



P12

SPURS WIN WITH KANE'S RECORD GOAL



P15

REAL ESTATE TRADING IN OMAN SURPASSES RO 2.7 BILLION



P20

OMAN'S BEAUTIFUL NATURAL PHENOMENON TO ADD TO YOUR BUCKET LIST



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO PAKISTAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to Dr Arif Alvi, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, on the death of former Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sympathies to President Alvi, the deceased's family and people of Pakistan. — ONA

TENDER BOARD LAUNCHES TWO NEW PLATFORMS

The Secretariat General of Tender Board launched two new platforms called 'Amana' and 'Adaa', as well as two initiatives to consolidate work culture and a Job Competencies matrix. The services were inducted at the Tender Board's annual gathering, held at the Diplomatic Club. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy. Speaking at the event, Dr Al Saqri said, "The restructuring of the Tender Board will play a significant role in raising the competence of the Tender Board and the government's projects and procurements. The developments included the creation of a local content directorate, a government procurements directorate and a project follow-up directorate." DETAILS ON P3

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KITES ADD COLOUR TO SUR MARITIME FESTIVAL P3



UKRAINE FRONTLINE TROOPS PLEAD FOR MORE TANKS P9

MASSIVE QUAKES KILL MORE THAN 2,600

HM SENDS CONDOLENCES TO SYRIAN, TURKISH PRESIDENTS



Residents retrieve a small child from the rubble of a collapsed building following an earthquake in the town of Jandaris, in the countryside of Syria's northwestern city of Afrin. — AFP

A huge earthquake killed more than 2,600 people and injured thousands more on Monday in Turkey and northwest Syria, flattening apartment blocks and heaping more destruction on Syrian cities already devastated by years of war.

The magnitude 7.8 quake, which hit before sunrise in bitter winter weather, was the worst to strike Turkey this century. It was followed in the early afternoon by another

large quake of magnitude 7.7.

It was not immediately clear how much damage had been done by the second quake, which like the first was felt across the region and endangered rescuers struggling to pull casualties from the rubble.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent two cables of condolences to President Dr Bashar al Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic, and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Republic of Turkey, on the earthquake that hit Syria and

Turkey.

In the cables, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt condolences to President Al Assad and President Erdogan, as well as peoples of their countries and families of the victims. His Majesty prayed to the Almighty Allah to rest the victims' souls in peace in paradise and grant their families patience, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

The Sultanate of Oman expressed its sincere condolences and sympathy to families of the victims in the

Republic of Turkey and the Syrian Arab Republic following the devastating earthquake that hit southern Turkey.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, Oman voiced its solidarity with Turkey and Syria, wishing the injured a speedy recovery.

"We were shaken like a cradle. There were nine of us at home. Two sons of mine are still in the rubble, I'm waiting for them," said a woman with a broken arm and injuries to her face, speaking in an ambulance near the wreckage of a seven-

storey block where she had lived in Diyarbakir in southeast Turkey.

In Turkey, the death toll stood at 1,498, the disaster agency said. At least 716 people were killed in Syria, according to figures from the Damascus government and the United Nations.

Poor Internet connections and damaged roads between some of the worst-hit cities in Turkey's south, homes to millions of people, hindered efforts to assess and address the impact. SEE P6 & 7

TURKEY

GAZIANTEP (EPICENTRE)
ELBISTAN

LATAKIA,
HAMA,
ALEPPO AND
TARTUS

SYRIA

Preventing cancer requires a major lifestyle change

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, FEB 6

Cancer cases have assumed an alarming proportion in the Sultanate of Oman. In the latest survey, the department of non-communicable diseases, Directorate General of Primary Healthcare, revealed that cancer cases in 2019 stood at 2,089 among Omanis, an increase of 77 cases from 2018. The survey also showed that cases among women were higher compared

to men. The survey called for awareness among people about the reasons that cause cancer, and preventive measures to control it at the right stage.

The risk of developing cancer is higher if there is a family history of the disease. Still, some measures may lower this risk, according to Dr Saleh al Hinai, Senior Consultant, Family Medicine Physician.

Global cancer incidence is expected to increase substantially over the following

decades. This trend is very much driven by a rise in lifestyle-related cancers due to economic and demographic transitions worldwide.

So how do people lower the chances of getting cancer?

Through his social media platforms, Dr Al Hinai encourages people to follow basic guidelines to lower cancer risk. He calls to avoid smoking as cigarette smoke can cause cancer almost anywhere in the body. TURN TO P2

Oman and Saudi aim to boost cooperation

MUSCAT: Prince Faisal bin Farhan al Saud, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, said that activating the Oman-Saudi Coordination Council represents a significant mechanism for elevating the bilateral cooperation between the two countries particularly in fields of investment and trade exchange.

The Saudi minister described the consultative meeting held on Monday with Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, as "fruitful". He said that the Omani-Saudi relations

are advanced and they witness a progress in many fields. Mega projects will be established that will enhance the economic integration between the two countries, Prince Faisal added.

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), the minister said that there is a development in the investment field following the opening of the border crossing between the two countries. He highlighted the Oman-Saudi Investment Forum held in Riyadh during January 31 to February 4. SEE ALSO P2



■ MINISTERS RECEIVE SAUDI FOREIGN MINISTER



Gen. Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received Prince Faisal Farhan Al Saud, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, in Muscat on Monday. During the meeting, they reviewed areas of cooperation between Oman and Saudi Arabia and touched on means of enhancing the distinguished relations between the two countries. They also exchanged views on several matters of mutual interest. The meeting was attended by Abdullah Saud Al Anzi, KSA Ambassador to Oman. Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, and Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, also held a consultative meeting at the Foreign Ministry.

Shura nod to draft biometrics law

MUSCAT: Majlis Ashshura approved the draft biometrics law forwarded by the government and decided to refer it to the Council of Ministers.

Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rabie, head of the Legislative and Legal Committee read out the draft law before the council.

Majlis Ashshura convened its sixth ordinary meeting of the fourth annual session (2022-2023) under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, on Monday.

The meeting saw enhanced discussion among the council members over the draft law as the Legislative and Legal Committee stated its visions and observations about the law.

The council approved a request of discussion presented to Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education regarding qualifying and appointing the graduates of educational colleges, and decided to refer the request to the Council



of Ministers.

Dr Hamad bin Hamdan al Rabie delivered an urgent statement regarding the state-owned Al Namaa Poultry in which he said: “After less than five years since its foundation, the company began to collapse, it halted its operations and dismissed its workers. If you go to the company’s headquarters you will see only the security guard.” In his statement, the member said: “The foundation of a giant

national project by the name of Al Namaa Poultry in the Wilayat of Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate in 2017 was associated with media frenzy being one of the biggest food security projects not only in the Sultanate of Oman but the whole region at a cost of RO 106 million.

It is a partnership between private companies, investment funds and retirement funds in addition to Oman Food Investment Holding.” Such a

large project should have been preceded by several feasibility studies that weighed the pros and cons and the risks that would face the project, he said.

In his statement, Al Rabie raised many questions about the reason for project failure, calling for the government to urgently protect the project from failing and put it back on track by forming a committee entrusted with investigating the reasons that led to the current situation.

Oman takes part in LEAP Riyadh 2023

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology and a number of government and private establishments, is participating in the international technical conference “LEAP Riyadh 2023”, which started in Riyadh on Monday and will last for several days.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, said in a dialogue session at the conference that the event lends force to the National Programme for Digital Economy.

Al Maawali pointed out that the programme constitutes a



roadmap for the growth of digital economy in Oman aimed at generating new opportunities for the digitalisation of businesses, achieving the government’s digital transition and attracting technical investments to Oman.

The minister underscored the comparative advantage of Oman’s geographical location, the availability of submarine cables linking the East with the West, and the business environment capable of

attracting major international companies specialised in modern technologies, notably providers of cloud service.

Through its participation in LEAP Riyadh 2023, Oman aspires to market local companies specialised in the field of communications and information technology and promote them in regional and global markets.

Oman also seeks to showcase its digital transformation initiatives. In this context, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises will organise an exposition on the sidelines of the event on Tuesday to portray the capabilities of 21 Oman start-ups. A group of 21 Omani start-ups will be under the limelight.



Smart meters to enable remote reading: APSR

VINOD NAIR
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The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) said the government has been focusing on replacing old meters with smart ones, which will help in remote reading to provide an accurate reading of bills.

The government aims to do away with the estimated reading of utility bills with the installation of smart meters.

It may be noted that 450,000 smart meters for electricity and 400,000 smart meters for water were installed in 2022.

These details were revealed at the annual press conference of APSR on Monday.

Dr Mansour al Hinai, Chairman of APSR, said that the number of subscribers’ accounts witnessed an increase of 3.5 per cent for electricity and 5 per cent for water and added that the Authority is currently reviewing the fees for connecting water services.

APSR is working on the project’s second phase to link the main electrical system to the electricity system in the Dhofar Governorate.

APSR also approved plans to integrate with the Gulf network to improve the system’s efficiency and reduce the costs of the sectors subject to the regulation of the electricity sector.

electricity grid link.

Dr Al Hinai spoke about the attention accorded by the government to the development of policies and regulations, with a view to empowering different sectors of concern to the APSR.

Al Hinai pointed out that the APSR oversaw the execution of the endorsed plans, through licensed firms, to diversify sources of alternative energy and devise necessary regulations for market liberalisation. He elaborated on a project for spot market. He noted that the project’s first phase brought about a mechanism of direct sale for power generation firms whose contracts have expired, as well as consumers relying on household production.

Al Hinai said APSR is planning to replace 30 per cent of traditional power with alternative energy by 2030.

In its plan for 2023, the APSR focuses on sustainability, efficiency and credibility. These are projected to be realised by implementing projects designed to upgrade the quality of services rendered to subscribers, ameliorating regulations, attracting investments, developing human resources, achieving digital transition and carbon neutrality and meeting the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

The chairman confirmed that technical investigations on



One of the most important projects of the Authority for 2023 is preparing regulatory frameworks for the water and sanitation sector, supervising the restructuring of the energy buying, selling, and planning system, as well as reviewing the economic regulation mechanism 2024-2027 for the OQ Gas Networks Company, as well as following up and implementing the north-south

electricity outage in September 2022 showed that the outage was not related to any cyberattack or a shortage of supply or power generation or defective network planning or technical fault related to the safety of the electricity system.

On the sidelines of the press conference, APSR and power and water companies signed the objectives of Oman Vision 2040 in the energy field.

Preventing cancer requires a major lifestyle change

FROM PAGE 1

Cigarette smoking causes cancer of the mouth and throat, oesophagus, stomach, colon, rectum, liver, pancreas, voicebox (larynx), trachea, bronchus, kidney and renal pelvis, urinary bladder, and cervix, and causes acute myeloid leukaemia.

Consumption of alcohol is one of the most important factors that cause cancer. Similar is the case with tobacco use and excess body weight. Heavy alcohol consumption may cause liver, breast, colorectal, oesophageal, and head and neck cancer.

Cancer can develop slowly over the time, and some types may not show symptoms until advanced stages. Preventative

cancer screenings are used to find cancer in people with no symptoms, offering the best chance of finding it early, before it spreads.

“At age 45, it’s recommended women start annual mammograms test to avoid breast cancer. Colon cancer screenings should also begin at the age of 45 for both men and women. That’s when treatment is most likely to succeed,” he said.

You can reduce your risk of getting cancer by making healthy choices like keeping a healthy weight and being physically active, protecting your skin, limiting the consumption of processed meats and eating plenty of fruits and vegetables.



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■ OMAN-UAE MILITARY DRILL BEGINS IN ABU DHABI



The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) units, Rafo aircraft and RNO ships, are taking part in the Oman-UAE military drill (Cooperation 3), which began in Al Hamra Military Training Centre in Abu Dhabi on Monday. The drill will continue till February 16. The participation comes within the framework of the annual training programmes conducted by the corps of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) represented by the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) with the armies of brotherly and friendly countries. The aim of the drill is to exchange military expertise, activate training plans to sustain high levels of training performance and combat competence of SAF personnel. — ONA

Conference on earth sciences kicks off in SQU

MUSCAT: The First International Conference on Earth Sciences and Energy Transition began at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) on Monday under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The 5-day conference is organised by the SQU Earth Sciences Research Centre in cooperation with the Unesco chair for Ophiolite studies.

As many as 162 researchers representing 26 countries are taking part in the accompanying exhibition.

The conference highlights the role of earth sciences and their importance in the transition to clean energy. It also underlines studies in this field, alternative energy types, and ways to combat carbon dioxide emissions.

The event discusses several



topics, including hydrogen energy, thermal and solar energy, wind energy, water energy, energy waste and the environment, as well as the utilisation and storage of carbon dioxide. — ONA

Tender Board launches Adaa and Amana



Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, during the launch ceremony at the Diplomatic Club in Muscat on Monday. — ONA

MUSCAT: The Tender Board on Monday launched two new platforms named Amana and Adaa, as well as two initiatives to consolidate work culture and a job competencies matrix.

The services were inducted at the Tender Board's annual gathering, held at the Diplomatic Club. The ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy.

Al Saqri said, "The restructuring of the Tender Board will play a significant role in raising the competence of the Tender Board and the government's projects and procurements. The developments included the creation of a local content directorate, a government procurements directorate and a project follow-up directorate." Al Saqri said that figures show the achievement of fiscal surplus and an improvement in the performance of projects. He expected a major decline in project contracts 'change orders' (amendments) in the forthcoming stage, noting that change orders in government projects often entail waste of public funds.

Badr bin Salim al Maamari, Secretary-General of the Tender Board, said that the value of tenders and associated works awarded by the Tender Board stood at more than RO 497 million in 2022. These were distributed into five sectors: health, roads and airports,

The value of tenders and associated works awarded by the Tender Board stood at over

RO 497 million in 2022

education, infrastructure and information technology, he added.

Al Maamari said number of small and medium enterprises registered in 2022 rose by 81 per cent. He pointed out that the Tender Board's plan in 2023 focuses on three main objectives: Developing national capacities and employment, fiscal sustainability and achieving high quality in terms of tenders, projects and government procurements.

The annual gathering of the Tender Board's sought to develop an integrated system that enhances the competence of government spending linked to government projects. The meeting aimed to find ways to improve the capabilities of the national staff, Omani firms and the local market.

This is in addition to furnishing a dynamic working environment that comprises better programmes and procedures for implementation of government projects and procurements in future. — ONA

Kites of various shapes add colour to Sur Maritime Festival

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Omani Maritime Heritage Festival, hosted by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, attracted hundreds of visitors to the Sur beach as scores of passionate Omani and expatriate kite flyers decorated the seaside with colourful kites just as kids tried their hands at the art of kite flying.

Oman Kite Team captain Mohammed, secretary Khalid, six other members along with One India Kite Team's Abdulla Maliyekkal and Kerala Kite's Abbas Kalathil flew kites of various shapes and sizes for hours.

Circle shaped kite, which have spars in only one plane and are flat when laid on the ground; soft kites without spars, which use the force of the wind to form their structure; cellular, dimensional kites with spars that provide a rigid 3-dimensional structure adorned



Sur skies for hours engaging a huge crowd throughout the event. "We have been flying kites for nearly ten years now, and opportunities like Sur Maritime

Festival is an occasion where we can show our loyalty to the country and the people through the kites," said members of the Oman Kite Team, based in Suwaiq, which



has already taken part in many festivals across the world.

The 17-day-long festival, organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in

cooperation with the Office of the Governor of South Al Sharqiyah and a number of government and private agencies, Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO)

and Oman LNG Company in the Wilayat of Sur from February 3 to 19 includes a plethora of activities.

"It is our dream project to conduct kite-flying competitions across the world, and we have participated in China, Malaysia and Japan kite fests, besides many other festivals. The opportunity in Sur through the authorities to fly kites is a rare honour for us, and we thank them for conducting a flawless kite festival. Indeed, Sur has a very windy beach and is suitable for kite flying events," said members of the One India Kite.

Other attractions of the festival include a Maritime Heritage Village offers a kaleidoscopic view of the maritime heritage of the Wilayat of Sur. It also has a pavilion dedicated to maritime heritage, craft industries related to marine heritage, folklore, live theatre, recreational and cultural events.



DEVELOPMENT WITH FOCUS ON WELFARE

THE ECONOMY
RECORDED ITS
STRONGEST
PERFORMANCE,
AIDED BY HIGH OIL
PRICES AND EASE
OF ALL PANDEMIC
RESTRICTIONS

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The Sultanate of Oman has been witnessing a steady post-pandemic recovery due to economic reforms initiated by the government, especially the Mid-term Fiscal Term Plan, which was introduced in the year 2020 to beat challenges posed by low oil prices and the Covid-related restrictions on businesses.

Last year, the economy recorded its strongest performance, aided by high oil prices and ease of all pandemic restrictions following a successful vaccine drive.

For the first time since 2014, the Sultanate of Oman reported a budget surplus of RO 1.146bn in 2022 against an estimated deficit of RO 1.550bn at the start of the same year.

The additional financial revenues helped the government to spend more on reducing public debt and increasing and enhancing social spending.

Three key global rating agencies upgraded the Sultanate of Oman's sovereign credit ratings in 2022.

It may be noted that the State Budget 2023 focused on spending in the social sectors, including education.

The social and essential sectors

are expected to spend about RO 4.3 billion, or 38 per cent of total public spending projected in the budget.

Of these, 44 per cent has been marked for the education sector, 22 per cent for social security and care, 12 per cent for the housing sector, and 22 per cent for the health sector.

New projects for the year 2023 include the construction of 15 schools in various governorates, health centres in some governorates, implementation of a few dual and service roads, natural parks and dams, and the establishment of a fishing port in the Wilayat of Mahout.

Apart from 15 schools, 42 schools will be developed in partnership with the private sector.

The government is focusing on maintaining economic stability, growth of no less than three per cent and inflation rate of not more than three per cent, employment of job-seekers under the National Employment Programme (NEP), and digital transformation, among others.

More than 100 per cent of its

targeted 35,000 job opportunities in the public and private sectors were created in 2022.

The number of job-seekers who joined the labour market for the first time crossed the 20,000 mark, and the number of employees who availed of the Benefit of Job Security increased by about 3,000 in 2022 compared to 2021.

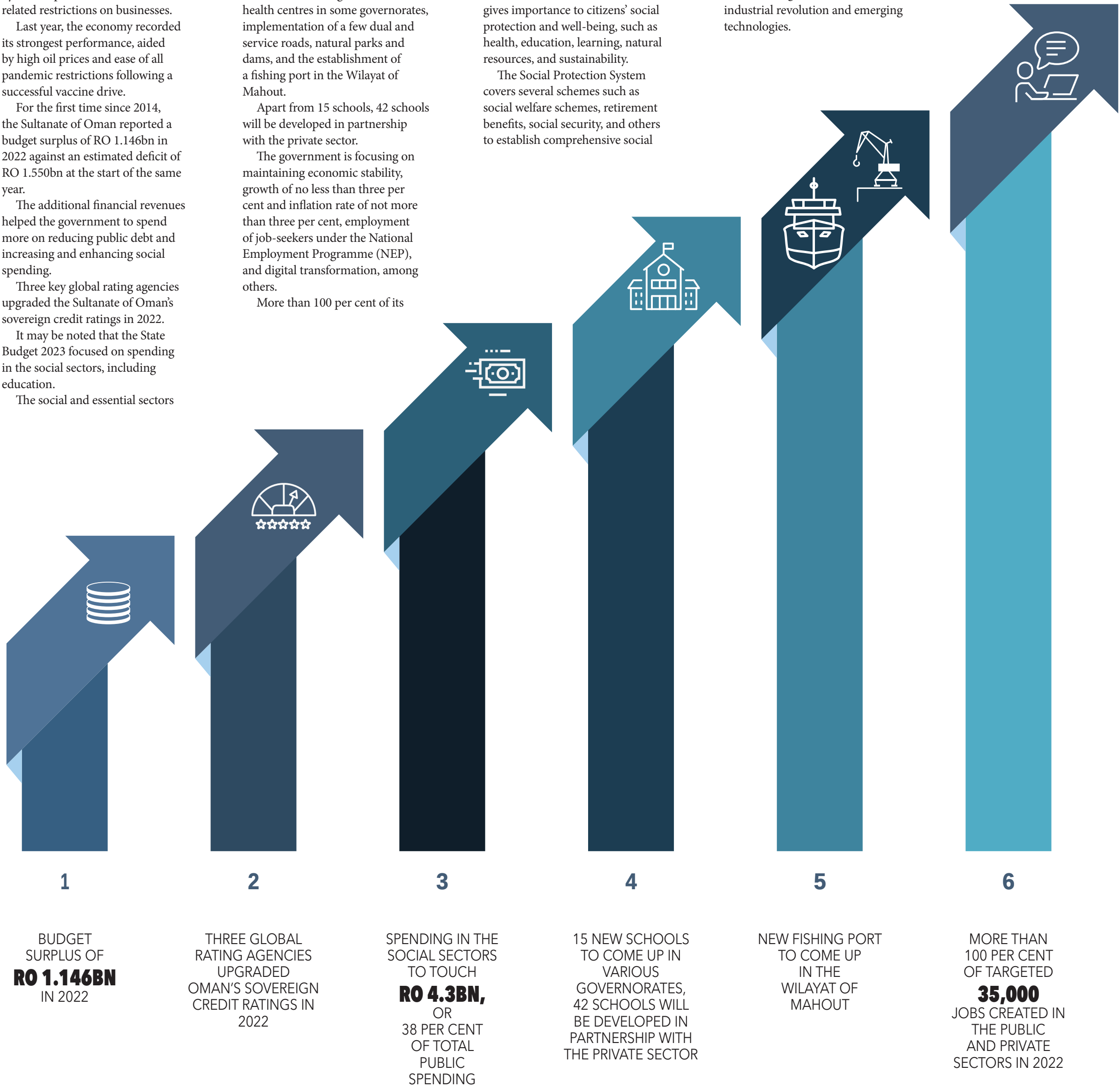
The Mid-term Fiscal Term Plan gives importance to citizens' social protection and well-being, such as health, education, learning, natural resources, and sustainability.

The Social Protection System covers several schemes such as social welfare schemes, retirement benefits, social security, and others to establish comprehensive social

protection for vulnerable people.

Several reforms initiated by the government include allowing expatriates to own real estate and visa exemption for tourists from over 100 countries.

The IT sector transformation focuses on expanding the fibre optic network expansion projects and promoting investment in the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution and emerging technologies.





Heritage facade ready for upcoming Khareef

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
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With a renewed heritage facade, Dhofar's Khareef 2023 will have many new features. Muscat National Development and Investment Company (ASAAS) has completed the first phase of Al Haffa Beach Market in Salalah.

Work on the project covering over 60,000 square metres began in 2021 in cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Dhofar, Dhofar Municipality and ASAAS.

"The Edge Development Project is a distinguished addition to the tourism, investment projects and opportunities it provides to the governorate, due to the presence of components and elements that open wide horizons for such projects," said Ahmed bin Salem al Busaidy, Chairman of ASAAS, during the launch of the project.

He also stressed the role of the Omani Investment Authority in empowering investment companies and giving them priority and confidence in developing tourism projects in the Sultanate of Oman. It is in



line with the Sultanate of Oman's strategy to enhance the tourism sector and diversify sources of income in line with the goals of the future vision of the Sultanate of Oman, Oman Vision 2040.

The waterfront consists of a series of shops, some of which are functional. It also has a marine walkway, which is ready along with other services and entertainment facilities.

The Al Haffa Beach Market

project consists of heritage markets, restaurants and cafes, family service and entertainment units, and rental areas exceeding 14,000 square metres.

Al Hafah Market, in its new look, provides the necessary capabilities to develop a national product with high quality, and to be a destination for many small and medium enterprises, and to attract leading brands.

With the Sultanate of Oman

moving towards decentralisation, all governorates represented by governors' offices are working on developing and implementing a number of developmental, service and infrastructure projects that contribute to supporting and developing the state's economy and meeting the needs of the citizen.

Dhofar Governorate has become a tourist destination not only during the Khareef season. Being a summer city during the

Khareef for local, Gulf and Arab tourists, it has a large presence year after year during the winter season in light of direct flights coming from abroad. It has become a tourist destination during the winter for European tourists.

Salalah markets appeal to many tourists due to its diversity and multiple options that it provides to visitors, and one of the most famous of these markets is the

Al Haffa market, which is located in the Al Hosn area, which used to carry many shops and goods among its halls that attracted the admiration of its visitors.

This place has become a destination for many people who want to enjoy a unique shopping experience, as it is considered one of the most famous and distinguished historical markets, as it is characterised as a diverse market.

Bidiya Museum showcases rare Omani heritage



TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

The Wilayat of Bidiya attracts several tourists every day. It hosts visitors from different countries due to its soft winter when tourists love to explore the desert.

The place offers activities like camel riding, dune bashing as well as sand boarding. Others prefer to learn about the types of plants and trees that grow exceptionally well in desert environments.

Al Sharqiyah is considered as one of the most beautiful camping areas in the Sultanate of Oman. Visitors prefer this area due to the ease of access and the availability of services close to it. Tourist camps around are spread over on the sands with tourism services to explore the golden desert.

Another attraction Bidiya Museum, which is designed like a traditional Omani house made of stone and mud. It displays old guns, silver daggers, traditional clothes, tools and utensils made of pottery and decorative copper ware.



The number of archaeological and heritage items here is estimated at about 18,000 artifacts, including weapons, coins, crafts, fashion, etc., which tell the history of the Wilayat of Bidiya in particular and the Sultanate of Oman in general.

The Bidiya Museum is located near Al Mantrib Castle. Established in 2008 by individual efforts, it is an archaeological and heritage asset. The museum building was designed to simulate the ancient Omani architectural

character.

The museum's northern building consists of two floors and contains seven galleries, in which several models of Omani daggers and swords, which are unique to the governorates of Oman.

The museum's oldest artifacts are trays dating back to the first Stone Age, and some weapons.

On the upper floor of the museum, a collection of traditional tools related to architectural models is displayed. The visitors can get a wonderful view of the desert oases, and one can also see Al Mantrib Castle which was built in the early seventh century AH and was restored and opened as a heritage landmark in 1991.

This museum provides a real opportunity to foreign tourists and new generations to see the authentic Omani heritage. Establishing private museums is a well-known gesture in a number of wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman. Such museums are present in Muscat, Al Rustaq and other cities.

60 per cent of Rusayl-Bidbid road widening project complete

MUSCAT: Sixty per cent of the Rusayl road expansion project in Bidbid, which starts from the Rusayl-Nizwa intersection on the Muscat Expressway and ends at the Sharqiyah Expressway intersection in the Wilayat of Bidbid, has been completed.

The 27-kilometre road will improve the capacity of the road to accommodate increasing traffic by expanding the road to 4 lanes in each direction.

During a visit on Monday, Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamaki, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport, urged the company to expedite the implementation of the project and open it to traffic to facilitate the movement of people between Muscat and other governorates with ease.

He explained that the project works include renovating the existing paved layers, adding the third and fourth lanes to meet the



design needs and the volume of traffic expected during the next twenty years; constructing service roads and 4 pedestrian crossings to connect communities on both sides of the road, and expanding existing bridges such as Wadi Al Jafnain Bridge and Wadi Fanja Bridge at the town of Al Amqat, and the construction of two new intersections for Ghala Road and Sih Al Ahmar.

The under-secretary pointed out that the project includes the expansion of the Fanja intersection and Bidbid intersection, the construction of a new valley bridge in the Wadi Al Daboun area, the construction of box culverts to drain rainwater, works to protect services and other facilities, and the construction of utility pipelines for services. — ONA

■ AIMING FOR BEST SHOT



The shooting competition organised by the Royal Court Affairs began at the shooting range of the Royal Guard of Oman in Halban on Monday. Seven teams are taking part in the competition, which will continue until February 14. The competition includes pistol shooting and rifle shooting. — ONA



QUAKE HITS TURKEY, SYRIA

ADANA & DAMASCUS: A huge earthquake killed about 2,300 people and injured thousands more on Monday in central Turkey and northwest Syria, flattening apartment blocks and heaping more destruction on Syrian cities already devastated by years of war.

The magnitude 7.8 quake, which hit before sunrise in bitter winter weather, was the worst to strike Turkey this century. It was followed in the early afternoon by another large quake of magnitude 7.7.

It was not immediately clear how much damage had been done by the second quake, which like the first was felt across the region and endangered rescuers struggling to pull casualties from the rubble, often using their bare hands to remove masonry.

“We were shaken like a cradle. There were nine of us at home.

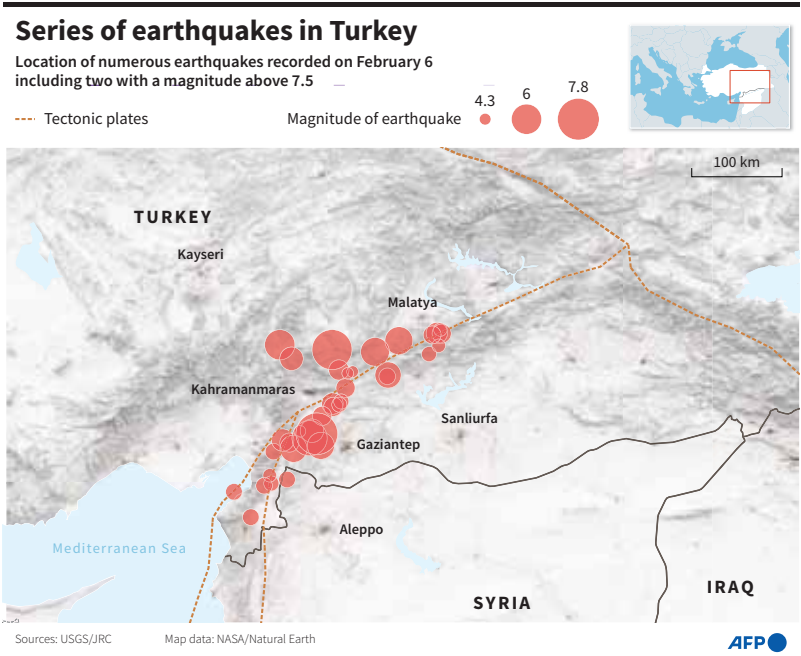
Two sons of mine are still in the rubble, I’m waiting for them,” said a woman with a broken arm and injuries to her face, speaking in an ambulance near the wreckage of a seven-storey block where she had lived in Diyarbakir in southeast Turkey.

In Turkey, the death toll stood at 1,014 people, the head of its disaster agency said.

President Tayyip Erdogan said 5,383 had been injured but he could not predict how much the death toll would rise as search and rescue efforts continued. He added that 2,818 buildings had collapsed.

“Everyone is putting their heart and soul into efforts although winter season, cold weather and the earthquake happening during the night makes things more difficult,” he said.

Live footage from Turkish state broadcaster TRT showed



a building collapse in the southern province of Adana after the second quake. It was not immediately clear if it was evacuated.

In Syria, already wrecked by more than 11 years of civil war, the health ministry said about

430 people had been killed and more than 1,000 injured. In the Syrian rebel-held northwest, a United Nations spokesperson said 255 people had died.

In Diyarbakir, journalists saw dozens of rescue workers searching through a mound of debris, all that was left of a big building, and hauling off bits of wreckage as they looked for survivors. Occasionally they raised their hands and called for quiet, listening for sounds of life.

Men carried a girl wrapped in blankets from a collapsed building in the city. In Izmir, drone footage showed rescue workers stood atop a hill of rubble where a building once stood, working to lift slabs of masonry.

Footage circulated on Twitter showed two neighbouring buildings collapsing one after the other in Syria’s Aleppo, filling the

street with billowing dust.

Two residents of the city, which has been heavily damaged in the war, said the buildings had fallen in the hours after the quake, which was also felt in Cyprus and Lebanon.

In the Syrian rebel-held town of Jandaris in Aleppo province, a mound of concrete, steel rods and bundles of clothes lay where a multi-storey building once stood.

“There were 12 families under there. Not a single one came out. Not one,” said a thin young man, his eyes wide open in shock and his hand bandaged.

Raed Fares of the Syrian White Helmets, a rescue service in rebel-held territory known for pulling people from the ruins of buildings destroyed by air strikes, said they were in “a race against time to save the lives of those under the rubble”.

Abdul Salam al Mahmoud, a

TREMORS FELT AS FAR AWAY AS GREENLAND

COPENHAGEN: Tremors from the powerful earthquake that rocked Turkey and neighbouring Syria on Monday were felt as far away as Greenland, the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland said.

“The large earthquakes in Turkey were clearly registered on the seismographs in Denmark and Greenland,” seismologist Tine Larsen said. The first 7.8-magnitude quake struck at 04:17 am at a depth of about 17.9 kilometres near the Turkish city of Gaziantep, which is home to around

two million people, the US Geological Survey said.

“The waves from the earthquake reached the seismograph on the Danish island of Bornholm approximately five minutes after the shaking started,” Larsen said. “Eight minutes after the earthquake, the shaking reached the east coast of Greenland, propagating further through all of Greenland,” she added.

Later, another 7.5-magnitude quake struck southeastern Turkey. “We have registered both earthquakes — and a

lot of aftershocks — in Denmark and Greenland,” she said.

ISRAEL OFFERS HUMANITARIAN AID
TEL AVIV: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has offered humanitarian assistance to Turkey and Syria, announcing the dispatch of search and rescue teams as well as medical teams “in accordance with a request from the Turkish government.” The precise nature of the assistance to Israel’s northern

neighbour, was not disclosed.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant earlier ordered the army to prepare to deploy a humanitarian aid unit to Turkey. Israel’s Zaka rescue service has also said it is prepared to assist with search operations.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog tweeted: “I am deeply saddened by the enormous disaster that has befallen Türkiye following last night’s earthquake. My condolences to President (Recep Tayyip) Erdogan and



omanobserver.com/podcast

Syrian in the town of Atareb, said it felt “like the apocalypse”.

The casualty toll in northwestern Syria was expected to increase, a spokesperson for the UN office for coordinating humanitarian affairs in northwestern Syria said.

“We have been dealing with weather events and snowstorms but nothing on the scale of an earthquake of this magnitude. It just adds on to all the layers of suffering,” said Madevi Sun-Suon, the spokesperson.

Syrian state television showed footage of rescue teams searching for survivors in heavy rain and sleet. President Bashar al-Assad held an emergency cabinet meeting to review the damage and discuss the next steps, his office said.

People in Damascus and in the Lebanese cities of Beirut and Tripoli ran into the street and took to their cars to get away from their buildings in fear of collapses, witnesses said.

Footage on broadcaster CNNTurk showed the historic Gaziantep Castle was severely damaged.

In the Turkish city of Malatya, a rescue worker crawled into a collapsed building, trying to identify a survivor trapped under the wreckage, in footage released by Turkey’s Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD).

“What colour are you wearing? Are you wearing pink? Please take care of yourself for the moment, I cannot see anything else,” the rescue worker could be heard saying.

Erdogan said 45 countries had offered to help the search and rescue efforts.

The United States was “profoundly concerned” about the quake and was monitoring events closely, White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said on Twitter. “We stand ready to provide any and all needed assistance,” he said.

The US Geological Survey said the overnight quake struck at a depth of 17.9 km. It reported a series of earthquakes, one of 6.7 magnitude. The region straddles seismic fault lines.

“The combination of large magnitude and shallow depth made this earthquake extremely destructive,” Mohammad Kashani, Associate Professor of Structural and Earthquake Engineering at the University of Southampton, said.

It was Turkey’s most severe quake since 1999, when one of similar magnitude devastated Izmit and the heavily populated eastern Marmara Sea region near Istanbul, killing more than 17,000. — Reuters



Rescuers search for survivors under the rubble following an earthquake in Jandaris, Syria. — Reuters

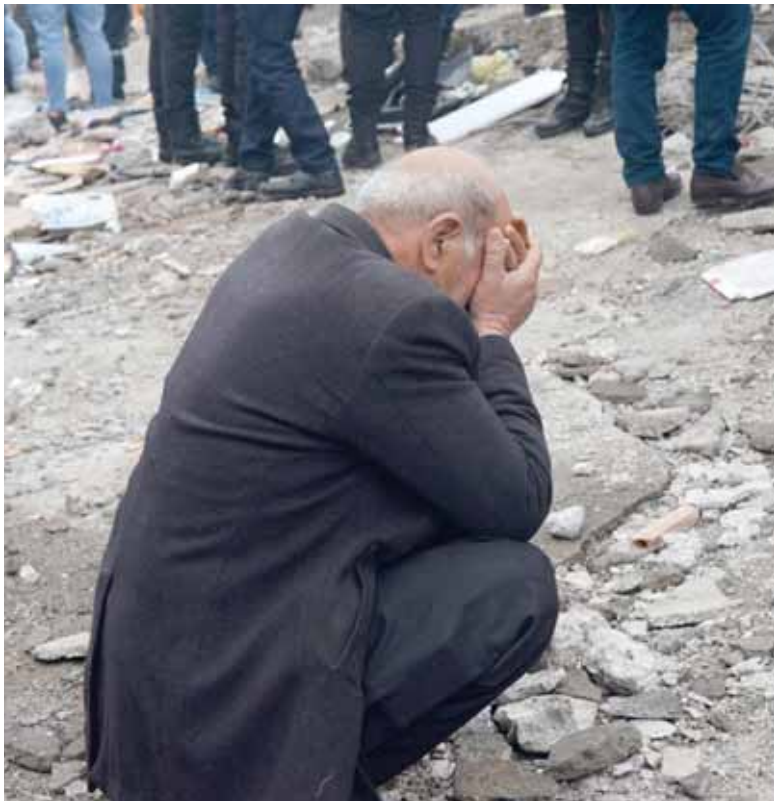


A man carries a girl following an earthquake, in rebel-held town of Jandaris, Syria. — Reuters



People stand in front of collapsed buildings following an earthquake in Kahramanmaraş, Turkey. — Reuters

Aleppo’s ancient citadel is damaged following a deadly earthquake that shook Syria. — AFP



A man reacts as people search for survivors through the rubble in Diyarbakir. — AFP



the Turkish people for the loss of life and destruction of livelihoods.”

IRAN TO SUPPORT IN RELIEF EFFORTS

TEHRAN: Iran offered support to those devastated by earthquakes in Syria and Turkey, saying it was ready to provide immediate assistance. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi sent condolences to the “friendly and brotherly countries” on Monday, but did not provide specific details as to what his country would supply.

Along with Russia, Iran is the most important ally of Syrian ruler Bashar al Assad in the civil war. One of the most severe areas affected by the earthquake on Monday was the Idlib region, which is held by Syrian fighters. According to observers, this is likely to make government emergency aid more difficult.

UK SENDING 76 SEARCH-AND-RESCUE SPECIALISTS

LONDON: The UK will immediately

send emergency response specialists, dogs and equipment to Turkey following the earthquake there, foreign minister James Cleverly said. Cleverly tweeted: “The UK is sending immediate support to Turkey including a team of 76 search & rescue specialists, equipment and rescue dogs.”

The foreign ministry said it would send four dogs as well as equipment to cut concrete, tools to support buildings and seismic listening

devices, following a request from Turkey. The aid mission is expected to arrive around 9 pm local time in Gaziantep in south-eastern Turkey.

The UK said it was also sending an emergency medical team to assess the situation on the ground. The ministry added that the UK-aid funded White Helmets were mounting a “significant search and rescue response” in north-west Syria, and have “mobilised all their resources to respond to emerging needs”.

GREECE PLEDGES ‘EVERY FORCE AVAILABLE’ TO AID TURKEY

ATHENS: Greece’s prime minister pledged to make “every force available” to aid Turkey after the neighbouring country was hit by a deadly 7.8-magnitude earthquake. Kyriakos Mitsotakis told the cabinet that Ankara had already approved the dispatch of a Greek emergency rescue squad and that Athens was ready to send “additional equipment, medical supplies, blankets, tents” depending on further Turkish requests. — AFP/Reuters/dpa

Tips for performing well during exams



Massrat Shaikh

The writer is an educational psychologist

With CBSE exams around the corner and other high schoolers gearing up for their last semester, exam time is always stressful for students, parents, and teachers. The following strategies can be helpful for everyone.

For Students - Your attitude towards your exams will directly affect your performance. The following tips can be helpful -

1. If you have listened, applied yourself, and worked this year, you will inherently know the answer to the question. Therefore do your best, and attempt your exam knowing that you will breathe, release, and let go of the outcome.
2. Have the perspective that education is a gift and only some are lucky enough to take the exams. Several children around the world

would love to take the opportunity you have.

3. During the exam, try this breathing exercise for a few minutes - Close your eyes, sit up straight, do some deep breathing, and with every breath, imagine you are breathing in calm and breathing out the anxiety.

For Teachers - Exam time is a delicate moment, and teachers play a critical role. These are some of the tips that can help teachers -

1. Make sure students understand the exam format, requirements, and grading criteria and have clear and concise information.
2. Offering extra help for struggling students, such as after-school tutoring or review sessions, can be very helpful.
3. Teaching students effective

OFFERING EXTRA HELP FOR STRUGGLING STUDENTS, SUCH AS AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORING OR REVIEW SESSIONS, CAN BE VERY HELPFUL

study habits and providing strategies for studying and stress management are essential, and they should be taught these skills explicitly.

4. Foster a positive and supportive classroom environment that encourages students to ask questions and seek help when needed.

5. Provide students with encouragement and positive reinforcement to help boost their

confidence.

For Parents - Parents play a vital role in providing emotional support during exam time. The following strategies can help parents -

1. Your positive and encouraging attitude can boost children's confidence.
2. Creating a stress-free environment at home by avoiding conflict, providing healthy meals, getting enough sleep, and minimising distractions are necessary to create a supportive environment at home.
3. Encourage your children to prioritise their tasks, create a study schedule, and help them stick to it.
4. Encourage students to take breaks and engage in physical activity, hobbies, or socialising,

Taking small mental breaks is extremely important for children at this time.

5. Listen to your children's concerns and offer constructive solutions to help them cope with stress.

6. Help them maintain a healthy perspective and avoid overthinking or obsessing about exams.

7. Encourage children to care for themselves physically and emotionally through exercise, healthy eating, and adequate sleep.

It is good to help children remain focused on their studies, but at the same time, pressurising is harmful. In the end, no matter their grades, it does not represent who your child is, and one exam does not determine their future.

Dealing with job search and stress



Amani Khaseeb Hamed Al Jalbooby

When you are in the process of looking for a new job, it can be a very stressful psychologically. Psychological stress is often caused by problems to personal reactions and perception.

In other words, a situation can be stressful for one individual, but for others, it might not be at all. It is possible to keep your balance through some of the strategies below, which can help you make better decisions in the future by giving you the space to make informed decisions and deal with psychological stress.

Rather than visualising how you will perform, visualise how you will show up. The trick to clearing up some of the fog of your head caused by stress is to be able to imagine how you would like to appear at the competition.

The benefits of doing this are that you will be able to clear your mind from some of the distractions brought about by stress, and you will be able to be calmer and more focused.

The best way to deal with worry is to schedule an appointment. You should schedule that heavy thought so that you can visit that thought only once per day, at a designated time, when there is something pulling at your mind.

The next time it occurs to you, as it will eventually do, just remind yourself to move on and that it has already been scheduled.

It is a good idea to give yourself a moment to think. Be careful not to make any rash decisions. It would be best if you were to sit back and wait for at least 24 hours after receiving an offer if you got one. In this way, you will have your own space to think about what choice is going to be most fulfilling for you in the long run, and it will give you the opportunity to move past your most immediate instinct.

Many empirical research studies have been conducted particularly on mindfulness meditation-based therapies.

Evidence suggests that meditation is successful while used in controlling stress and anxiety.

Several aspects of meditation prove to help manage pain.

Furthermore, it helps managing the reactivity of our biological stress responses and blood pressure in response to stress. Some researchers suggest that it may also be a useful intervention for certain functional disorders such as fibromyalgia.

Exercising is also another best strategy to deal with the stress in the period of job search. As the body is automatically prepared to cope with stress, physically exerting the adrenaline energy is a good way to manage stress.

Year 2 of the Ukraine war is going to get scary



Thomas L. Friedman

The writer is a NYT Op-Ed columnist, writes about foreign affairs

As we approach the anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine — and the ferocious Ukrainian response backed by a US-led Western coalition — the following question urgently needs answering: How is it that on February 23, 2022, virtually no one in America was arguing that it was in our core national interest to enter into an indirect war with Russia to stop it from overrunning Ukraine, a country most Americans couldn't find on a map in 10 tries? And yet now, nearly a year later, polls show solid (though slightly shrinking) American majorities for backing Ukraine with arms and aid, even though this risks a direct conflict with Vladimir Putin's Russia.

That's a head-snapping shift in US public opinion. Surely it's partly explicable by the fact that no US combat forces are in Ukraine, so it feels as if all that we're risking, for now, is arms and treasure — while the full brunt of the war is borne by Ukrainians.

But there is another explanation, even if it's one that most Americans might not be able to articulate and many might only reluctantly agree with.

They know at some deep level that the world we live in today is tilted the way it is because of American power. That doesn't mean we have always used our power wisely, nor could we have succeeded without allies. But to the

PUTIN, IT'S NOW CLEAR, HAS DECIDED TO DOUBLE DOWN, MOBILISING IN RECENT MONTHS POSSIBLY AS MANY AS 500,000 FRESH SOLDIERS FOR A NEW PUSH ON THE WAR'S FIRST ANNIVERSARY

extent that we have used our power wisely and in concert with our allies, we have built and protected a liberal world order since 1945, which has been hugely in our interest — economically and geopolitically.

Upholding this liberal order is the underlying logic that brought the United States and its Nato allies to help Ukraine reverse Putin's "marry me or I'll kill you" invasion — the first such onslaught by one country in Europe against another since the end of World War II.

Now the bad news. For the first year of this war, the United States and

its allies have had it relatively easy. We could send arms, aid and intelligence — as well as impose sanctions on Moscow — and the Ukrainians would do the rest, ravaging Putin's army and pushing his forces back into Eastern Ukraine.

I don't think year two is going to be so easy.

Putin, it's now clear, has decided to double down, mobilising in recent months possibly as many as 500,000 fresh soldiers for a new push on the war's first anniversary.

Mass matters in war — even if that mass contains a large number of mercenaries, convicts and untrained conscripts.

This is going to get scary. And because we have had nearly a generation without a Great Power war, a lot of people have forgotten what made this long era of Great Power peace possible.

While I argued in my 1999 book "The Lexus and the Olive Tree" that the massive explosion of global commerce, trade and connectivity played a major role in this unusually peaceful era, I also argued that "the hidden hand of the market will never work without a hidden fist — McDonald's cannot flourish without McDonnell Douglas, the builder of the F-15."

Somebody needs to keep the order and enforce the rules.

That has been the United States, and I believe that role is going to be tested now more than any time since the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. Are we still up for it?

There is an important new book that puts this challenge in a larger historical context.

In "The Ghost at the Feast: America and the Collapse of World Order, 1900-1941," Brookings Institution historian Robert Kagan argues that whatever isolationist twitches Americans may have, the fact is that, for the past century-plus, a majority of them have supported using U.S. power to shape a liberal world order that kept the world tilted towards open political systems and open markets in more places in more ways on more days — enough to keep the world from becoming a Hobbesian jungle.

— The New York Times



Ukrainian army from the 43rd Heavy Artillery Brigade fire the German howitzer Panzerhaubitze 2000, called Tina by the unit, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, near Bahmut, in Donetsk region. — Reuters

Does the face show it all?

The face says it all, said a friend. But some are always calm, in control of their emotions. The face that can hide emotions or the one that cannot - whom do you think fairs better in life? Silently struggling might preserve dignity while the one that cannot control the overflow of emotions maybe an open book.

Who is better off? The answer to the question is subjective. And we are all not psychiatrists or psychologists, but a group of friends wondered about which personality is better.

There is one among us who can conceal thoughts, feelings and emotions quite well so much that we never know what the person is going through although the person has a sense of humour as well that is prevalent most of the time. Now there are others in the group whom we can detect their mind through their eyes set off to a distant far away place. They look lost and any interruption from our end would be looked at as sheer disturbance.

Even with anger some say it is better to have an outlet than to restrain oneself and feel suffocated. Holding it all inside can lead to more stress induced health problems but on the other hand an anger outburst could cost relationships. What causes anger?

They say that anger could be triggered if we are being threatened or feel we are being treated unfairly. Then there is more - when we do not get what we want, we are disappointed and soon it leads to anger.

When we do not have an opportunity or means to express ourselves then the situation builds up to the point of an outburst but the only factor is that the thrust of it might be with someone else. For example, the stress at work might have build up but the outburst might be with the family members at home who might have no idea where it is coming from leading to misunderstandings and this could be Vice versa. Carrying emotional luggage and dumping it in the wrong place can have adverse effects.



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

ANGER COULD BE TRIGGERED IF WE ARE BEING THREATENED OR FEEL WE ARE BEING TREATED UNFAIRLY

Anger can also lead to hatred because the person in the receiving end might take it personal depending on their character and capacity. For some the outburst might just bounce off but in other people's cases, it might leave a lasting mark. As a friend asked, "We can forgive, but can we forget?"

But then again, for whom do we forgive for? We forgive for our own peace of mind and release space in our mind. It is only when we let go of negativity can we fill ourselves with positivity to let creativity flow within ourselves. For anger consumes us and calmness allows us to rejuvenate and can lead to tranquillity.

We crave for peace and accordingly we enjoy being in the company of calm people because they allow us to thrive. After all we all want to be ourselves and truly understand our calling and know the goals we need to attain. But then how can we when we are constantly distracted with someone else's anger? We end up being on a reactive mode.

There are many people who long to walk away and find their sanctuary.

It is unfortunate that some people think it is their right to let their disappointments be someone else's misery because they have to digest the words that have been spewed in the air. No one really has the time to research and reflect on the source of the anger outbursts.

What one might need is an outlet to share and talk about their disappointment, confusion or fear. Sharing or having a conversation with a trustworthy person somehow diminishes its power. So it seems we all need to have conversations instead of handling the outcomes of anger.

Taking us for granted is yet another situation that makes us feel let down. If only we realised the numerous ways we lose our relationships and how damaging it could be for others, for words that are spoken can never be retrieved back without having emotional impact. Our words can either create joy or unhappiness or motivate or break a person. Let us not forget the age old theory what goes around, comes around.

RACE FOR TOP SPOT



Pilots compete during the seventh stage of the Paragliding Americas Cup, in Roldanillo, Valle del Cauca department, Colombia, on Monday. Pilots from 38 countries are competing to earn the needed points to get a spot in the upcoming Paragliding World Cup. – AFP

On Ukraine frontline troops plead for more tanks, munitions

PHIL HAZLEWOOD

In the frozen fields of the eastern Donbas region of Ukraine, a T-64 tank emerges ominously from its hiding place under camouflage netting, churning the snow into mud under its tracks.

The rusting Soviet-era hulks have led the Ukrainian fight-back against Russian forces, firing directly at enemy positions unseen a short distance away or deep behind their lines.

Gunner Igor Khonko, whose job it is to set the targets and fire, is in little doubt about the key role played by the 1st Tank Brigade in nearly 12 months of bitter fighting.

"For me I see this war as more of an artillery war and of heavy weapons, not infantry," he said, as the thud of heavy guns close by shattered the morning air. "Of course, there is infantry fighting but the main thing is artillery, tanks and air power," he added.

"I think that the course of the war will be changed when we receive heavy weapons: tanks, armoured personnel carriers and long-distance rockets."

After weeks of stalling, Ukraine's Western backers have finally agreed to supply it with the latest modern battle tanks, which President Volodymyr Zelensky believes could be decisive in

AFTER WEEKS OF STALLING, UKRAINE'S WESTERN BACKERS HAVE FINALLY AGREED TO SUPPLY IT WITH THE LATEST MODERN BATTLE TANKS, WHICH PRESIDENT VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY BELIEVES COULD BE DECISIVE IN THE RESTIVE EAST

the restive east. For Khonko, 26, they can't come soon enough. But a more pressing need is a fresh stock of munitions.

"At the moment we're lacking shells. At some parts of the front, you use tanks more than artillery," he said. "It can happen that you shoot 28 shells within 10 minutes... So once you're finished, you have to go back to get new ones."

Khonko's T-64, made a full 24 years before he was born, is showing its age: shells get stuck, oil leaks and the engine can cut out, forcing emergency repairs.

The tanks are so old that his colleague Volodymyr drove one in the mid-1980s when he was conscripted in the Soviet army. Despite a few modifications, they have not changed much since, he said. The 57-year-old carpenter, who declined to give his last name, signed up after Russia's war on February 24 last year and is now back in the cab.

He skillfully manoeuvres the 38-tonne machine across the countryside at speeds of up to 50 km per hour in a deafening roar and belching fog of diesel smoke.

"We need tanks because we don't have any new ones," said

Volodymyr after cutting its engine. "One thing gets broken, then another, then another. Tanks are needed. (The new tanks) have better weapons. They don't break."

Khonko is eager to be trained to operate the new tanks, even though he has only ever seen pictures of the M1 Abrams promised by the United States on the internet.

He reels off its specifications like a car enthusiast comparing the latest high-performance models. "The firing capacity and

the damage that can be caused is much higher from a modern tank. The armour is better, so the crew is better protected," he said.

"Abrams have the best armour in the world. The Russians say that they will not be suited to this terrain but it'll be OK," he said confidently.

A year ago, Khonko had not imagined that his life would be spent in the disputed Donbas, dug in against the cold, with only his comrades and an adopted pregnant cat for company.

Volodymyr hopes for an end to the war, his only son's safe return from the front, and, perhaps like the ageing T-64, retirement. Khonko is more afraid for his parents' safety if Russia escalates its attacks in the run-up to the first anniversary on February 24.

But with fresh supplies of munitions and heavy weaponry, hopefully Ukraine will at least be able to claw back territory by the time temperatures begin to rise above freezing in the coming months, he said. — AFP



People walk on a destroyed bridge to cross a canal towards the disputed area in Bakhmut, amid the Russian war on Ukraine. – AFP

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Oman fencers shine in Arab tourney in Lebanon



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 6

Oman's fencers delivered an impressive show in the Arabian Junior Fencing Championship which concluded in Lebanon. The national fencing team bagged 21 medals including 12 gold medals, four silver and five bronze. The event was organised under an umbrella of Lebanon Fencing Federation in coordination with Arab fencing federation. The Arabian championship targeted different categories including U-12, U-14 and U-16 for both genders and at singles and teams level. Said al Shuaibi clinched the gold medal in boys U-16 singles

competition for floree category. In the same competitions, Ahmed Kaskas claimed silver medal while Ali al Busaidy took bronze medal. The fencer Ghazal al Fulaiti bagged gold medal in the U-14 girls singles floree competitions while Ammar al Azizi won gold medal in the 'Epee' category for boys U-14 singles and Ali al Busaidy snatch bronze medal. Talented fencer Israa al Syiabi impressed as she claimed gold medal in the girls U-16 singles competitions for floree category and also she got silver medal in the singles U-16 for epee competitions while Ghazal al Fulaiti clinched bronze Jana al Sharji bagged bronze



medal in the girls singles U-16 competition for epee category. In the boys U-12 epee category, talented fencer Muhab al Harthy won the gold medal. In the U-16 singles competition for epee category, Ahmed Kaskas claimed gold medal while Said al Shuaibi got the silver medal for boys U-14 singles competition for floree category. Ali al Busaidy clinched gold medal while Ammar al Azizi got the bronze in the same category. Jana al Sharji managed to earn the gold medal in the girls U-14 singles competition for epee category while Salma al Dhugaishi bagged silver medal. At the teams level, the boys

team bagged gold medals in the floree and epee categories. The team was represented by Ahmed Kaskas, Said al Shuaibi, Ammar al Azizi and Ali al Busaidy. The girls team also captured two gold medals in the same categories and the team was represented by Israa al Syiabi, Salma al Dhugaishi, Jana al Sharji and Ghazal al Fulaiti. Oman's Omar al Harthy took part in the Arab event as an umpire. He officiated for different competitions and categories. Al Harthy had earned category 'C' license of umpiring from the Fencing Confederation of Asia (FCA) in last April.

Kirsten impressed by talent in Oman

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket (OC) got a thumbs up from none other than a World Cup-winning coach and South African great Gary Kirsten. Following the conclusion of the second Gary Kirsten Cricket (GKC) camp at the Oman Cricket Academy in Al Amerat on Saturday, Kirsten said that he "was really encouraged with the talent at the Oman Cricket Academy." GKC in cooperation with OC successfully organised the second ever camp in Oman after hosting the inaugural camp last year. During the last few days, Kirsten and his coaching staff organised a grassroots camp besides holding a CoachEd coaches training and a high-performance camp for under-14 and under-19 cricketers. Another highlight of this edition was a talk session by Kirsten emphasising the role of parents in the success story of their children. The South African great said: "I thoroughly enjoyed the last few days in the Sultanate of Oman. Oman Cricket is



Participants receiving certificates from Gary Kirsten.

doing a great job. I was really encouraged with the talent I watched at the Oman Cricket Academy. "The young cricketers showed great enthusiasm and many of them displayed good potential to grow with their abilities." A total of 132 participants took part in various sessions over the five days and included 12 coaches for the CoachEd training. Twenty aspiring cricketers joined the grassroots camp while the maximum 60 attended the high-performance under-14 camp held over three days.



Coaches line up with Gary Kirsten

For me as a coach from another country, it is great to watch the talent in Oman. Importantly, going forward, the cricketers are being looked after very well by Oman Cricket. The cricketers can progress through such a system and it is going to make a big difference to cricket in Oman

GARY KIRSTEN
Former South African player

Another group of 40 cricketers took part in the under-19 high-performance

camp. Kirsten said: "For me as a coach from another country,

it is great to watch the talent in Oman. Importantly, going forward, the cricketers are being looked after very well by Oman Cricket. The cricketers can progress through such a system and it is going to make a big difference to cricket in Oman." The coach, who was at the helm of Indian team that won the 2011 Cricket World Cup, added: "The things that impressed me among the young players were their enthusiasm and eagerness to learn." Kirsten was briefed about the activities at Oman Cricket by Duleep Mendis, chief

development officer, Evert Laubscher, OCA manager and national team trainer, and other officials. Meanwhile, Varun Khimji, OC board advisor, said: "The partnership with GKC is a long-term one, with plans for trips to cricketing destinations abroad where Oman players are given better exposure and competition. The association with GKC is sure to benefit our boys, be it cricketing knowledge, coaching, and playing." Gary Kirsten was accompanied by two other GKC coaches - Ryan van Niekerk and Gareth Von Hoesslin - during the camp. Both Van Niekerk and Von Hoesslin have been part of GKC's first camp which was successfully organised in October 2022. Since his retirement in 2004, Kirsten, a former opening batter, has devoted his time to 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 in IPL 2022.



SCOREBOARD

WEST INDIES	
K Brathwaite lbw Masakadza	182
T Chanderpaul not out	207
K Mayers b Mavuta	20
R Reifer c Kaia b Mavuta	2
J Blackwood c Tsiga b Mavuta	5
R Chase c Ervine b Mavuta	7
J Holder c Tsiga b Mavuta	11
J Da Silva not out	3
Extras (b6, nb3, w1)	10
Total (6 wkts dec, 143 overs)	447
Fall of wickets: 1-336, 2-373, 3-383, 4-389, 5-413, 6-435	
Bowling: R Ngarava 20-4-69-0, V Nyauchi 27-6-73-0, B Evans 24-3-74-0, W Masakadza 31-8-85-1, B Mavuta 41-5-140-5	

CHANDERPAUL HITS UNBEATEN DOUBLE TON FOR WEST INDIES

BULAWAYO, Zimbabwe: Tagenarine Chanderpaul made an unbeaten double century after setting a new West Indies record of 336 for the first wicket with Kraigg Brathwaite on Monday before the tourists declared at 447-6 in the first Test against Zimbabwe.

The stand surpassed the 298-run partnership shared by Gordon Greenidge and Desmond Haynes against England in 1990.

Brathwaite made 182 before being trapped leg before while Chanderpaul, the son of former West Indies skipper Shivnarine, finished on 207 not out after hitting a six to reach a double ton in only his third Test outing.

It is the ninth highest opening Test partnership, a long way short of the overall record of 415 added by South Africa's Graeme Smith and Neil McKenzie against Bangladesh in Chattogram in 2008.

Both batsmen began day three at the Queens Sports Club with hundreds under their belts as West Indies resumed on 221 without loss after two rain-affected days.

The scoring rate had been under two and half until that

point but Brathwaite, 116 not out overnight, immediately set about the attack with the run rate early on standing at five per over.

Brathwaite clattered his way to 182 and looked odds-on to score the second double century of his Test career when he was

trapped by spinner Wellington Masakadza.

For once the captain misread the length and tried to sweep a full-length delivery on off stump, ending an innings which spanned 312 balls and included 18 fours.

— AFP

OPENING STANDOUTS

HIGHEST OPENING PARTNERSHIPS IN TESTS FOR WEST INDIES



PLAYERS	RUNS	OPP	VENUE	YEAR
KC Brathwaite, T Chanderpaul	336	ZIM	BULAWAYO	2023
CG Greenidge, DL Haynes	298	ENG	ST. JOHN'S	1990
CG Greenidge, DL Haynes	296	IND	ST. JOHN'S	1983
SL Campbell, AFG Griffith	276	NZ	HAMILTON	1999

Srinidhi clinches five titles in ISC badminton

MUSCAT: Srinidhi used her brilliant form to claim five titles at the Purshottam Kanji Exchange -sponsored annual badminton championship organised by the Indian Social Club Muscat. She won titles in under-13, girls under-15, girls under-19, girls under-15 doubles pairing with Diya Anil and mixed doubles pairing with talented Himesh Haridas.

In the final of under-13 and under-15, Srinidhi defeated challenging Diya Anil whereas in under-19 she beat talented young player Nakshthra Rajesh.

In under-13 after trailing 6-9, Diya Anil rallied to 13-16 before Srinidhi played with tact and reeled off the next five points scoring 21-14 and 21-14. Srinidhi faced some stiff resistance from Nakshthra in under-19 before wrapping up the title with a cross court smashes and drop shots.

In under-11 girls singles, talented youngster Gauri Sajayan defeated Jessel Ruth Pinto scoring 15-5 and 15-5.

In under-11 boys singles, Ian George Sudhin beat Atharv Dutta in the final and Himnesh Shahlot overcome the resistance in second game from the upcoming player Ishaan Shakthi scoring 21-5 and 21-13. Himnesh along with his partner Aman D'costa defeated Ian George and Atharv D in boys under-13 doubles scoring 21-15 and 21-14 to record two titles in



Srinidhi and Nakshthra, under-19 finalist.



Himnesh and Ishaan, U-13 finalist.

the name of Himnesh Shahlot.

In under-15 boys singles, Vedant Anand faced some resistance from Pranith to claim the title and in girls under-15 doubles Diya and Srinidhi faced stiff resistance before beating

Nakshthra and Ria scoring 22-20 and 22-20.

In Super veterans, Bonny Thomas and Krishnakumar showed some good teamwork in their victory over Kutty and Udayan scoring 21-14, 21-13.

Bank Muscat's Green Sports support deadline on Feb 18

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat , the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced that the bank will continue to accept applications for the 2023 edition of its landmark Green Sports programme till February 18.

As in previous years, in 2023 too, 20 sports teams from different governorates will be provided support in one of the four categories available including greening of football fields with natural grass, synthetic turf, installation of floodlights and water desalination equipment. The aim of the long running programme is to help provide suitable infrastructure that can help Omani youth develop their talents, create local community bonding and contribute to the socio-economic development of the Sultanate of Oman.

Green Sports has brought about a tremendous positive change in Oman's sports infrastructure since its launch in 2012 and benefitted Omani youth teams across different governorates in Oman. Keeping in mind the importance of submission of all the required documents, the bank has requested all youth teams who would like to apply for Green Sports support to submit their applications through the link specified below, well ahead of the deadline.

Teams should go to: <https://techgurusaales.com/greensports/green-stadium-participation-form-terms.aspx> and complete



the application form electronically using a computer, a tablet or a mobile phone. All applicants should be able to showcase their positive impact and contributions to the local community. In case of any queries or doubts on the submission process, teams may email GreenSports@bankmuscat.com, or call 24801200/24801625 for more details.

The landmark Green Sports Programme is one of Bank Muscat's CSR initiatives, which draws from the values of leadership and partnership so as to create a positive impact on Omani society. The programme aims to develop and provide a sustainable infrastructure for sports fields in Oman. The facilities developed as part of the programme are often used as a venue for other social activities by local communities, leading to stronger social bonding and positive behaviour among

young people. It is a matter of great encouragement that Bank Muscat's Green Sports programme has so far benefitted 163 teams with over 50,000 team members across the Sultanate of Oman and with yet another 20 teams to be added this year. In the past few months, the bank has seen the inauguration of more Green Sports fields across Oman with more expected to be completed in the coming months.

Bank Muscat has been well recognised in the past with many local and regional awards for its pioneering efforts in CSR and sustainability , including being honoured by the Ministry of Social Development. Earlier in 2021, the bank was honoured by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry and has also won the Middle East Award for Sustainability from EMEA Finance.

Spurs win with Kane's record goal



Tottenham Hotspur's Harry Kane scores their first goal past Manchester City's Ederson to become Tottenham Hotspur's all-time top goal-scorer. – Reuters

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, FEB 6

It was a special moment for Harry Kane as he drove in his 267th goal for Tottenham Hotspur to become the club's all-time top scorer beating the record of the legendary Jimmy Greaves. It was also the only goal of the match that brought Manchester City their fifth defeat in five goalless visits to Tottenham's new stadium putting a dent on their chances of winning the Premier League as they remain five points behind Arsenal.

Kane became the fastest player to reach 200 Premier League goals with only former players Alan Shearer with 260 and Wayne Rooney with 208 scoring more. A jubilant Kane said: "It's a magical moment. I was desperate

to do it with a win as well. To do it in front of the home fans, it's a moment I'll never forget. To do it against one of the best teams in the world, it's a special feeling.

He added: "There's been so much talk about it the last couple of weeks. I just wanted to get it done as soon as possible. It's a dream come true. My friends and family were here so it was a special time to do it."

Spurs manager Antonio Conte was unable to be at the ground following a surgery.

Spurs took time to settle into the game as City dominated possession for the first 15 minutes moving the ball with control and came close to scoring when Nathan Ake missed a chance for a header and a low volley from Julian Alvarez from the edge of the box took a deflection and



Tottenham Hotspur's Harry Kane celebrates after the match against Manchester City. – Reuters

went just wide.

But against the run of play came Kane's big moment. A poor pass from Rodrigo aimed at Rico Lewis was intercepted by Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg whose accurate pass inside the area to Kane was driven inside the far post in the 15th minute for a definitive goal to the delight of a packed stadium.

In added time at the end of the first half, Riyad Mahrez was unlucky to see his powerful shot hit the bar. The second-half substitutions did not help City, although Kevin De Bruyne's arrival improved the attack and from his excellent free-kick Alvarez saw his shot blocked by Eric Dyer.

City's striker Erling Haaland who has made a massive impact since joining from Borussia

Dortmund for £51.4 million and leading with 25 Premier League goals and 31 in all competitions for the club made little impression on this occasion. He was closely marked by Christian Romero and after Romero was sent off in the 87th minute for a foul on Jack Grealish, Dyer kept a close eye until the end of added time.

On his team's dismal record at Tottenham, City manager, Pep Guardiola said: "Sooner or later it's going to change, but it's strange we haven't scored one goal. We missed penalties in the past. To find an explanation isn't easy. We found the positions, made good balls to the channels, but missed the last action up front. Tottenham have a fantastic team and they punish you. They have a lot of quality up front."

Oman claim four medals in Arab taekwondo

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, FEB 6

The Sultanate of Oman has won four medals at the Arab Taekwondo Championship held in Fujairah, United Arab Emirates. The Oman Professional Taekwondo Academy team represented Oman in this tournament.

The championship witnessed wide participation from different counties. 740 male and female players of different age groups participated in the championship, representing more than 20 countries.

The Omani team, led by coach Harib bin Khalfan al Abdali, snatched four medals. In the junior category, Dania bint Salim al Abdaliyah won first place and was crowned with the gold medal. In the youth category, Sabrah bint



Moosa al Saltiyah won the bronze medal in girls section, while Nibras bin Mohammed al Touqi won the bronze in

boys section. Moataz Ghassan won the silver medal in the junior category. Lieutenant General

Mohammed bin Hilal al Touqi, administrative director of the academy, accompanied the team.

Coach Harib al Abdali expressed his pleasure with this great achievement of the Sultanate's players.

He said that the team has received continuous training to compete in the tournament.

Mohammed bin Hilal al Touqi, Managing Director of the Academy, said: "We are happy with the achievements of our players. The tournament was a good experience for the team members, especially those who participated for the first time in foreign tournaments."

He praised the good performance of the players, and wishing them good achievements in the future tournaments.

Oman team is also taking part in the 10th Fujairah International Championship, from February 5 to 8. The two-star tournament sees participation of 1,364 male and female players representing 36 countries.

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Dhofar Tourism reverses decision to delist

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 6

Publicly listed Dhofar Tourism Company, which owns a luxury resort at Mirbat in Dhofar Governorate, announced on Monday that it has reversed an earlier board decision to convert the business into a closed joint stock company.

The company said in a disclosure filing to the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) that its Board of Directors, meeting on January 30, 2023, had decided to “abandon the conversion of the company from a public shareholding company to a closed joint stock company for

the time being.”

At an earlier meeting on January 16, 2023, the Board had adopted a decision to transform the company from a public shareholding company into a closed joint stock company, and to immediately start the procedures related to its conversion, including calling for an extraordinary meeting of the General Assembly and completing the rest of the procedures.

“This decision came after the main shareholders of the company decided to subject the matter to more time to study and make the appropriate decision,” Dhofar Tourism said yesterday.



Third edition of on-the-job training initiative launched

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, FEB 6

The Ministry of Labour launched the third edition of the “on-the-job training” programme in cooperation with the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED).

The initiative, which targets Omani job seekers with a bachelor’s degree or less, provides a stipend for trainees for a duration of 12 months.

Juhaina al Rumhi from the Training Support Centre in the Ministry of Labour, shared: “The initiative encourages entrepreneurship through providing SMEs with national cadres that will boost the growth of the SME sector and lending support to them by bearing the trainees’ monthly stipends.”

“The importance of this initiative lies in training and qualifying job seekers with employment guarantee commensurate with the requirement of the SMEs labour market,” she added.

Additionally, trainees will also be filed for social security.

Candidates are selected through the ministry’s job seeker database, or through direct nomination by small and medium enterprises. The



Ministry of Labour bears the entire cost of the training stipend in the first year and bears 50 per cent of it in the second year.

The following monthly stipends have been allocated for different graduates, RO 300 for general diploma holders, RO 400 for university diploma holders and RO 500 for bachelor holders.

In a press conference, the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development (ASMED) revealed that it received 3,033 applications submitted by small and medium enterprises in the process thus far.

The initiative was first introduced in 2021 as a response to reduce the after effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to support small and medium enterprises, and to increase the employability of job seekers by equipping them with the required technical and professional skills.

10-year strategy unveiled to advance Oman’s space policy

AMBITIOUS GOALS: Sizable portfolio of space-related initiatives outlined in Executive Programme spanning 2023-2033 timeframe

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 6

The Sultanate of Oman’s newly unveiled National Space Policy targets, among other strategic goals, the establishment of a domestic industry that will support the assembly of satellites and space systems in-country.

An Executive Programme, an outline of which was shared recently by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT), sets out a 10-year-long blueprint spanning the 2023 – 2024 timeframe for the development of national capabilities culminating in the delivery of these strategic objectives.

“The executive programme aims to support the Sultanate of Oman’s vision in the field of the space sector with its various sciences, technologies, applications and services. The positive results of the sector for the country within 10 years will be determined through partnership in implementing various projects and initiatives,” said the ministry in a backgrounder on the Space Policy and accompanying Executive Programme.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali (pictured), Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, added in a message: “This policy highlights Oman’s space vision, values and



priorities. It lays the foundations and charts the path of our space sector for the years to come.”

“...the tremendous changes in the global space sector offer unique perspectives for our country to leverage capabilities, respond to our most critical national challenges and support our way towards a flourishing digital economy to fuel a sustainable knowledge-based economy,” the minister further stated.

Divided into three distinct phases, the executive programme kicks off with a focus on the development of space-related downstream activities centring on data and services, before moving progressively upstream into the manufacture of space systems and related hardware.

Phase 1 of the programme, aptly titled ‘Ignition’, broadly aims to stimulate the growth of a national ecosystem of service providers that will spawn the development of space-based applications.

As many as nine initiatives are planned to be progressed during this roughly three-and-a-half-



MOTCIT - ENG SAID BIN HAMOUD AL MAAWALI

phase in roughly the seventh year of its implementation, with investments planned in complex systems and capabilities.

This third phase, branded ‘Orbiting’, effectively prepare the ground for the next development cycle of the space sector. Also envisaged for rollout in this phase are three initiatives: Regional Satnav Augmentation System, Launch Site Partnership, and Satellite R&D programme.

Royal Decree 90/2020 enshrining the establishment of a new space sector for the country mandates the ministry to, among other objectives, propose policies and strategic plans related to technology and space sciences in a way that contributes to achieving the goals of the Oman development plans.

Also as part of its remit, the ministry has been tasked with establishing a National Space Programme, supporting initiatives to foster the adoption of space science and technology, and establishing the infrastructure to underpin the development and manufacture of space systems and satellites.

Differently-abled Omanis become self-employed via Qaderoon platform

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, FEB 6

In order to empower people with disabilities, the Ministry of Labour, in cooperation with ASAAS Muscat, organised yesterday a ceremony to celebrate the successful handover of sustainable projects, as well as the presentation of scholarships to self-employed Omanis with special needs. Organised as part of the ‘Qaderoon programme, the event, titled ‘How Much Can We Do’, was held under the auspices of Shaikh Issa bin Hamad al Azri, Secretary General of the Supreme Judicial Council.

Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development, said “The forum represents a quantum leap due to its interest in an important segment of society (people with disabilities).”

“Among the qualitative projects organised by ASAAS in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and supporting partners from the government and private sectors, the goal is to launch an electronic shopping platform and establish about 225 sustainable projects. Today, the first phase saw the delivery of 14 projects for disabled

people, and the goal is to support a total of 100 individuals this year,” he added.

The Qaderoon e-platform was launched in August 2022, which includes 100 sustainable projects for people with disabilities, and aims to allocate stores for direct e-marketing and selling for all products offered through the platform.

Around 120 projects are targeted for delivery in the next stage of the programme. They include service projects located near government offices and designed to cater to the needs of all segments of society. Beneficiaries of these projects will

also receive the requisite equipment and aids to facilitate their movement and work.

The first forum for Qaderoon was implemented in 2019 under the official auspices of the erstwhile Ministry of Civil Service in that period, and a number of people with disabilities were employed in private sector institutions, in addition to providing some scholarships and training opportunities.

The ceremony was accompanied by an exhibition to showcase the handicrafts of the category of persons with disabilities, as well as inspiring videos of people with disabilities.

Omran Group launches ‘Najm’ to employ 250 Omani graduates

ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET: New start-up established to train and employ Omani Graduates in the tourism and hospitality sector

MUSCAT: Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran Group) has signed an agreement with the Ministry of Labour to launch the new training for employment project “Najm”.

The project, which operates under the #IAmTourism programme, aims to provide a platform for developing highly skilled Omani nationals in the tourism and hospitality sector. It will train 250 job-seekers for employment at a newly established start-up company, which will develop and manage tourism-related activities across Oman to stimulate the growth and popularity of the sector.

The agreement was signed by Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Human Resources Development and the CEO of Omran Group, Hashil bin Obaid al Mahrouqi, with senior officials from both parties in attendance.

As part of the agreement, 250 job opportunities have been announced and applications are currently being accepted from prospective Omani candidates across Oman. To be eligible, relevant candidates profiles have to meet the required criteria being announced. The selection process will involve a personal interview and different ability tests. After the



selection, 250 high-calibre Omani nationals with an entrepreneurial mindset will be shortlisted.

These candidates will undergo six months of intensive theoretical and practical training developed in partnership with recognised and specialised institutes in the country. Upon completion of the training and certification, each of the 250 candidates will be offered full-time employment with a newly established Omran Group start-up.

“This project will improve the labour market and its outcomes by creating new

employment opportunities. The tourism industry in the country is still growing and requires the involvement of national competencies, both in terms of tour guides and hospitality.” He added, “The tourism sector is crucial and requires the proper training and qualification of national competencies to prepare them for work. This project also stimulates the work environment and the aspirations of those joining it. In the Sultanate of Oman, there are clear indications that the tourism sector is growing and shaping the country’s future.”

“At Omran Group, we understand the significance of investing in human capital for the growth and sustainability of the tourism and hospitality industry. That’s why we are happy to partner with the Ministry of Labour and launch the ‘Najm’ project,” said Hashil al Mahrouqi.

“By creating a sustainable platform for employment in the tourism industry and encouraging Omani youth to pursue careers in this dynamic and fast-growing sector, the ‘Najm’ project will play a significant role in supporting the objectives of the National Tourism Strategy 2040. Furthermore, ‘Najm’ represents our commitment to developing the next generation of Omani talent in the tourism industry and equipping them with the skills and talent required to draw out the full potential of the destinations in which they will work.”

‘Najm’ is the latest project to operate under the #IAmTourism programme, which serves as an umbrella strategy for all Human Capital initiatives launched or managed by the Omran Group.

In addition to the ‘Najm’ project, the programme encompasses several others, including Midhyaf, the graduate development programme, the pathways programme (Masarat), and the ‘Tadreeb’ training programme.

As a comprehensive programme that covers all aspects of tourism training and development, #IAmTourism will continue to include any future initiatives organised by the Group in cooperation with other relevant authorities for the growth and prosperity of the tourism sector in Oman.



Oman team wins at Omantel Country Pairs Betterball

MUSCAT: Ras Al Hamra Golf Club in partnership with Omantel hosted the Omantel Country Pairs Betterball on Friday, January 27. The fact that each team is made up of players from the same nation distinguishes this golf competition from others. The monthly competition featured 19 teams in the course.

When all of the results were in, the UK team of Paul Brotherton and Joe Watson and the Omani team of Salim Al Harthy and Hisham Al Siyabi were tied. The total was 46 for both teams. The Omani Team prevailed after the final countback with 18 points versus the UK teams’ 16 points.

With 45 points, the United Nations team of Christophe

Perringerard (France) and Robbie Joseph (USA) came in third place.

Ras Al Hamra Golf Club Captain said, “We would like to congratulate all our winners and extend a special thank you to Omantel for their generous support.”

Ras Al Hamra Golf Club was founded in 1969 making it the oldest golf club in Oman. Originally a sand course, it was redesigned by Graham Marsh Golf Design and opened as a floodlit grass course in November 2014. Supported by a strong member base as well as home to several local golf societies, Ras Al Hamra Golf Club puts a spotlight on all who visit.



Zubair Automotive Group celebrates 50th anniversary, holds special event



MUSCAT: Commemorating five decades of success and growth in the country, the Zubair Automotive Group (ZAG) recently celebrated its 50th anniversary with a special event for its dedicated staff and their families. The casual and fun-filled event took place at the Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah on February 3, 2023 and was a memorable experience for all who attended.

Present at the event were Mohammad al Farei, Chief Operating Officer, Zubair Automotive Group, together with several executive management members and personnel from Zubair Automotive Group companies. The event also saw the



attendance of over 800 of staff from across the Group and their families.

“At Zubair Automotive Group, our employees are a part of our family and the backbone of our success. We are both honoured and proud to have celebrated this milestone alongside them,” said Mohammad al Farei. “On behalf of the entire Group, I would like to thank them for their tireless dedication and commitment, which has helped us reach where

we are today. This event was a testament to our commitment to them, and we are grateful for everyone who attended and shared this special day with us.”

The celebration included a variety of exciting activities, including bouncing castles for children, fun and entertaining shows, and several mini-games and contests for both children and adults, providing a fun and competitive atmosphere for people

of all ages to enjoy. There was also live music by an Omani Band for everyone to enjoy. The event was an excellent opportunity for the staff and their families to come together, have a good time, and celebrate the Zubair Automotive Group’s achievements over the past 50 years.

For more information on the Zubair Automotive Group, please visit the Head Office in Azaiba or call 24500500.

Dell to slash over 6,000 jobs amid ‘uncertain market future’

TEXAS: Dell Technologies Inc is cutting about 6,650 jobs, or 5 per cent of its global workforce, as it struggles with a slump in the personal computer market and braces for a potential recession.

The move on Monday aligns Dell with a raft of US companies from Goldman Sachs Group Inc to Alphabet Inc that have laid off thousands this year to ride out a demand downturn wrought by high inflation and rising interest rates.

Dell had already rolled out cost-cutting moves such as a hiring pause and limits on travel as it dealt with a post-pandemic collapse in PC sales, which account more than half of its revenue.

However, those moves are “no longer enough”, co-Chief Operating Officer Jeff Clarke wrote in a memo to employees.

“What we know is market conditions continue to erode with an uncertain future,” Clarke said. Dell expects to book costs related to the layoffs in its fiscal fourth quarter, which ends in January.

Rival HP Inc has also said it will cut up to 6,000 jobs. The market for PCs and tablets is



set for another year of decline in 2023 with a fall of 2.6 per cent, according to research firm IDC, after rapid growth during the pandemic on the back of remote working.

“It was only a matter of time before the wave of tech layoffs reached Dell’s shores, given how sensitive the company is to both consumer and corporate confidence,” said Susannah Streeter, markets analyst, Hargreaves Lansdown.

Dell had about 133,000 employees as of January 28, 2022, of which, about one-third were based in the United States.

The layoffs were first reported by Bloomberg News earlier on Monday.

Dell’s shares were flat before the bell. — Reuters



DCO calls for collaboration to bridge digital divide



DIGITAL ECONOMY: Digital Cooperation Organization holds first in-person General Assembly hosting delegations from 13 countries

BUSINESS REPORTER
RIYADH, FEB 6

The Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO), the international organisation to promote digital prosperity for all, has successfully concluded its second General Assembly in Riyadh on Monday with a Ministerial Declaration calling for open collaboration among nations to bridge the digital divide.

The DCO Ministerial Call for Action, which was issued on behalf of all 13 Member States, recognised the crucial role that the digital economy plays in shaping a more equitable and thriving future, and called for increased international dialogue to identify and promote successful approaches, and impactful initiatives that will empower nations to create sustainable, inclusive and equitable growth of the digital economy.

The General Assembly, the

first full in-person gathering of the DCO, brought together delegation(s) from the DCO member states, DCO observer partners, and other international stakeholders in the digital economy.

The DCO calls for international cooperation to coordinate efforts and develop sustainable solutions that are specifically tailored to address four major concerns; such as policies and regulations, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) Digitalisation, Digital Skills and Education, and Digital Transformation.

Deemah al Yahya, Secretary-General of the DCO, said: "There is an urgent need to modernise and harmonise digital policies and regulations, support MSMEs, take advantage of the cross-border nature of the digital economy and reduce barriers to access new markets, grow and create new opportunities".

"Presently, around 36 per cent of the world's population, or approximately 2.7 billion people, do not have access to the internet. This substantial divide separates those with the means and abilities to participate in the digital economy from those without. We must take collective action to

unleash the full potential of the digital age by equipping everyone with the digital skills they need. This can be through a combination of formal education systems, informal training programmes, and civil society initiatives that promote continuous learning and upskilling. We must invest in building and enhancing digital skills and reap the rewards for generations to come," Al Yahya added.

The one-day General Assembly included several strategic announcements around the expansion of the DCO and aligning the organisation to accelerate its mission in the future.

Recognising the importance of ensuring continuity and efficiency of the DCO's operations, the Assembly approved the establishment of an Executive Committee, consisting of representatives from the Kingdom of Bahrain, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the Sultanate of Oman, with a representative from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as the Chairperson until 2030. The committee will help streamline decision-making at DCO.

The DCO also announced

the formation of an Observer Committee. Observer Partners, including the private sector, intergovernmental organisations, academic institutions, and other stakeholders in the digital economy, are an essential part of the DCO, and the Observer Committee is intended to increase the impact that Observers can bring to the DCO and ensure that they have a voice in DCO dialogues.

The Ministers and Government Representatives of the Digital Cooperation Organization agreed to launch the DCO 2030 Road map to promote common interests and advocate for advanced cooperation on all aspects of the digital economy at local, regional, and global levels between countries and all other stakeholders of the digital economy, including the private sector.

In line with the Charter of the DCO, it was announced that the Kingdom of Bahrain is appointed to the Presidency of the DCO for 2023 and will chair the organisation for the coming year and host the next edition of the General Assembly.

In 2024, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was endorsed for the DCO presidency for 2024.



Real estate trading in Oman surpasses RO 2.7 billion

MUSCAT: The total value of property transactions in the Sultanate of Oman by the end of December 2022 rose by 6 per cent to reach RO 2,706.1 million, compared to RO 2,552.5 million, according to the latest date issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The figures revealed that the total fees collected for all transactions by the end of December 2022 amounted to RO 62.6 million, a decrease of 25.5 per cent compared to the same period in 2021.

The traded value of sales contracts also decreased by 4.8 per cent, to stand at RO 1,131.5 million by the end of December 2022, compared to RO 1,188.9 million at the end of December 2021.

Sales contracts also saw a decline of 21 per cent, to stand at 68,616 contracts at the end of December 2022, compared to 86,856 contracts at the end of December 2021.

The statistics showed an increase in the traded value of mortgage contracts at the end of December 2022 by 15.9 per

cent, to reach RO 1,558.6 million, compared to RO 1,344.6 million at the end of December 2021.

Meanwhile, the number of mortgage contracts reached 19,089 at the end of December 2022, an increase of 5.6 per cent over the same period of 2021 when it stood at 18,082 contracts.

The traded value of swap contracts decreased by 15.6 per cent to reach RO 16.1 million at the end of December 2022, compared to RO 19 million at the end of December 2021.

The number of swap contracts also decreased by 25.5 per cent to reach 1,309 contracts, compared to 1,758 contracts by the end of December 2021.

According to NCSI statistics, as many as 233,178 title deeds were issued by the end of December 2022, a decrease of 7 per cent compared to the end of December 2021.

Meanwhile, the number of title deeds issued for the GCC citizens rose by 6.5 per cent at the end of December 2022 to reach 884 title deeds by the end of December 2022, compared to 830 title deeds at the end of December 2021.

— ONA

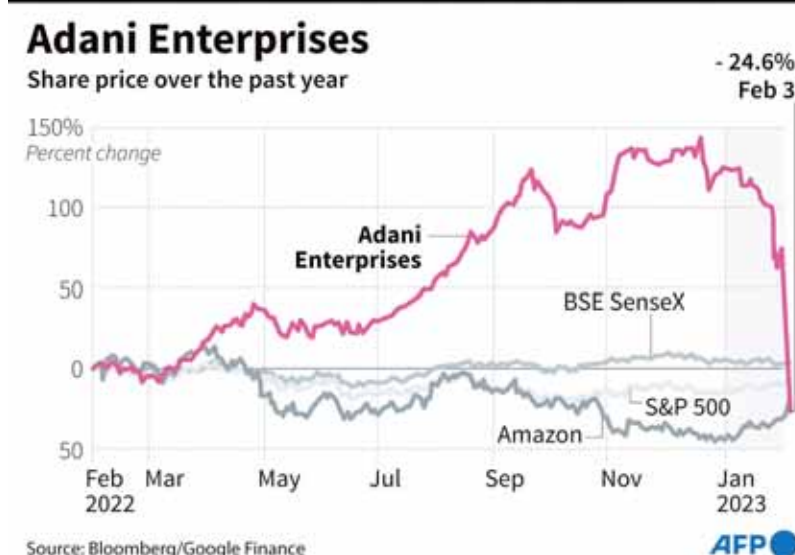
Adani to prepay \$1.11bn loans on shares

MUMBAI: India's Adani Group on Monday said shares related to some group companies will be released following the prepayment of \$1.11 billion of loans ahead of their maturity in 2024 while denying media reports that said the conglomerate was planning to cut back its capital spending.

With the pre-payment of loans against shares, promoter holdings of 12 per cent in Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd, 3 per cent in Adani Green Energy Ltd and 1.4 per cent in Adani Transmission Ltd will be released, the embattled group said in a statement.

The loan pre-payment is "in light of recent market volatility and in continuation of the promoters' commitment to reduce the overall promoter leverage," the group said.

Adani Group plans to trim its capital spending while providing more collateral in the form of stock pledges to lenders, Indian newspaper Mint said, citing people



close to the development.

"False report, on the contrary, Adani Group is moving to prepay all LAS (Loans Against Shares) finance," a spokesperson for the group said in a separate emailed statement to Reuters.

The group's domestic lenders do not plan to cut off the conglomerate from utilising sanctioned but unused credit lines for fears it could backfire and lead

to defaults, Mint said in a separate report, citing bankers.

In the brutal fallout of Hindenburg's report, investors dumped Adani shares, while the group's flagship company, Adani Enterprises, was forced to abandon a \$2.5 billion share sale last week. Meanwhile, Group Chairman Gautam Adani lost his title as Asia's richest person and slipped down the global rankings

of the wealthy.

Shares of Adani Group companies have lost more than half their market value, topping a cumulative \$110 billion, after US short-seller Hindenburg Research last month raised questions about the group's debt levels and use of tax havens.

Meanwhile, investors dumped more Adani stock on Monday as India's opposition staged protests calling for a full inquiry into allegations of major accounting fraud at the country's biggest conglomerate.

The group owned by tycoon Gautam Adani has lost around \$120 billion in value since the claims were levelled by short-seller US investment group Hindenburg Research on January 24.

Trading in Adani Total Gas, in which French oil giant TotalEnergies owns a 37.4-per cent stake, and in Adani Power was again suspended on Monday after the stocks fell five per cent.

— AFP



A masterclass by Indian Institute of Management Kozhikode (IIM-Kozhikode - IIMK), an autonomous business school based in Calicut, India, is hosting a Masterclass on 'Mindful Leadership' on February 28 and March 1, 2023, at the Dubai Knowledge Park, with a strong focus on uplifting the intellectual capital in UAE and region and helping to develop future leaders in the evolving landscape.

Prof Debashish Chatterjee, Director of IIM-Kozhikode, will conduct the two-day Masterclass which is being organised in coordination with the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), UAE.

It will look at engaging entrepreneurs, CEOs, CXOs, professionals, future leaders, education leaders,

healthcare professionals, chief administrators, NGO managers, among others.

This Masterclass is also part of the IIM-Kozhikode's mission to take the IIM brand to the world.

Talking about the Masterclass, Prof Chatterjee, said: "Amidst the growing pre-eminence of India in the global marketplace, we are happy to bring our Masterclass on 'Mindful Leadership' to Dubai. It is about thriving in a volatile, uncertain, and non-linear world, with economic activity growing exponentially. Corporates need reflection time and dedicated attention to develop high potential leaders who can navigate and create value in the changing world."

For details, contact mini@innovstarinvest.com or email iimk@dstidubai.com

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Oman's beautiful natural phenomenon to add to your bucket list

Despite the many environmental challenges, everyone who has been to Oman will agree that it is one of the most fascinating countries to visit. These are some of the most fascinating natural phenomena guaranteed to make it your next bucket list... **P20**

Rarely seen Klimt painting returns to Austria after 60 years

A MAJOR WORK FROM the Austrian painter Gustav Klimt has returned to Vienna where it will be shown in its homeland for the first time in nearly 60 years, after museum officials pieced together its tumultuous history.

"Water Serpents II," which depicts nymphs grappling with a red serpent,

was completed in 1907 during Klimt's so-called golden period, when he embraced the gold-leaf techniques he is known for today.

But unlike many of his other works it has rarely been seen, last exhibited in the Austrian capital in 1964 before falling into obscurity.

The painting was originally



purchased by the Steiners, an Austrian art collecting family, and was looted by the Nazis after Germany annexed Austria in 1938 and Jenny Steiner fled the country.

It was later purchased by the Austrian film director Gustav Ucicky, Klimt's "illegitimate son", according to Markus Fellingner, curator of the new exhibition at the

Belvedere Museum.

Ucicky's widow is said to have exhibited the painting in 1964, and since then it had largely been kept from public view, Fellingner told AFP.

But it re-emerged in 2013 when the widow surprised the art world by agreeing to sell it the Russian oligarch Dmitry Rybolovlev, president of the AS Monaco football club, for \$112 million.

Rybolovlev then sold it two years later to its current owner, the HomeArt collection founded in Hong Kong by Rosaline Wong.

The Belvedere, working with the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, was able to borrow "Water Serpents II" as they put together a show on the artists and works that inspired Klimt.

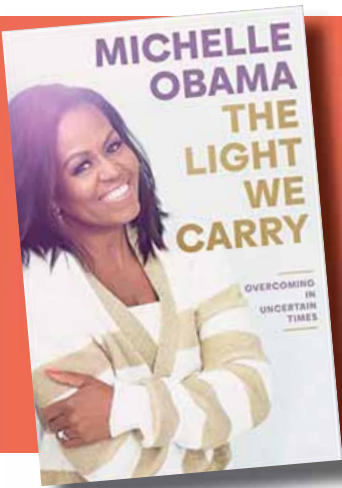
Unable to finance the six-figure sum required to insure the work, the Belvedere offered instead its restoration expertise to include it in the show that opens Friday and runs through May 29. — AFP

READ

THE LIGHT WE CARRY

BY MICHELLE OBAMA

The former first lady shares personal stories and the tools she uses to deal with difficult situations.



FASHION

Models present creations by Hungarian designer Dora Tomcsanyi during a fashion show in the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest, Hungary during the 11th edition of the Budapest Central European Fashion Week. — AFP



LIFESTYLE

People watch a performance of a dragon dance during the celebration of Lantern Festival in Danzhai, in China's southwestern Guizhou province. — AFP





Beyoncé: music's golden girl

BEYONCÉ, THE MUSIC royal whose art has shifted the culture time and again, long ago cemented herself as one of the world's seminal stars.

On Sunday, she made history again, becoming the winningest artist in Grammys history, surpassing the late classical conductor Georg Solti's long-standing record of 31 lifetime trophies.

Speaking through tears, the regal artist donning a metallic Gucci corset gown with elbow-length black leather gloves thanked her family, including her three children and husband Jay-Z, who looked on from the crowd.

"I'm trying not to be too emotional. And I'm trying to just receive this night," she said.

She paid special tribute to the queer community, who she credited with inventing the genre she celebrated in her historically layered record that pays homage to pioneers of funk, soul, rap, house and disco.

But to the shock of everyone and the fury of fans on social media, Beyoncé — whose tour announcement is virtually guaranteed to trigger a ticketing crash for the ages — missed out on the Album of the Year award. Again.

This time, it went to British pop phenom Harry Styles, six years after she lost the award to Adele.

She has also never won Record of the Year, despite having the most

nods ever for the category, with eight. So the Beyoncé paradox lives on: the same night she further burnished her GOAT — greatest of all time — status, the legendary artist also lengthened her streak as the Recording Academy's most snubbed nominee.

- QUEEN BEY -

Born Beyoncé Giselle Knowles in Houston, Texas, the now 41-year-old has been in the upper echelons of pop music since her teenage years.

She initially rose to fame as part of the girl group Destiny's Child — whose smash hits included "Survivor" AND "Say My Name" — before embarking on a wildly successful solo career.

From setting the standard for the overnight album drop to delivering her earth-shattering "Homecoming" show at Coachella in 2018, Beyoncé has long bucked the industry's conventional wisdom, and is simultaneously one of music's most private and most-watched stars.

Her paradigm-shifting 2016 album "Lemonade," which emphasized Black womanhood against the backdrop of America's heritage of slavery and culture of oppression, remains one of the most venerated musical projects in recent memory.

Then she dropped the critically acclaimed song "Black Parade" in June 2020, amid nationwide pro-

tests ignited by the murder of an unarmed Black man, George Floyd, at the hands of a white police officer.

"She's arguably the most culturally important artist in the world," Merck Mercuriadis, the music publishing mogul who was once Beyoncé's manager, told AFP at a pre-Grammy gala.

"Renaissance," her house-tinged 2022 dance record, offered a pulsating, sweaty collection of club tracks.

Eminently danceable and rife with nods to disco and EDM history, the 16-song album was an instant hit and earned wide praise for its deep ambition.

Prior to releasing her opus, Beyoncé had dropped the single "Break My Soul" to acclaim, setting the tone for her house revival that highlighted the Black, queer and working-class artists and communities who molded the electronic dance genre, which first developed in Chicago in the 1980s.

Beyond her music, she is a fashion icon — she actually was named just that by the Council of Fashion Designers of America in 2016 — with her own athleisure line Ivy Park. She has appeared in a handful of films including "Dreamgirls."

She sang Etta James classic "At Last" for Barack and Michelle Obama at an inaugural ball in 2009, and then belted out the national anthem at his second inauguration

in 2013. She has twice performed at half-time of the Super Bowl.

According to Forbes, her net worth as of last year was \$450 million.

- 'ARTIST OF OUR LIVES' -

Despite losing the Album and Record of the Year Grammys for what feels like the umpteenth time, the outpouring of love from her peers on Sunday made clear it was still Beyoncé's night.

"You never know with this, you know, this stuff," a sheepish Styles told journalists backstage, when asked if he had also expected a Beyoncé triumph for top album.

"I don't think you can look at any of the nominees and not feel like they deserve it."

And Lizzo, who bested Queen Bey for Record of the Year, delivered a heartfelt tribute to one of her idols, challenging the audience to keep their eyes dry.

"In the fifth grade, I skipped school to see you perform," she said at the podium, speaking directly to a clearly touched Beyoncé.

"You changed my life," she continued, Beyoncé's eyes also welling up. "The way you make me feel, I was like, I want to make people feel this way with my music. So thank you so much."

"You clearly are the artist of our lives!" — **AFP**

MUSIC

From reggaeton to Iran, five key moments on Grammys night



MUSIC'S BIGGEST STARS turned out in force at the Grammys on Sunday in Los Angeles — and a LOT happened.

Beyoncé made history, but lost the night's biggest prize to Harry Styles. Bad Bunny opened the show with some serious reggaeton and First Lady Jill Biden showed up to honor an Iranian artist.

Here are five key moments from Grammys night:

- BAD BUNNY, WORLD'S BIGGEST ARTIST -

Bad Bunny, music's most streamed artist, exploded into the Crypto.com Arena to open the night, performing a medley of hits off his blockbuster album "Un Verano Sin Ti."

Host Trevor Noah greeted him in Spanish as the Puerto Rican trailblazer introduced himself simply by his first name, "Benito." The room then erupted in color and rhythm as the audience was immersed in Latin sounds including bachata, merengue and mambo.

"I want to know if the Grammys are ready for the real party," exclaimed the 29-year-old who has fast become the face of reggaeton, the genre he has globalised.

Donning a white tee shirt and jeans, Bad Bunny left no one unmoved, with even Taylor Swift launching into a few dance steps.

"Now everyone wants to be Latino," he quipped. "But they're lacking flavour."

Bad Bunny went on to win the Grammy for Best Musica Urbana Album.

- FIFTY YEARS OF HIP-HOP -

In probably the most electric moment of the night, a parade of stars from the world of hip-hop — from Grandmaster Flash and Run DMC to Method Man, Queen Latifah, Missy Elliott and LL Cool J — got the audience up on their feet to mark the upcoming 50th anniversary of the genre, seen as born in the Bronx in 1973.

The rapid-fire medley of hits across the decades — Nelly offered a few bars of "Hot in Herre," Lil Uzi Vert closed the tribute with a bit of his "Just Wanna Rock" — had Jay-Z cheering from his seat.

The Recording Academy has long been criticised for failing to honor hip-hop artists in the main Grammy categories, and for being behind the times in terms of acknowledging hip-hop's overall influence in music. The all-star performance certainly went some distance in putting the genre front and centre, at last.

- TOUCHING IN MEMORIAM -

The Grammys annual tribute to those the music industry has lost was even more emotional than usual, with Quavo of the hip-hop act Migos honoring his nephew Takeoff, who was murdered late last year in a shooting at the age of 28.

"Days ain't the same without you / I don't know if I'm the same without you," sang Quavo. "I wish I had a time machine / Just so you can take a ride with me / I miss just how you smile at me / Unc and Phew until infinity."

Kacey Musgraves opened the set paying homage to Loretta Lynn, the iconic country singer who died at 90, by covering Lynn's iconic "Coal Miner's Daughter."

And Mick Fleetwood was joined by Bonnie Raitt and Sheryl Crow in a touching performance of "Songbird" by Christine McVie, the late Fleetwood Mac artist who penned many of the beloved band's most famous songs.

- SPECIAL AWARD FOR IRANIAN SONG -

In the night's most political moment, First Lady Jill Biden came to Los Angeles to present a special Grammy for Best Song for Social Change.

That award went to 25-year-old Iranian pop singer Shervin Hajipour for his "Baraye" — an anthem for the protests that have rocked Iran since the September 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old ethnic Kurd arrested for an alleged breach of strict dress rules for women.

Hajipour was detained after his song went viral and later freed on bail. He is not allowed to leave Iran.

Biden called "Baraye" a "powerful and poetic call for freedom and women's rights." — **AFP**

Key winners for the 2023 Grammy Awards

Here is a list of winners in key categories for the 65th annual Grammy Awards, which were handed out on Sunday in Los Angeles.

Beyoncé led the field with a total of nine nominations and scooped up four awards, making her the winningest artist in Grammys history.

Harry Styles won the Album of the Year award, while Lizzo, Adele, Kendrick Lamar, Brandi Carlile and Bonnie Raitt also took home golden statuettes.

Album of the Year: "Harry's House," Harry Styles

Record of the Year, recognising overall performance of a song: "About Damn Time," Lizzo

Song of the Year, recognizing songwriting: "Just Like That" — Bonnie Raitt, songwriter (Bonnie Raitt)

Best New Artist: Samara Joy

Best Dance / Electronic Music

Album: "Renaissance," Beyoncé

Best Dance / Electronic Recording: "Break My Soul," Beyoncé

Best Pop Vocal Album: "Harry's House," Harry Styles

Best Rap Album: "Mr. Morale & the Big Steppers," Kendrick Lamar

Best Rock Album: "Patient Number 9," Ozzy Osbourne

Best Pop Solo Performance: "Easy on Me," Adele

Best Pop Duo/Group Performance: "Unholy," Sam Smith and Kim Petras

Best Americana Album: "In These Silent Days," Brandi Carlile

Best Country Album: "A Beautiful Time," Willie Nelson

Best Music Video: "All Too Well (The Short Film)," Taylor Swift

Best Global Music Album: "Sakura," Masa Takumi

Best Score Soundtrack for Video Games and Other Interactive Media: "Assassin's Creed Ragnarok," Dawn of Ragnarok, Stephanie Economou

ARTISTS WITH MOST WINS

Beyoncé - 4

Bonnie Raitt - 3

Kendrick Lamar - 3

Brandi Carlile - 3 — **AFP**



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AROUND THE WORLD

LIFESTYLE

New York returns 14 stolen antiquities to Italy



AUTHORITIES IN NEW YORK announced Thursday the return to Italy of 14 antiquities worth an estimated \$2.5 million, as part of a criminal investigation into smuggling of stolen artifacts.

The Manhattan District Attorney's office over the past two years has been conducting an extensive campaign into looted antiquities that have ended up in New York museums and galleries – including the prestigious Metropolitan Museum of Art.

During a ceremony Thursday with the Italian consul general and Italian police representatives, 14 more artifacts – some 2,600 years old – were returned to Italy, bringing the total number of repatriated pieces to that country over the past seven months to 214, District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office said.

More than 700 pieces worth more than \$100 million have been returned in the past year to 17 countries, including Cambodia, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Iraq, Greece and Italy, the statement added.



New York, a hub of stolen antiquities trafficking for decades, set up a task force in 2017 to investigate the illicit trade.

According to the statement by District Attorney Bragg, who took office in January 2022, Thursday's repatriation included the silver "Sicily Naxos Coin," minted around 430 BCE and currently valued at half a million dollars.

Other notable items included ancient pottery dating to 510 BCE, and a marble head of Roman Emperor Hadrian, dating to 200 CE.

Among the culprits behind the 14 returned pieces, the statement said, were well-known art traffickers Giacomo Medici and Giovanni Franco Becchina, as well as Robert Hecht, the Paris-based American art dealer who died in 2012.

The traffickers had "relied on gangs of tombaroli (tomb raiders) to loot carefully chosen and insufficiently guarded archaeological sites throughout the Mediterranean," it added. — **AFP**

CULTURE

Crafts festival seeks to attract visitors to Libya's 'pearl of the desert'



YOUNG GIRLS in colourful dress and traditional jewellery sing at a festival in Libya's Ghadames, an oasis city that was relatively unscathed by the past decade's chaos and is seeking to attract visitors.

Under tents strung up with red and ochre patterned material, baskets were on display as a woman sat weaving one together with a large wooden needle, silver rings tracing the movements of her hands as she worked.

Ghadames, known as the "pearl of the desert", is located nearly 500 kilometres (310 miles) southwest of the capital Tripoli.

The UNESCO-listed oasis city, a pre-Roman Berber settlement and a key stop on Saharan trade routes, has unique multi-level architecture with white-washed, covered alleyways.

In 2016, it was one of five Libyan sites added to the UN cultural body's list of World Heritage in Danger after Libya plunged into lawlessness and armed conflict following the 2011 toppling of dictator Moammar Ghadhafi.

The crafts festival, which also highlights Tuareg traditions, aims to bring visitors to the desert gem near the border with Tunisia and Algeria.

"It's a great honour for Ghadames to host this shopping and heritage festival," said mayor Qasem Mohammed al-Manea, 74, highlighting the "traditional industries and handicrafts made by Libyan hands".

He noted the presence of "people from various parts of Libya and even from abroad like Tunisia", expressing hope



to see tourists from Algeria if a nearby border crossing is reopened.

A United Nations-guided peace process following the last major fighting in 2020 led to the appointment the following year of a prime minister heading a Tripoli-based Government of National Unity, now contested by an administration in the east.

Clashes between the two

camps repeatedly shook Libya last year, notably Tripoli.

Since July 2021, the country has been trying to have Ghadames removed from the UNESCO danger list, arguing that it has been largely sheltered from fighting.

Authorities say the only relatively recent damage to traditional houses was due to heavy rain – a new climate phenomenon in the region. — **AFP**

TRAVEL TALES

Light returns to the stained glass of the Saint-Denis Basilica



THE BASILICA OF Saint-Denis on the northern outskirts of Paris may be less famous than Notre-Dame, but when Emmanuel Putanier was asked to restore the historic monument's stained glass windows to their former glory, he jumped at the chance.

"This is something that you only do once in a lifetime," the master glassmaker told AFP.

For a year now, his team has been working in the Basilica to restore the windows, which date back to the 12th century, to their former, distant splendour.

Just down the road from that cathedral to sporting excellence, the national Stade de France, the Basilica is nestled in a Paris suburb with more of a reputation for crime, religious sectarianism and poverty than for medieval architecture.

However its architectural splendour, and the fact that it is the resting place of no fewer than 43 French monarchs, attracts 130,000 visitors each year.

The major renovation works have been underway for several years already.

Since last year, the building's stained glass windows have been the focus of the work at the Basilica, the culmination of 25 years of preparation work costing more than 2 million euros (\$2.2 million).

"All things heritage take time," said Laurent Roturier, head of the Paris region branch of the office of cultural affairs (DRAC), which is in charge of the works.

The project began to take shape a quarter of a century ago when the Basilica's oldest glass windows went under the care of France's research laboratory for historical monuments (LRMH).

"We're just the final stage of the journey," said Guillaume Uvroas, a glassmaker working in the Basilica.

- DATING BACK TO 12TH CENTURY -

When the project kicked off in 1997, the windows dating back to the middle of the 12th century and considered a milestone in the history of stained-glassmaking, were worn down by time and dulled by the elements.

Duplicates made of polycarbonate were installed in their place.

That move started a new conversation: should the original stained glass art be restored and reinstalled, or should perfect copies be put in their place?

Experts decided to go with the latter option: more than 20 copies have been produced in total.

But getting it right has required deep research in the archives, going back to the French Revolution during which they were dismantled, said Thomas Clouet, an architect specialising in historic buildings.

Some windows had been vandalised, and there were various bits and pieces scattered about.

"We needed to find the pieces and retrace their history and journey before we could proceed to the duplication phase," said Roturier.

"What we do here requires insane precision, from the colour range to the composition," said Putanier.

Because his team was not allowed to remove the originals from the laboratory, "we set up an operation plan to take measurements on site," he said.

The most important task was to achieve consistency across the entire structure, a job made hard by the several restoration efforts the Basilica had undergone over the centuries.

"To make the copies, we took into account distortions that happened over time," he said, "They couldn't appear too new or modern-looking."

The final step will be to fit the copies into glass panes that date back to the 19th century.

"The most important thing for us was to recover this relationship to light, because that's the spirit behind the construction of this basilica," insisted Roturier. "It's what the founders would've wanted."

More restoration projects are planned over the next five years, including of the Basilica's tabernacles and its spire. — **AFP**

art & life

Local Scene

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TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 7 | 2023

SNOW IN THE MOUNTAINS

It's been noted to happen in the past but this year, the mountains of Oman's capability to pull down snow has created a frenzy. With temperatures in the mountain dropping to a sometimes negative degree, snow is bound to happen. For a few days this year, the peak of Jabal Shams became a winter wonderland with snow covering quite a large area and giving people an opportunity to build snowmen and play on the ice. Snow in the desert? Who would have thought, indeed?

Photo by Abdullah al Abri

GLOWING SEA

It's beautiful, mysterious, and rare that you must be at the right spot when it happens. Glowing seas inspire wonders and are a testament to the complexity of nature. Scientifically, this phenomenon is caused by "bioluminescence" or creatures with the ability to produce light in their bodies. On land, we usually see this among fireflies but in the ocean, this is usually caused by plankton. During winter, this phenomenon intensifies and can be witnessed in different areas from Muscat around the Dimaniyat, Qantab, and Bandar Al Khairan/ Yiti areas all the way to Ras al Hadd and Ras Al Jinz including Masirah and the neighbouring coastal areas. The best place to watch this phenomenon is far from light-polluted areas and as of late, has become a popular attraction for kayakers and campers.

Photo by Natalia Mikhailova

Oman's beautiful natural phenomenon to add to your bucket list

By Rumpa Mitra

Oman's combination of history, culture and natural beauty make it an ideal destination for travellers looking for an authentic and diverse experience. As a Middle Eastern country known predominantly for its deserts, it is perceived as mysterious because of its

remote and isolated location. Its detachment from the rest of the world has led to a romanticisation of desert cultures and lifestyles.

Despite the many environmental challenges, everyone who has been to Oman will agree that it is one of the most fascinating

countries to visit. Oman's culture is rich historically and to this day, many of its traditions are shrouded in mystery and intrigue.

Looking at its natural beauty, these are some of the most fascinating natural phenomena happening in the country that will make anyone come and pay a visit.

KHAREEF SEASON

Perhaps one of the most popular phenomena happening in Oman, Khareef (or the autumn season) has been driving tourism to the country annually. Happening in the southernmost part of the country in the Dhofar Governorate, the usually hot and humid weather is totally transformed into a monsoon. This seasonal weather change happens every year during June and September when the rocky mountains are covered with dense white fog and eventually creates rain/drizzle resulting in the mountains and the surrounding areas becoming a green paradise.

As an added tourist pull, Salalah also organises the Khareef Festival filled with different cultural and traditional attractions.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PINK LAKES

Travel to some coastal towns near Sur, Al Ashkharah, and Masirah and your trip will be interrupted by pink lakes. Lakes can become pink due to the presence of algae that produce a pigment called beta-carotene. Beta-carotene is a type of carotenoid, which are pigments that give certain plants, algae, and animals their bright red, yellow, and orange hues. When these algae bloom in high concentrations, they can give the lake a pink or red tint.

In Oman, it is believed that the pink lakes turn to such color because of the presence of algae and bacteria that produce a red pigment in response to high salt concentrations. Being a temporary phenomenon, you have to be at the right spot at the right time to see these salt lakes to display this fascinating natural phenomenon.

Photo by Haitham al Farsi