% or 4%.

A recent study of Internet searches and social media from the Global Labour Organisation suggests most people don't worry about inflation until it gets close to 4%. — Reuters

After the 2008 financial crisis, economists worried the targets were discouraging authorities from launching aggressive economic stimulus.



NUMBER AND FIGURES

A man looks at an electronic display board showing the numbers on the Tokyo Stock Exchange, along a street in Tokyo on Tuesday, after Japan announced a surprise tweak to its ultra-loose monetary policy. The Bank of Japan shocked markets with a surprise tweak to its bond yield control that allows long-term interest rates to rise more, a move aimed at easing some of the costs of prolonged monetary stimulus. Shares tanked, while the yen and bond yields spiked following the decision, which caught off-guard investors who had expected the BOJ to make no changes to its yield curve control (YCC) until Governor Haruhiko Kuroda steps down in April. — AFP

Concern of difficult times ahead



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK.

Unless the government takes action to strengthen companies' confidence in the economy, the UK risks another "lost decade of growth", the country's top business group has warned.

According to the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), Rishi Sunak must create an environment that incentivises business investment to avoid prolonging the UK's growth malaise since the financial crisis.

The warning has been sparked by the organisation's latest set of economic forecasts revealing the UK is already in a recession that will last until the end of next year. That long slump has shaved 1.4 percentage points off the CBI's GDP projections and the group now thinks the economy will contract 0.4 per cent in 2023.

Separate figures from consultancy BDO show businesses agree with the CBI's assessment. Nearly half of British firms are concerned about being unable to source materials due to supply chains breaking down.

Ramping up investment incentives could help businesses expand capital stock, limiting their exposure to international trade disruption. Stimulating investment improves an economy's long-term health by increasing the amount of goods and

services it can produce.

"Britain is in stagflation – with rocketing inflation, negative growth, falling productivity and business investment," Tony Danker, director general of the lobby group, said. Firms see potential growth opportunities but a lack of "reasons to believe" in the face of headwinds is causing them to pause investing in 2023, he said. "Government can change this," he added.

Sunak and Chancellor Jeremy Hunt last month put pressure on firms' balance sheets by launching a near £6 billion national insurance tax grab. They also confirmed the super deduction investment allowance will end next spring. Under current fiscal policy, the CBI reckons business investment is on track to be nine per cent lower compared to pre-Covid-19 crisis.

Unless Sunak and Hunt return to the dispatch box with policies to trigger an investment boom to reverse years of chronically poor productivity improvements, the UK economy will by the end of the CBI's forecast period be 27 per cent smaller compared to its pre-financial crisis trend.

A Treasury spokesperson said: "We have been honest that there are tough times ahead for the UK economy in the face of strong global headwinds, and we are not alone in that challenge." Hunt said the economy is going to get

worse before it gets better – as he defended the decision not to give public sector pay rises in line with inflation.

He made the comments following the release of gloomy figures showing a 0.3 per cent fall in growth, also insisted 12 years of Conservative rule and Brexit were not to blame for the UK's financial woes.

He instead highlighted global issues, such as the war in Ukraine and the pandemic. He said: "I think it's a very challenging international picture. About a third of the world's economies are predicted to be in recession, either this year or next. We're no different in this country."

Hunt added: "And truthfully, it is likely it will get worse before it gets better. Which makes it even more difficult when we have big public sector strikes going on at the moment. But we have a plan that will more than halve the inflation over the next year. So, if we stay on course we can get back to strong economic growth."

He described strikes as a 'symptom' of inflation, which hit a 40-year high of 11.1 per cent in October, and said tackling that would "deal with the underlining anger many people feel". However, while Hunt described unions as being 'completely sincere' in wanting better salaries for workers, he insisted that independent review bodies were best placed to make recommendations on pay.

Financial deglobalisation must come next



JAYATI GHOSH

The writer, Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, is a member of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism.

After four decades of fostering integration through trade and finance, the global economy has begun a painful process of fragmentation.

Initially driven by wealthy countries – namely, the United States under former President Donald Trump and the United Kingdom following the Brexit referendum – several geopolitical forces have combined to accelerate the shift toward deglobalisation.

The fracturing of global trade could herald the fragmentation of international capital markets. Covid-19-related lockdowns and closures have disrupted global supply chains and shut down major production centres, most notably in China.

Similarly, the war in Ukraine has altered trade routes and forced Western countries to find alternative suppliers of

major commodities like oil, gas, wheat, and fertilisers. Western-led sanctions on Russia have further impeded trade and sharply increased food and energy prices.

But while global trade could become even more fragmented if major economies adopt protectionist policies such as border carbon taxes, financial markets remain strongly integrated. Cross-border capital flows are still largely unregulated and more volatile than ever. It's a combination that is currently proving to be lethal for many low- and middle-income countries.

The liberalisation of capital accounts in these countries in the 1990s has led to large inflows of "hot money": private financial capital driven not so much by developing countries' economic outlook as by developed countries' macroeconomic policies. In the years following the 2008

global financial crisis, capital flows to emerging and "frontier" markets surged as prolonged monetary expansion by developed countries' central banks fuelled asset bubbles.

Financial agents borrowed cheap in dollars and either lent in foreign currency to developing countries or invested in local currency markets. Capital inflows triggered higher interest-rate spreads and currency appreciation, making carry trades particularly lucrative – at least for a while.

Over the years, the inflows of hot money, often held as reserves and invested in low-return dollar assets, have made emerging and developing economies vulnerable to capital flight. This has had a dampening effect on these countries' fiscal policies, as rising seigniorage costs have stoked fears of credit-rating downgrades.

The rapid interest-rate hikes in the US and the European Union have compounded low- and middle-income countries' external debt burdens, forcing them to raise interest rates even more aggressively than advanced economies and hindering their recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Moreover, these dramatic rate hikes have not prevented fickle foreign investors from fleeing, causing emerging-market currencies to depreciate and severely damaging labour markets and growth prospects. But the developed countries' combination of higher interest rates and fiscal consolidation is counterproductive, as it risks causing recessions without addressing the real forces behind surging inflation.

As a result of following the US Federal Reserve's lead, many low- and middle-income countries

already face severe stagflation – and integration with global finance is worsening their economic woes.

Instead of mimicking developed countries' ineffective approach, developing and emerging countries must introduce policies tailored to their specific needs and political economies.

Such policies include controlling the prices of key commodities, increasing domestic production to alleviate critical shortages, and ensuring social protections for the newly unemployed and those who are worst affected by high inflation.

Above all, developing countries must introduce more effective capital controls. Imposing constraints on volatile portfolio flows, particularly those that contribute to currency depreciation, is crucial to mitigating the risks associated with financial globalisation.

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BAIT AL LAMBAH A RENOVATED ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECE

Unexpectedly, the mango tree kept expanding, so they opened the ceiling to let the sun and the sky in and to let its branches grow farther so that it could produce more of its incredibly delicious fruits... **P20**

TOKYO EXHIBIT SHOWCASES DIOR'S PASSION FOR JAPAN

A hit exhibition showcasing Christian Dior's work opens in Tokyo this week with a focus on the French designer's fascination with Japan and the country's influence on his pieces. "Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams" arrives in Japan after drawing huge crowds in Paris, London

and New York. Opening on Wednesday, the exhibition features 350 haute couture dresses -- including Japan-inspired gowns displayed in settings intended to pay tribute to Japanese culture. Architect Shohei Shigematsu created structures including a room covered with an undulating three-

dimensional facade constructed from translucent traditional washi paper pasted over wooden frames. "When Dior makes a skirt, there is a structure and then the fabric is laid on top of it," he said. "I was asked to create a Japanese traditional structure, so I thought about shoji screens, for example, which have a wooden structure and are covered with paper." Each section features a different interior design intended to show various parts of Japanese culture. "There is a section inspired by an orderly tatami room separated by sliding doors. But not everything in Japan is simple and minimal," he said. "We have different designs like Japanese gardens and flashy kimonos. I wanted to show the sides of Japan people don't know." The Dior house first presented a show in Japan in 1953, and the designer had a well-known fascination with the country. "Dior had a lot of respect for traditional Japanese culture and he wrote about it in his memoir," curator



Florence Muller said. "I think there is a mutual fascination between France and Japan." Starting in the 1950s, Dior also collaborated with Japanese companies, giving them the rights to adapt and reproduce Dior looks to cater to local tastes. In a sign of the brand's popularity,

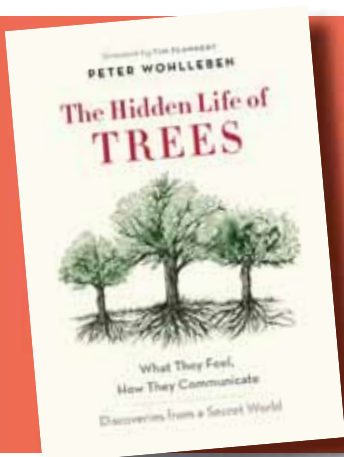
Japan's former empress Michiko chose a Dior gown made from Japanese textiles when she married then-prince Akihito in 1959. The Tokyo show, which runs until May 28, includes archive pieces as well as works by more recent creative directors, and showcases several items inspired by Japan. — AFP

READ

THE HIDDEN LIFE OF TREES

BY PETER WOHLLEBEN

It describes how trees can communicate, support each other, learn from experience and form alliances with other inhabitants of the forest.



LIFESTYLE

This photo taken on December 18, 2022 shows wild geese in a river in Shenyang, in China's northeastern Liaoning province. — AFP



ART

A wall mural which is made as a part of a creative collaboration between India and embassy of Netherlands who are initiating a multi-city wall paintings to commemorate 75 years of bilateral relation between two countries in New Delhi. — AFP





MELANIE Boschaert has one goal for Christmas: “I want my children to be special and feel special.” So Boschaert, who works for an insurance company and lives in East Bethel, Minnesota, doesn’t just search for the perfect gifts for her four adult children, their partners and her two grandsons. She also buys wrapping paper they won’t forget.

Last year she stumbled upon Gift Wrap My Face, a website that allows you to superimpose someone’s mug amid menorahs or dreidels or on an elf’s body, a gingerbread man or a Christmas tree.

Even though she thought her gifts were pretty good — a gift card to a speakeasy for one of her children; a NASA flying experience for another — Boschaert, 58, said each recipient was most excited about the paper that featured their face.

“They took time to unwrap the gift because they didn’t want to rip it,” said Boschaert, 58. “I was like, ‘That’s a \$100 gift, and you’re focused on the wrapping paper.’”

She plans to make it a tradition. “I am buying it again this year,” she said.

Gift wrap has been getting a glow-up; in uncertain economic times, it can be a relatively inexpensive way to dazzle a recipient before they even get to what’s inside.

Given the economic climate, “we expected sales to be down this year, but they are up 20 per cent,” said James Green, an owner of Gift Wrap My Face.

People may be paring down on extravagant gifts, “but nobody is skipping Christmas,” he said. “Even if you are spending less, you still want to find a way to make your gift stand out.”

“You can wrap up a pair of plain old underwear and put it in wrapping paper with their face on it, and it’s special,” he added. A roll of personalised wrapping paper costs about \$19.

There is also, of course, the waste of it all. A 2021 study by the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental non-profit, showed that Americans generate 23 per cent more tonnes of waste in December than in other months of the year.

Meagan Downey felt guilty about that. “I tend to go overboard for my daughter’s birthday or special occasions, and there was always this horrible feeling of

It’s the wrapping paper that counts



guilt,” she said.

So in the fall of 2020, Downey, who lives in Shelburne, Vermont, started selling the Shiki Wrap, a reusable, machine washable fabric gift wrap made from

recycled plastic. The fabric, which is inspired by furoshiki, or traditional Japanese wrapping cloths, is also stretchy, which means it can fit around oddly shaped presents. “It’s so easy —

you can just bunch it up,” Downey said.

She estimated that the company has sold about 4,000 wraps since its start.

Patrick Kling, a theme park designer, also hated how he felt the morning after Christmas. “It always bugged me that we put all this trash into a black garbage bag, and we don’t even know if it’s recyclable,” he said. (It is, unless it contains chemicals, laminates, dyes, plastics, metals or glitter — which many papers do.)

So he teamed up with Patrick Feeny, a longtime friend who worked in music touring, to create Giftiply, a sustainable wrapping paper made of recycled newspaper with soy-based ink; 33 per cent of proceeds are given to charities such as the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Alex’s Lemonade Stand Foundation for Childhood Cancer. They started selling it in August.

The company commissions artists to design the paper (a QR code on the paper links to information about the artist and the charity). Jess Goldsmith, an illustrator in Brooklyn, hopes her designs will inspire people not to trash it. “This could be a cool opportunity to use the wrapping paper to repurpose it further,” she said — either as household art or as, say, a paper airplane (all of Giftiply’s packaging comes with instructions).

Not surprisingly, brands that make other products want in on the gift wrap game. Kendall Jenner’s liquor company, 818 Tequila, offered a roll of its own for \$35, which sold out.

Chili’s, the restaurant chain, is selling wrapping paper decorated with peppers and burgers (\$32 for two rolls). “They are a hot seller,” said George Felix, the chief marketing officer.

Caitlyn Davison, 39, who works for a non-profit and lives in New Gloucester, Maine, is wrapping all her gifts this year in Giftiply. “I kept asking myself, how do we bring something that feels more authentic to our family to our holiday giving?” she said. “We want it to reflect our values.”

One of her favourite features of the paper was that it arrived in flat sheets, rather than a cardboard roll, which only creates more waste.

Additionally, it’s less likely to be weaponised by her children. With rolls, “they will find them and bash them and roll them out,” Davison said. “I like this wrapping paper much better.” — **NYT**

DISCOVERIES

Researchers discover over 100 new ancient designs in Peru’s Nazca lines



MORE THAN a hundred new designs discovered in and around Peru’s ancient Nazca plain and surrounding areas could bring new information to light about the mysterious pre-Columbian artworks that have intrigued scientists and visitors for decades.

Following two years of field surveys with aerial photos and drones, Peruvian and Japanese researches from Yamagata University earlier this month reported the discovery of 168 new designs at the UNESCO World Heritage site on Peru’s southern Pacific coast.

The geoglyphs, huge figures carved into the South American desert, date back more than 2,000 years and represent humans, cats, snakes, killer whales, birds and native camalids - animals such as llamas, guanacos and alpacas.

Jorge Olano, head archaeologist for the Nazca Lines research programme, said the new figures averaged between two and six metres (6.56 to 19.7 feet) in length. The purpose of the Nazca lines, which could only be seen from the air, remain a mystery.

This month’s findings, however, are smaller and can be seen from the ground, Masato Sakai, a professor from Yamagata University who led the study, said.

The figures, iconic vestiges of Peru’s rich history, are about a three-hour drive from the capital Lima.

Researchers had already discovered 190 figures in the area since 2004. But the vastness of the terrain they cover has complicated efforts to study and conserve the heritage site.

Yamagata University said the research will be used in artificial intelligence-based surveys to help inform the lines’ preservation.

Studies from the university in collaboration with Peru’s government have helped delineate and protect the area, which is facing threats from urban and economic developments.

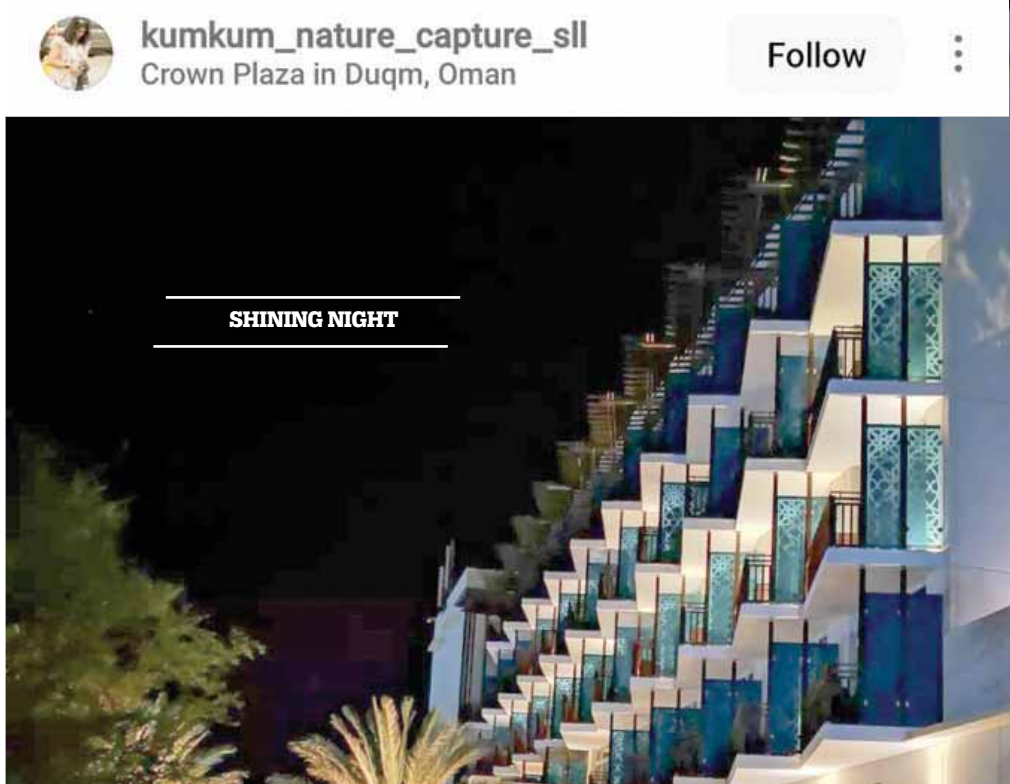
“Some geoglyphs are in danger of being destroyed due to the recent expansion of mining-related workshops in the archaeological park,” Sakai said. — **Reuters**





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AROUND THE WORLD

LIFESTYLE

Belgian social media star uses power of visuals to demystify disability



"BEING DISABLED doesn't define a person," says Sarah Talbi, who was born without arms and has become a social media star with her videos on cooking, painting and other activities she is able to do thanks to the extraordinary dexterity of her feet.

"I wanted to show that there is nothing dramatic about being disabled," says Sarah, who appears in one YouTube video showing her audience how to cook a Maghrebi dish of eggs poached in a sauce of tomatoes and peppers, all done with her toes and feet.

"Thanks to the era of social media, we can exploit the power of images," Talbi said from her home in Belgium's capital, Brussels. "To see people with disabled bodies even 10 years ago would have been almost unthinkable. Today it is much more tolerated and less shocking."

Talbi, 40, was born without upper limbs and grew up learning to use her feet and toes as hands and fingers.

In recent years she has emerged as an influential champion of the disabled, meeting politicians, attending conferences and creating social media content to promote understanding, demystify disability and squash taboos.



She now has about half a million followers on social media channels.

Talbi, a single mother of four-year-old Lilia, studied when she was younger to be a translator, but she struggled to find work because of her disability.

"Often we are treated like children," she told a European Day of Persons with Disabilities conference in Brussels last month, where she explained that many people post unpleasant comments and even mock her disability on social media.

She started to draw and paint with her feet and, with support from a teacher, found she had a talent for watercolours, her toes curling as deftly as fingers would around the paintbrush as her other foot holds the paper still.

"I realised that we could always go beyond our limits," she said. "I realised that these limits didn't exist in reality, that they were all in the mind."

— Reuters

THEATRE

Can the show go on? Britain's theatres fear the dark



BRITISH THEATRES are negotiating with energy suppliers, investing in hot water bottles and dusting off generators as they live in dread of blackouts and utility bills they cannot pay.

Their problems echo those across society as the Ukraine war and its impact on energy supplies have exacerbated a cost-of-living crisis in Britain, where inflation rates are among the highest in the developed world.

People want escapist fun more than ever, and musicals and Christmas shows are drawing record audiences, but attendance figures for the year overall lag pre-pandemic levels and pantomime jokes about utility bills generate nervous laughter.

Steve Mannix, Executive Director at the Mercury Theatre in Colchester, to the northeast of London, says half in earnest that he has told the cast of "Beauty and the Beast" to stick to the script for fear of running over time: the emergency back-up generators waiting in the wings have only three hours of capacity.

"In 37 years in this industry, this is the hardest," Mannix said.

Even after a £14-million (\$17 million) refit to install triple glazing, low energy lights and solar panels that has put the theatre in the country's top 25 per cent of

environmentally-friendly public buildings, Mannix says its cash reserves will run out in six months' time unless the government provides more help.

The Mercury Theatre's annual energy bill is set to reach £120,000 (\$147,432), up from £40,000 last year.

It cannot pass on the extra cost, in part because many tickets were sold months in advance, and in part because theatre-goers have limited cash to spare.

"We know this is a difficult time for theatres and we remain firmly on their side," a government spokesperson said by e-mail, without specifying whether energy and tax relief for the arts would be extended.

The relief is currently expected to decrease at the start of April.

HOT WATER BOTTLES
Figures vary as some London theatres benefit from tourists lured by sterling's weakness while classical music and more experimental theatre suffer the biggest audience declines.

But overall, tickets sales for some of the country's top theatres were down 38 per cent in the three months to August from the pre-Covid average, according to data providers The Audience Agency. A brief improvement earlier this year vanished as the cost-of-living crisis took hold.

Nine out of 10 theatres are worried for their future, with eight out of 10 saying they need deep cost cuts to survive, research commissioned by Ecclesiastical Insurance and shared with Reuters showed.

Theatres rely on insurance in case of cancellation, for instance because of blackouts, though premiums have also risen.

Ecclesiastical commissioned research by OnePoll, which interviewed representatives of 100 theatres and found nearly half were renegotiating suppliers' contracts, reducing opening hours and reducing staff hours.

Even the big private theatre groups are worried.

Trafalgar Theatres, which operates 13 venues across Britain, including in London, said in e-mailed comments it had so far seen a 200-per cent increase in energy costs.

"Theatre operators are having to look at all costs and all revenue streams to remain viable," it said.

In the small independent venues, where budgets have always been stretched to breaking point, the battle to survive continues.

"Energy strategy — we bought some hot water bottles. That's about it. We're just struggling on," said Neil McPherson, artistic director at the Finborough Theatre based in a west London pub. (\$1 = £0.8139.

— Reuters

GASTRONOMY

Foie gras or 'faux gras'?
Paris chef offers festive vegan alternative



VEGAN AND ANIMAL-friendly alternatives to foie gras are taking off in France just as a severe bird flu outbreak has ravaged duck flocks and cut short supplies of the traditional Christmas delicacy.

French chef Fabien Borgel, who manages the "42 Degres" vegan restaurant in Paris, created what he calls a "faux gras" two years ago as a substitute to the foie gras traditionally made from fattened duck and goose livers.

Foie gras is considered part of France's culinary heritage, but the practice of force-feeding ducks or geese to enlarge their livers is condemned by animal activists.

"You have people that have never tasted foie gras and will never taste it and they want something festive for the year-end parties. Others want to change the way they eat and are heading towards alternatives," Borgel said in his restaurant.

Borgel's veggie foie gras, containing cashew nuts, sunflower and coconut oil, looks like the traditional foie gras but is more creamy.

In France, by far the largest foie gras producer, output is expected to fall between 30 per cent and 35 per cent from last year after bird flu devastated duck flocks in most of Europe while prices would rise about 20 per cent due to the drop in supply combined with soaring costs, producers group CIFOG said earlier this year.

"It could make some people want to try something else," Borgel said. "It could be an opportunity."

42 Degres is putting its "faux gras" on the menu from December through February.

Foie gras was officially classified as part of the "cultural and gastronomic heritage" of France but some countries and US states such as California and New York have considered banning it because of on animal welfare concerns.

A poll released by French foie gras producers on Wednesday showed 77 per cent of domestic consumers were not ready to switch from the original to one made from plant-based products. "There is room for everyone," Borgel said.

— Reuters



BAIT AL LAMBAH

A RENOVATED ARCHITECTURAL MASTERPIECE

By Arwa Al Hashimi

Omanis used to construct their homes using various materials depending on the local weather conditions in the distant past. Houses in mountainous areas, such as Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, were constructed of stone to prevent them from collapsing during heavy rain. Regarding other areas, the majority of the regions used mud to construct their homes. This is a result of the East African culture's influence. These older homes typically had barns in addition to bedrooms, stores, halls, and guest rooms.

Recently, several young Omani people committed their time and energy to remodelling the homes of their ancestors. Through the crooked walls and wooden windows, each house has a unique story that can be heard.

One of the wonderful mud homes in the Wilayat of Izki, more specifically in the wonderful village of Imti, called Bait Al lambah. Omanis refer to mango as al lambah, and the leafy mango tree that grows in one of the house's rooms is what gave the building its name.

Unexpectedly, the mango tree kept expanding, so they opened the ceiling to let the sun and the sky in and to let its branches grow farther so that it could produce more of its incredibly delicious fruits.

The house was built about 400 hundred years ago and it is now renovated by one of the owner's grandsons, Falah al Toobi. He aims to show the beauty of Omani



architecture and present his ancestors house as an amazing tourist attraction.

A distinctive feature of Bait Al lambah is its integrated environmental system design. It keeps heat, fresh air, and energy in reserve. This is due to the Omani man's inventiveness in architectural design. The house, which has a picturesque view of the magnificent palm groves to the east, is situated on the slope

of one of the mountains in Harat Al Ain. It was constructed using a style of ancient architecture that is frequently used in Al Dakhiliyah: stones and mud. Its renovation was completed in the third quarter of the year.

Six rooms make up the house, which was formerly known as "matrab," along with a hallway and two bathrooms. The fact that a portion of the falaj Al Sawad passes through the house is amazing



endearing scene. The home also features something called an Arshah, which looks like tents but is constructed from palm fronds. Omanis typically host their visitors there and serve them dates and Omani coffee.

One of many old Omani homes that transport us to bygone warm times is Bait Al lambah. Every nook and cranny contained a memory, and now it is available for everyone to add their own unique memories.