

HM sends greetings to Libya

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Muhammad al Manfi, President of the Libyan Presidential Council, on the occasion of his country's Independence Anniversary. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the president, wishing him good health and happiness and further progress and prosperity for the friendly Libyan people. – **ONA**



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MANCHESTER CITY BEAT FLUMINENSE TO CAPTURE CLUB WORLD CUP



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OMAN'S Q3 GDP REACHES RO 11.022BN, NON-PETROLEUM ACTIVITIES SHOW RESILIENCE



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WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE FLU VIRUS



MUSCAT

SAYYID BADR HOLDS PHONE CALL WITH CZECH COUNTERPART

Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, held a phone conversation with Jan Lipavský, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, during which he expressed condolences on the victims of the shooting incident that took place at Charles University in the Czech capital, Prague, wishing a speedy recovery for the injured. — **ONA**

VISA-FREE TRAVEL TO TURKIYE FOR OMANIS

Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, on Saturday issued a decision providing visa exemption for ordinary passport holders of certain countries. With this decision, citizens of the Sultanate of Oman, United States, Kingdom of Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Canada and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are exempted from visas for 90 days in every 180 days for travel to Turkiye for tourism purposes. **DETAILS ON P3**

PRAGUE

CZECH REPUBLIC HOLDS MOURNING



The Czech Republic held an official day of mourning on Saturday for the victims of the Charles University shooting in Prague earlier in the week. The country observed a minute of silence at noon. Flags flew at half-mast on public buildings and black ribbons were attached. Many pre-Christmas events were cancelled, and state television ran a special programme. A student opened fire on Thursday from the main building of the Faculty of Philosophy of Charles University on Jan Palach Square, killing 14 people and injuring 25. Mourning services were also being held in Prague's St Vitus Cathedral and in other churches. — **dpa**

Theyazin opens Municipal Councils forum

SUHAIL AL NAHDI

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, will preside over the opening of the Municipal Councils Symposium 2023, organised by the Ministry of Interior, and the launch of the Tanmia application at Al Bustan Palace Hotel today.

The two-day symposium will discuss a number of working papers.

The first session will review the developmental and societal roles assigned to the members of the municipal councils to develop



HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said will preside over the opening of the Municipal Councils Symposium 2023 today.

governorates in accordance with the Municipal Councils Law.

Dr Salem bin Sulaiman al Shukaili, Professor of Constitutional and Administrative Law, will present the first working paper on local administration and municipal councils in the Sultanate of Oman. The second working paper will be presented by Saleh bin Ali al Mahrouqi from the Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs during which he will review the powers assigned to municipal councils.

The second session of the symposium will deal with the developmental role of the municipal councils.

Said bin Rashid al Qatabi, Director of Social Sectors at the Ministry of Economy, will present a working paper on the role of the municipal councils in local economic development.

The second working paper will be on municipal councils and the development of the governorates in 'Oman Vision 2040' and will be presented by Eng Abdullah bin Yousef al Hammadi, General Supervisor of the Priority of Development of Sustainable Governorates and Cities at the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit. **TURN TO P2**

Oman welcomes UN resolution on Gaza

FIGHTING RAGES IN NORTHERN GAZA

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman affirmed that the Security Council resolution on the Gaza Strip represents a welcome progress, however it does not meet the broad international consensus on a ceasefire, underscoring the importance to ensure continued and effective flow of humanitarian and relief aid to the entire Strip.

In a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry, the Sultanate of Oman renewed its call on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities by implementing all its resolutions related to the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on the two-state solution and ending the illegal Israeli occupation of Arab lands.

Meanwhile, Israel battled Hamas on Saturday in pursuit of its elusive goal of full control of northern Gaza after the UN Security Council appealed for more aid for the Palestinian enclave but stopped short of demanding a ceasefire.

Thick smoke hung over the northern town of Jabalia - which is also home to Gaza's largest refugee camp - and residents reported persistent aerial bombardment and shelling from Israeli tanks, which they said had moved further into the town.

Hamas' armed wing Al Qassam Brigades said it had destroyed five Israeli tanks in the area, killing and injuring their crews, after reusing two undetonated missiles launched earlier by Israel.

SEE ALSO P2 & 7

REVOLUTIONISING PROSTATE CANCER TREATMENT



A specialised medical team at the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre (SQCCCR) managed to launch a new treatment service for prostate cancer patients using the radionuclide (Lutetium-177) (Lu-177) PSMA. The new service is expected to be a valuable addition to the field of cancer treatment in the Sultanate of Oman. Dr Kholoud bint Salem al Riyamiyah, head of the nuclear medicine unit at SQCCCR, says that this service is the ideal therapeutic option for treating prostate cancer patients who have not responded to other treatments such as androgen deprivation therapy and chemotherapy. – **ONA**

DETAILS ON P3



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Theyazin opens Municipal Councils Symposium

FROM P1
On the second day of the symposium, the first session will be dedicated to talking about the media aspects of municipal councils.

Dr Abdullah bin Khamis al Kindi, Head of the Media Department at Sultan Qaboos University, will present a working paper on the media skills of the municipal councils members.

Ahmed bin Abdullah al Amri, Manager of Tanmia Application Project at the Ministry of Interior, will present a working paper on the Tanmia application.

Tanmia app, set up by the Ministry of Interior, is a digital interface for the municipal

councils, a link between Omani society and municipal councils in the governorates.

It is designed to enhance communication and boost transparency and trust between individuals and institutions which leads to achieving sustainable development and improving municipal work.

The second dialogue session of the second day of the symposium will be dedicated to talking about the integrated roles between municipal council members and the governors and will be addressed by HH Sayyid Marwan bin Turki al Said, Governor of Dhofar, and Sayyid Khalifa bin Al Mardas al Busaidy, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Interior.

Oman condemns Israeli aggression in Gaza



TEHRAN: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the Tehran International Conference on Palestine which was held in the Iranian capital, Tehran, under the auspices of Dr Ebrahim Raisi, President of Islamic Republic of Iran. The Sultanate of Oman's delegation to the conference was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthi, Political Affairs Under-secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Addressing the conference, Al Harthi affirmed the Sultanate of Oman's stance condemning the continuing Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip and demanding an immediate

ceasefire and allow entry of humanitarian aid. He expressed the Sultanate of Oman's rejection to all the pretexts being used to justify the continuation of Israeli genocide on the Palestinian people which exceeded the standards of reaction and the principles of international law and humanitarian values. The conference discussed the effects of the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip and emphasized support for the Palestinian people so that they can achieve their legitimate rights and establish their independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. — ONA

Two new Quran centres to come up in Salalah and Musannah

MUSCAT: Under the patronage of Dr Muhammad bin Saeed Al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, Oman Association of Holy Quran Care organised its annual ceremony on Saturday in the hall of the Gulf College in Wilayat of Al Seeb. The ceremony included a visual presentation of an expanded introduction to the association and its Quran centres, and a presentation of its most prominent achievements, including second edition of the competition for the most beautiful recitation. It also included the second edition of the competition for standards of excellence among the association's centres, and the official announcement of two new centres for the association, namely the Salalah and Musannah Quran centres.



The winning centres were Saham Quranic Centre (first place), Seeb Quranic Centre (second place), Ibri Quranic Centre (third place), Adam Quranic

Centre (fourth place), and Nizwa Quranic Centre (fifth place). The event was graced by the presence of excellencies, undersecretaries of government

ministries, members of the Shura Council, governors, and ambassadors of Arab countries to the Sultanate of Oman.

— ONA

JOINT MILITARY NAVAL EXERCISE ENDS



MUSCAT: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) concluded the joint military naval exercise 'Al Thamar Al Tayyib', which was carried out in the naval exercise area with the participation of ships of the Pakistani naval forces and with the support of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) and the Royal Oman Police (ROP). The implementation of these joint military exercises aims to exchange experiences with the navies of sisterly and friendly countries and hone the skills of members of the RNO in various maritime specialisations in line with the national tasks assigned to them. — ONA

Regional municipalities to supervise local roads

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has announced the completion of the procedures for the first phase of the road dependency transfer project, which consists of transferring the jurisdiction of supervising dirt roads to the municipalities of the governorates of the Sultanate of Oman.

This came during the first meeting of the Steering Committee for the Governance of Road Dependency, headed by Eng Khamis bin Mohammed al Shamakhi, Under-Secretary for Transport, and in the presence of the members of the committee, representatives of the concerned authorities, directors of all municipalities in the governorates.

The meeting discussed the mechanism for activating decentralisation in road management and maintenance and activating governance and its implementation for each governorate, which is to support the ministry in the technical aspects related to transferring budgets for maintenance contracts and transferring knowledge.

The meeting also discussed that the ministry is required to assume responsibility for establishing, maintaining and operating asphalt roads (national, arterial and secondary). While the governorates will undertake the construction and maintenance of local asphalt roads.



RAM concludes leadership, management programme

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management (RAM) successfully concluded the inaugural Master in Leadership and Management programme, preparing its first cohort with both scientific knowledge and practical skills.

This programme was specifically designed to equip emerging leaders with the ability to innovate and thrive in a digital innovation-driven economy.

Utilising a blended network learning approach, the participants, who are section and department heads, and their equivalents in the state's administrative apparatus, have successfully graduated after completing their third and final residency at the Thunderbird College of Global Management at Arizona State University, United



The Royal Academy of Management concluded the inaugural Master in Leadership and Management programme.

States.

The programme was developed in collaboration with the prestigious Thunderbird School of Global Management, renowned for its excellence in teaching leadership and modern executive management.

The college's Master of Global Management programme is

ranked first globally in the Wall Street Journal/Times Higher Education newspaper ranking and it is endorsed as a recommended university for study by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The Master in Leadership and Management programme

provided participants with a unique opportunity to explore international perspectives in leadership, management, innovation, strategies, public policy analysis and agile government. Its diverse implementation methods added richness and effectiveness to the programme. In addition to

the academic depth provided by the university, the RAM was committed to integrating supplementary components to create a comprehensive programme.

This approach combined scholarly insights with cognitive growth, fostering leadership proficiency, adept management of change processes, and nurturing innovative thinking methodologies.

The third residency of the Master in Leadership and Management programme was held at Arizona State University.

The RAM launched the Master in Leadership and Management programme in September 2022, targeting 25 participants from department heads and similar positions in units of the state's administrative apparatus.



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Muscat International Airport marks 50th anniversary

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 23

Muscat International Airport, formerly Seeb Airport, celebrated its 50th anniversary on Saturday. The airport originally featured one passenger terminal building, one runway, and minor cargo and maintenance facilities.

Netherlands Airport Consultancy Company (NACO) was awarded the design contract and the responsibility to supervise the construction, while Joannou & Paraskevaides (Overseas) Ltd was awarded the tender to build the runway, taxiways, and aircraft stands.

The first phase of the airport would consist of preparation and construction

of the runway, passageways, and aircraft berths. Three years later, on January 1, 1973, Seeb International Airport opened for operations.

On September 23, 1973, the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said conducted official inspections of the airport himself before he officially inaugurated it on December 23, the same year.

The late His Majesty the Sultan's private plane was the first aircraft with an Omani registration to land at the Seeb International Airport.

During the expansion from late 2007, a new terminal and control tower were built along with a new runway as the new airport opened for traffic in 2018.



The name of the Seeb International Airport was changed to Muscat International Airport on February 1, 2008. Facilities now include a VIP terminal for private jets and an onsite airport hotel.

Muscat International Airport is ranked 10th in the list of the best airports in the world in the field of services and passenger satisfaction, according to the Airports Council International, it has jumped 53 places since 2018 within its capacity category of 10-25 million passengers.

It was ranked the Best New Leading Airport in 2018 during the World Travel Awards in Lisbon, Portugal.

There are currently 35 airlines

operating from the airport.

AirHelp, the world's largest air passenger rights organisation, recently unveiled its annual comprehensive score, offering an evaluation of airports and airlines globally.

In this extensive analysis, 83 leading airlines were rated for punctuality, customer opinion, and claim processing, using data collected between January 1 and September 30, 2023.

Among airports, Muscat International Airport claimed the top spot globally, showcasing an average score of 8.54 points.

Muscat scores 8.4 for on-time performance, 8.7 for customer opinion, and 8.9 for shops.

SQCCRC launches prostate cancer treatment service

MUSCAT: A specialised medical team at the Sultan Qaboos Comprehensive Cancer Care and Research Centre (SQCCRC) managed to launch a new treatment service for prostate cancer patients using the radionuclide (Lutetium-177) (Lu-177) PSMA. The new service is expected to be a valuable addition to the field of cancer treatment in the Sultanate of Oman.

The first-of-its-kind radionuclide treatment session was performed on a patient at the Department of Radiology and Nuclear Medicine has met with success. A dose of the radioactive substance (Lu-177) (PSMA) which targets and damages prostate cancer cells was administered to the patient.

Dr Kholoud bint Salem al Riyamiyah, head of the nuclear medicine unit at SQCCRC, explained that this service is the ideal therapeutic option for treating prostate cancer patients who have not responded to other treatments such as androgen deprivation therapy and chemotherapy.

She added that the objective of using this diagnostic and therapeutic service is to relieve symptoms and achieve maximum control over the spread of cancer while preserving surrounding tissues thus improving the patient's quality of life.

Providing this modern therapeutic service which utilises nuclear medicine techniques represents a qualitative leap and will open new horizons in cancer treatment, she said adding that the Centre is striving to provide more treatments based on (Lutetium-177) in the near future for patients suffering from other conditions such as neuroendocrine tumours. – ONA

Traditional weapons shooting championship in Bidiya



BIDIYA: The traditional weapons shooting championship for 2023 kicked off in Bidiya, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. Organised by the Bidiya Shooting Team, the championship has drawn participants from various governorates for two days.

Amer bin Mohammed al Hajri, head of the Bidiya Shooting Team, said hosting the competition aligns with the array of winter activities in the governorate. The event aims to preserve and endorse the traditional Omani heritage of talents in traditional shooting. On the inaugural day, the competition featured qualifying rounds across various categories. These included individual shooting in the 'Sakton' category for juniors, generals, and professionals. Qualifiers were also held for rifle shooting competitions catering to individuals with disabilities, a new inclusion in the championship. Team shooting competitions, focusing on dish-dropping events, also took centre stage.

Results from the shooting for individuals with disabilities showcased Ali bin Hamad al Habsi securing the top spot, followed by Amer bin Saif al Rashidi in second place, and Mohammed bin Ali al Turshi achieving the third position.

The championship held under the patronage of Mahmoud bin Yahya al Thuhli, Governor of Al Sharqiyah North. The final day featured replay shooting for finalists in the 'Saktoon' general competitions, archery for gold square finalists, and bowl-drop shooting competitions. During the concluding day, participants showcased their prowess in traditional shooting disciplines. – ONA

Oman citizens can travel visa-free to Türkiye



Oman citizens will now be able to enter the territory of Türkiye without having to obtain a visa.

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

MUSCAT: In a major move that will help citizens, Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, on Saturday issued a decision providing visa exemption for ordinary passport holders of certain countries.

With this decision, which was published in the official gazette, citizens of the Sultanate of Oman, the United States, the Kingdom of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia are exempted from visas for 90 days in every 180 days for travel to Türkiye for tourism purposes.

“Decision 7976 on providing visa exemption for ordinary passport holders of the USA, Bahrain, the UAE, Canada, Saudi Arabia, and the Sultanate of Oman for 90 days every 180

days for their touristic travels to Türkiye,” the official Gazette said.

It amended the decision of the Council of Ministers 2002/3654, concerning the determination of those who will be exempted from a visa to visit Türkiye.

Oman, passport holders can now travel to around 88 destinations visa-free.

Turkish Ambassador to Oman, Muhammet Hekimoğlu, said in June this year that both countries are currently working on easing the visa rules for Omani citizens.

Once implemented, Oman citizens will be able to enter the territory of Türkiye without having to obtain a visa.

In 2022, 130,000 Omanis entered Türkiye for tourism purposes, which is expected to increase with the ease of travel rules.

Currently, Oman Air flies

to Istanbul and Trabzon, while SalamAir flies to two airports in Istanbul including Sabiha Gökçen.

Pegasus Airlines and Turkish Airlines also fly to Istanbul from Muscat.

Türkiye has earned \$42 billion from tourism in the first nine months of this year, a figure that rose 20.1 per cent year-on-year, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) said.

The country hosted 44.6 million visitors in January-September, an increase of 13.2 per cent from the same time last year.

In the third quarter of this year, tourism income increased 13.1 per cent from the prior year to \$20.2 billion.

The country saw 22.4 million visitor arrivals in July-September, while the figure stood at 21 million last year.

Oman to observe GCC Inmates Week from today

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Royal Oman Police, is celebrating the Unified Gulf Inmates Week from Sunday to Thursday at the Mall of Oman, with events aimed at communicating with prison inmates and associating them in building a better future for themselves and the whole society.

Members of all GCC countries commemorate Inmates Day under the concept that prisons are fundamentally reformatory institutions that train and educate the inmates to qualify them for a better life and improved living conditions.

The inmates receive training in several subjects, including soft skills development, IT, and personality development, the medium of which is the English language, and they obtain training certificates that enable them to get jobs in public and private establishments.

The activities of the GCC Inmates Week, themed this year, ‘Let us give them hope and work’, include an exhibition highlighting the role of government agencies

and civil society organisations in reforming and rehabilitating inmates and providing support and assistance to their families.

Besides the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth have joined hands to devise better rehabilitation possibilities for the inmates.

Several awareness messages that aim to spread a conscious culture, contain and accept released inmates, and reintegrate them into society through aftercare are part of the Week.

GCC Unified Inmates’ Week also aims to uphold the rights of inmates, highlight the efforts undertaken by the Penal and Correctional Institutions Department, and shed light on this category of society besides enhancing community partnership and finding out the latest developments and modern methods in dealing with inmates, care for their families, and support the efforts made in developing penal and correctional institutions and upgrading them to keep pace with the progress achieved worldwide in that field.



WINTER WELLNESS

EMBRACING OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES AND SEASONAL NUTRITION IN WINTER

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EMBRACE THE CHILL, BOOST YOUR HEALTH

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CRAVING FRESH AIR AND FITNESS

HEALTH IN EVERY STEP

As winter descends upon Oman, it brings relief from the scorching heat and ushers in the challenges of flu. At the same time, it unveils a myriad of health benefits for its residents. The Sultanate of Oman, known for its typically high temperatures, experiences a refreshing change with the onset of winter, making it the opportune time for outdoor activities and exercise. "This season offers a unique chance for Oman's inhabitants to embrace an active and healthy lifestyle. From brisk walks to invigorating runs, the cooler weather provides the perfect backdrop for individuals to engage in physical activities that contribute to overall well-being. The crisp air and pleasant temperatures create an inviting environment, encouraging

people to step outdoors and make the most of this fitness-friendly season," says Dr Viprashree, a specialist at NMC Hospital. Furthermore, winter brings abundant fresh fruits and vegetables to Oman's markets and tables. The local produce, rich in vitamins and nutrients, not only adds a burst of flavour to meals, but also contributes to a balanced and nutritious diet. This seasonal bounty provides an excellent opportunity for residents to prioritise their health by incorporating a variety of wholesome foods into their daily intake. In essence, Oman's winter is not just a respite from extreme heat but a golden period to prioritise health and well-being through outdoor activities and nourishing seasonal produce. It is a time to savour the season's benefits and embrace a holistic approach to fitness and nutrition.

Saud Bahwan Group Unveils Chery Automotive Brand in Oman



Mr. Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, H.H. Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik Al Said, H.E. Li Lingbing (Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Sultanate of Oman) & Mr. Shen Xiantian at the Event



Mr. Shen Xiantian Delivering the Keynote Address



Guests Experiencing the Chery Range

Under the patronage of His Highness Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik Al Said, Saud Bahwan Group unveiled the Chery Automotive brand in Oman. Attending the occasion were Her Excellency Li Lingbing, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Sultanate of Oman, Mr. Shen Xiantian, General Manager, Middle East and North Africa, Chery Automobile and other senior management officials from Chery Automobile. Commenting on this momentous occasion Mr. Abdullah Mohamed Bahwan, Managing Director – Corporate, Saud Bahwan Group, said, "Today, we herald a momentous occasion, the grand launch of Chery Automobile here in Oman. For us at Saud Bahwan Group, Chery Automobile symbolises new-age designs, quality and inspiring technology. The brand Chery is much more than just vehicles. It is about a passion to listening to customer desires and employing everything it takes, to bring those desires into reality. Owning a Chery vehicle will definitely be a valuable and memorable experience."

Speaking about the partnership between Saud Bahwan Group and Chery Automobile he said, "We are extremely delighted to partner Chery Automobile on this visionary journey. We are also happy to know that recently Chery Automobile was awarded the first place in the 2023 J. D. Power China Initial Quality Study among Chinese brands. We eagerly look forward to serving our customers with some of the finest high quality products with the support and assurance from Saud Bahwan Group. We also

look forward to continued guidance & support from the Management at Chery Automobile to drive the brand to be among the top automotive brands in Oman. We are all set to usher in a delightful and memorable experience for our valued customers."

Later in the evening, Mr. Shen Xiantian, General Manager Middle East and North Africa, Chery Automobile, in his keynote address highlighted Chery Automobile's product strengths and the association with Saud Bahwan Group. He said, "The collaboration between Chery and Saud Bahwan Group represents another meaningful annotation in the continuation of this longstanding friendship in the new era. We are all dedicated to bring Omani consumers more technological, more sustainable and smarter automotive products and services. Chery was founded in 1997 and it is a technology-oriented company, with five R&D centers around the world, more than ten overseas factories, and over 1,500 dealerships and service centers. We have the strongest engine technology among Chinese brands, consistently securing the JD Power China New Vehicle Quality award for multiple years. Our products are exported to over 80 countries and regions, earning the trust of 12 million consumers worldwide. With global sales expected to reach nearly 2 million units this year, maintaining the first position car export for 22 consecutive years among all Chinese brands. We are confident that Chery will soon become the top 10 car marker worldwide. Saud Bahwan Group is a crucial strategic partner for Chery, and through years of honest business practices,

has gained widespread popularity and trust among consumers in the Oman market. Today, we join forces in a strong alliance and are full of confidence in the future. I believe that with the trust and support of our friends present here, Chery can undoubtedly achieve success in the Omani market."

Sharing interesting information about the Chery range, Mr. Sajdin Osmancevic, Exterior Design Director, Chery Automobile, said, "The TIGGO8 PRO MAX, TIGGO4 PRO, and ARRIZO6 PRO represent the latest achievements of Chery in terms of automotive technology design and performance and will bring a completely new driving experience to consumers in Oman. Continuing the high-end positioning of the TIGGO 8 family, TIGGO 8 PRO MAX is a luxury and commercial SUV with both forceful powertrain and advanced technology launched for the urban new middle-class elites. Designed by a team of top international designers, TIGGO 8 PRO MAX perfectly interprets the design concept of Life in Motion. Tiggo4 Pro is the first product of the Chery Pro family. It is also a global model created by Chery by integrating the latest design power intelligent technologies with the latest processes. The most remarkable feature of Tiggo4 Pro is the integration of dynamic and stylish appearance. Luxurious comfortable interior and smart configurations. The Arizzo 6 Pro features a new family front design with a sophisticated and graceful interior. It is equipped with 10.25-inch LCD instrument and HD central control screen which highlights its high end and intelligence. Besides it possesses NVH super quiet space 360-degree panoramic



The Feature-Rich Chery Range

image and wireless mobile phone mapping CARPLAY which brings user-friendly and comfort driving experience. During the event, the guests were invited to experience Chery Automobile's recent introductions – The Tiggo 8 Pro Max SUV, Tiggo 4 Pro SUV and the Arizzo 6 Pro sedan. The Tiggo 8 Pro Max SUV is equipped with Superior ADAS with 12 Point Coverage, Panoramic Sunroof, All-Wheel Drive, 540 Panoramic Image, 9 Airbags, 12.3 Inch Dual Screen Design with Wireless Carplay/ Android Auto, Front Radar, 8 Way Electric Memory Driver Seat Adjustment and 2.0 Litre Turbocharged engine. The Tiggo 4 Pro SUV is equipped with 10.25 inch Central Screen with Wireless Carplay/ Android Auto / Apple Play, 18 Inch Alloy Wheel, 360 Panoramic Image, 6 Speakers, 6 Way Electric Driver Seat Adjustment, Electric Sunroof, Fast Wireless Fast Charging, 4 Airbags and a 1.5 Litre Turbocharged engine. The Arizzo 6 Pro Sedan is equipped with 10.25 inch Dual Screen Design / Android Auto/ Apple Play, 18 Inch Alloy Wheel, Superior ADAS

with 6 Point Coverage, 360 Panoramic Image, 6 Airbags, Electric Sunroof, 6 Way Electric Driver Seat Adjustment, Air Purifier PM 2.5, Ambient Lighting, Fast Wireless Fast Charging, Ventilated Front Seats, 6 Speakers and 1.5 Litre Turbocharged engine. Fascinated by the stylish, feature-rich and technology packed vehicles a customer remarked, "These all-new introductions from Chery are indeed very impressive and thrilling. There is so much technology and features available, it is indeed pure value for money. I am also very delighted to know that Saud Bahwan Group is extending all the support to make the entire ownership period hassle-free and satisfying. Apart from that, I am also very impressed that Chery has also recently received the 2023 J. D. Power China Initial Quality Study Award. This demonstrates Chery's commitment and dedication towards making high quality vehicles that are the perfect travel partners."

The brand new Chery range is now available for viewing at the Chery showroom at Wattayah.



UTAS Nizwa celebrated the graduation of 729 accomplished students comprising both males and females.

729 graduates from UTAS Nizwa

NIZWA: The University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Nizwa celebrated the graduation of 729 accomplished students. The graduates, comprising both males and females, achieved academic success at the diploma, advanced diploma, and bachelor's levels across various disciplines, including engineering, technology, economics, business administration, creative industries, and computer and information sciences.

Dr Mohammed bin Rashid al Maamari, Assistant President of the University at Nizwa Branch, expressed pride in the university's commitment to providing a comprehensive education. He highlighted the institution's planning and organisational efforts to equip students with technical

competence, applied sciences knowledge, and readiness for the evolving landscape of the knowledge revolution.

Al Maamari shared achievements of the Nizwa branch, including the acquisition of research funding for seven projects from the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation's institutional support programme.

Additionally, the branch received accolades, such as the Best Documentary Film award in the Department of Mass Communication at the Al Batinah Festival's Cinema of the Year.

The university secured first and second places in structural packaging at the First Arab Packaging Competition for Designers and Professionals in Lebanon. — ONA

Mild 0.6% inflation rate in November

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman reported a modest annual inflation rate of 0.6 per cent in November 2023, according to the National Center for Statistics and Information's monthly consumer price index survey.

The slight uptick in inflation was primarily driven by increases in various consumer price index categories. Notably, the food and non-alcoholic beverages group witnessed a rise of 2.91 per cent, propelled by significant increases in fish and seafood at 15.29 per cent and unclassified food products at 5.07 per cent.

Other components, including milk, cheese, and eggs (4.94 per cent), vegetables (3.95 per cent), and foodstuffs (3.21 per cent), contributed to the overall increase. In contrast, meat prices experienced a modest decline of 0.37 per cent.

Personal goods and services prices increased by 2.39 per cent, with tobacco rising by 2.35 per cent. Furniture, fixtures, household equipment, and routine household maintenance saw a 1.46 per cent increase, while culture and entertainment rose by 1.02 per cent.



November sees a marginal 0.07 per cent uptick in inflation compared to October 2023

Health costs experienced a marginal increase of 0.28 per cent, and clothing and shoes inched up by 0.1 per cent. Housing, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels saw a minimal rise of 0.01 per cent. However, transportation costs decreased by 1.45 per cent, education by 0.57 per cent, communications by 0.16 per cent, and restaurants and hotels by 0.04 per cent.

In comparison to October

2023, the inflation rate edged up by 0.07 per cent. This increase is attributed to upticks in the prices of food and non-alcoholic beverages by 0.30 per cent, culture and entertainment by 0.05 per cent, and transportation by 0.04 per cent. Conversely, decreases were observed in the prices of restaurants and hotels by 0.14 per cent and miscellaneous personal goods and services by 0.11 per cent. Minor declines were also noted in furniture, fixtures, household equipment, and regular home maintenance by 0.02 per cent, and clothing and shoes by 0.01 per cent, while the prices of other groups remained stable.

— ONA

Buraimi OCCI explores health cooperation

ABU DHABI: A delegation from the Health Committee of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry branch in Al Buraimi Governorate discussed with its counterpart from the Abu Dhabi Chamber areas of cooperation in providing health care, developing professional practices, and introducing investment opportunities on both sides.

The visit of the delegation of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch in Al Buraimi Governorate to Abu Dhabi aimed to enhance communication between representatives of the private health sector, exchange experiences, and learn about developments in the medical sector in the field of hospitals, clinics, pharmacies, and alternative medicine activities.

Engineer Saeed bin Rashid al Badi, Chairman of the Health Committee, OCCI, Al Buraimi, said that this visit comes to shed light on developments in the activities of the private health sector and learn about the strategies and programmes followed in the work groups related to health issues in the Abu Dhabi Chamber. — ONA

Muscat artist shines at Kochi Kathak painting exhibition

MUSCAT: The Kochi Kathak painting exhibition, held at Pepper House, Fort Kochi, Kerala, from December 9 to 20, showcased the talents of about 40 artists, including legendary actress Sheela, Kottayam Nazeer, Davinci Suresh, Loumy Majeed, director Arun Bose, Merle Things from Belgium, and artist Rema Siva Kumar from Oman.

Curated by Loumy Majeed, the exhibition featured a diverse range of artworks, with Rema presenting 20 paintings exploring figurative, abstract, semi-realism expressionism, and collage themes, enriched with mixed media.

Rema's creations included an acrylic abstract portraying a young romantic couple, earning acclaim alongside her oil painting depicting horse riding and pieces on kanjar.

Her mastery of acrylic, oil,



Artist Rema Siva Kumar from Oman at the Kochi Kathak painting exhibition.

and paper collage techniques garnered positive reviews.

The exhibition, organised by actor Anwar Sharif and associates from the Arts and Thoughts group, went beyond visual arts, hosting cultural programmes.

Highlights included a Kathak programme for children, Human Rights installation, a lecture by Finland's Michael Senger,

and presentations by Sangeeta Pari Padi. The event also featured a one-act play by actor Rajesh Sharma, documentary screenings, Abdul Salim Kochi's watercolour workshop, Kalavata Ranam by actor Amal Rajeev, and Akshay Venu's magic performance. The exhibition served as a vibrant platform for cultural exchange, celebrating artistic diversity and creativity.



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

With reference to the announcement issued by Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C, NESC date on 12 December 2023, NESC, would like to draw attention to the extension of the tender participation and submission period, as per the details listed below.

Tender No.	Description	Last Date of Buying	Date of Submission	Grade	Site Visit	Tender Price (OMR)
RE-TENDER/ NESC/ 04/2023	DATA CENTER & IT INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT ANNUAL MAINTENANCE CONTRACT (AMC) at NESC	28/12/2023	08/01/2024	Specialist	N/A	52.500

The table below shows the instructions for participation: -

Participation	- Companies registered with Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and in I Supplier with Nama Groupe may obtain Tender documents. - The amount specified above is including 5% VAT. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from Tender fees. - The amount specified above is Non-Refundable payment (Terms and Condition apply). - To obtain the tender document and payment procedure, please contact us by email Tender@supply.nama.om - Tender purchase will be in working ours between 08:00 AM till 02:00 PM.
Enquiries	- Any inquiry can be sent to Tender@supply.nama.om. - Any request for clarification received after the above-mentioned period will not be considered. - Last day of receiving clarifications on 01/01/2024.
Tender Submission	Please follow SUBMISSION OF TENDER mentioned in the Prime Document.
Guarantee	- The Tender should enclose a bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman Unconditional and irrevocable and shall be disbursement as soon as it is submitted for the value of (1%) of the tender value valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission and addressed to the CHAIRMAN OF MINOR TENDER COMMITTEE, Nama Electricity Supply Company S.A.O.C. - The bid bond should including 5% VAT. - The bid bond should be submitted as seprate envelope. - Riyada card holders from Small and Medium Enterprises, SME, are exempted from bid bond requirements. - Any tender not accompanied by a Tender Bond shall be rejected.
Terms and Conditions	- The Tender shall be valid for a period of at least ninety (90) days from the last date of tender submission including any extension thereof. - If the submission date extended, the bank guarantee or a certified cheque shall be extended in accordance with the bid extension date. - NESC is not bound to accept the lowest (or highest) Tenderer. - Preference of awarding the tender will be given to those bidders who achieved a high percentage of purchasing from Local Products and have a High-level percentage of Omanization - NESC gives priority to award the projects to SMEs companies. - Failure to comply with the instructions in tender document may lead to disqualification.



Nama Electricity Supply Company SAOC
PO Box 1239, PC 131, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 24250800 | CR 1/7/1235/7
info@supply.nama.om | www.supply.nama.om



Tender Number

T-27-2023

Tender Announcement

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:

Tender Name

Framework Agreement for the Supply and Delivery of Pantry and Cleaning Items for Mwasalat, Oman Post & Royal Express.

Project Summary

Within the framework of this tender, Mwasalat, Oman Post & Royal Express seek a qualified supplier for the supply and delivery of pantry and cleaning items, in accordance with the terms and conditions stipulated in the tender documents.

Tender Fee

OMR 50, waived for SME Riyada

Grade & Specialty

Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field

Start date for tender document distribution

Sunday, 24 December 2023

Last date for tender document distribution

Sunday, 21st December 2023

Last date for submission

Sunday, 14th January 2024

The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00A.M - 2:00 P.M.

Tenderers are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email.

The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.

Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head- quarter Oman National Transport Company S.A.O.C "MWASALAT" at Ghala, Muscat (Jabal Shams Building 5th floor), Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.

"Mwasalat"
Head Quarter, Ghala Tel: +968 1551
P.O.Box: 911, Al Khuwail, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman

For more information
please send to:
tenders@mwasalat.om



S Korea says warship named for torpedoed vessel begins mission

SEOUL: A South Korean vessel named after a warship torpedoed by Pyongyang in 2010 resulting in the deaths of 46 sailors began a new mission with “unbeatable combat readiness”, Seoul’s military said on Saturday.

The sinking of the Cheonan has remained a politicised issue in South Korea, where some have questioned whether Pyongyang really downed the ship.

An international investigation concluded that the vessel was torpedoed by a North Korean submarine, but Pyongyang has denied responsibility.

Seoul’s hawkish President Yoon Suk Yeol has shown public support for the victims of the Cheonan incident by wearing a T-shirt and hat that featured the ship.

The new Cheonan -- a 2,800-tonne frigate with significantly enhanced anti-submarine capability -- began a “full-fledged mission to protect the West Sea” on Saturday, Seoul’s navy said in a statement.

“We will be fully prepared for battle and equipped with unbeatable combat readiness posture,” the Cheonan’s chief said, according to the statement. “If the enemy provokes in the West Sea, we will respond immediately and strongly until the end,” the chief added.

The new Cheonan is equipped with long-range anti-submarine torpedoes and tactical ship-to-ship guided missiles, which make it capable of “attacking enemy submarines from long distances”.

The frigate also has the capability to “directly strike facilities that command enemy submarines”, — **AFP**

South Korean naval destroyer ROKS Choe Yeong is pictured during military drills.
— AFP file photo



POLAND CALLS ON WEST TO RALLY AROUND UKRAINE

KYIV: Poland’s new foreign minister urged the West to rally around Ukraine, choosing the war-torn country for his first visit abroad in a sign of support as other allies waver on aid.

Ukraine in turn expressed hope for a quick resolution to a blockade from Polish truckers and said the visit marked a “new page” in the two countries’ relations that became strained under the previous administration.

Air alarms sounded during the meeting, warning of a potential new attack from Russia, which has intensified air attacks in the past weeks.

“If the West mobilises, I have no doubt who will win, but it must finally start mobilising,” Poland’s Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said in a press conference wrapping up his trip.

He said Western economies were “twenty times wealthier than Russia” but that Moscow “has switched its economy to a war mode.”

His visit comes as fatigue builds among Kyiv’s allies nearly two years into the war despite Ukrainian officials’ efforts.

In the US, Senate leaders said that Washington would not be able to approve new aid for Ukraine before the year’s end.

Hungary blocked a 50-billion-euro European Union aid package for Ukraine, though Ukraine did win a symbolic victory when the bloc opened formal membership negotiations with Ukraine -- but any actual accession is years away.

Sikorski’s visit aimed to



Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy welcomes Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski before their meeting, in Kyiv.
— Reuters

Sikorski’s visit aimed to reassure Kyiv and to resolve a month-long blockade at the Ukraine border by Polish hauliers was top of the agenda

reassure Kyiv and to resolve a month-long blockade at the Ukraine border by Polish hauliers was top of the agenda.

When the war began in

February 2022, the EU waived restrictions for Ukrainian road carriers to enter the bloc to ease the cargo traffic in and out the war-torn country.

But Polish truckers say the move undercut their earnings and have been blocking the border with Ukraine -- which heavily relies on the route for its exports and imports.

Earlier the Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba addressed the issue.

“The first thing to do is to unblock the border, because the

situation in which our friendly relations find themselves -- in the shadow of the blocked border -- is unacceptable and harmful,” Kuleba told his Polish counterpart.

“We hope that this problem will be solved by Christmas, before the end of this year,” Polish Deputy Infrastructure Minister Pawel Gancarz said at a briefing later on, speaking alongside Sikorski in Kyiv. The blockade has been a thorn in the relations between Warsaw and Kyiv. — **AFP**

Mexico to boost measures aimed at curbing migration to US

MEXICO CITY: Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said that his government will reinforce measures to contain migration as he seeks to help the United States cope with record numbers of people trying to reach the US border.

Lopez Obrador’s comments come a day after he spoke with US President Joe Biden, during which both agreed that more enforcement was needed at their shared frontier, as record numbers of migrants disrupt border trade.

“What was agreed is that we keep working together,” Lopez Obrador told a regular press conference. “We have a proposal to strengthen our plans, what we’ve been doing,” he added, without going into details.

Migrants are heading through Mexico to the US to escape economic distress and negative impacts of climate change, according to the UN. The number crossing the perilous Darien Gap straddling Colombia and Central America has topped half a million this year, double last year’s record.

The latest tensions over the border flared up after Mexican authorities temporarily stopped expelling migrants due to an end-of-year funding crunch, according to officials.



Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador reacts during a news conference, in Salina Cruz, Oaxaca, Mexico. — Reuters

What was agreed is that we keep working together. We have a proposal to strengthen our plans, what we’ve been doing

ANDRES MANUEL LOPEZ OBRADOR
Mexican president

After Lopez Obrador spoke, the government of Mexico’s Coahuila state announced in a

statement it had sent a planeload of migrants from Piedras Negras, across the border from Eagle Pass, Texas, to Villahermosa, in the southern state of Tabasco to be returned to their countries of origin.

Top US officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Homeland Security chief Alejandro Mayorkas, will visit Mexico on Wednesday to follow up on the call, Lopez Obrador said, calling current migratory pressures “extraordinary”.

Lopez said Mexico would step up containment efforts on its southern border with Guatemala. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

WASHINGTON Court declines to fast-track Trump case

The US Supreme Court declined to immediately hear former president Donald Trump’s claim that he is immune from prosecution, potentially delaying his 2020 election interference trial.

Special Counsel Jack Smith had asked the nation’s highest court to take up the immunity case on an expedited basis, bypassing the federal court of appeals. The Supreme Court denied the request in a one-line order that did not provide any reason for the decision.

Lawyers have repeatedly sought to delay the trial until after next year’s election, including with the claim of “absolute immunity”. — **AFP**



AJACCIO Police arrest alleged Corsican gang leader

Alleged Corsican gang leader Laurent Emmanuelli was arrested in Bastia getting off a plane from Paris.

The 32-year-old was apprehended by a large gendarmerie force, a source close to the case said, confirming a report in Corsican newspaper Corse-Matin.

Police suspect Emmanuelli of leading one of the 25 criminal gangs active on the Mediterranean island, a region of France.



According to a confidential note from the national police dating from March 2022, he is considered to be close to the Moretti and a “support” for the Orsoni in Balagne. — **AFP**

BERLIN Mayor to maintain order on New Year’s Eve

Berlin Mayor Kai Wegner has pledged to maintain law and order in the German capital and to act forcefully against any disturbances during the traditional celebrations on New Year’s Eve.

“We have taken all the necessary precautions to ensure that the rule of law is implemented,” the Christian Democrat (CDU) politician said.

Referring to parts of the city that have seen disturbances in recent weeks, Wegner noted that maintaining order in some areas presented a challenge. “I can only appeal to all: Let us celebrate New Year’s Eve peacefully with each other in a relaxed way,” he said. — **dpa**





omanobserver.com/podcast

GAZA: Israel pressed its Gaza offensive on Saturday, with Palestinian groups reporting heavy shelling in several cities hours after world powers demanded more aid be allowed into the besieged territory.

Clouds of grey and black smoke rose over the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis after strikes in the morning.

The Palestinian health ministry reported 18 people killed in a strike on a house in Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, and said other targets were hit up and down the coastal Gaza Strip.

The bombardments came after the UN Security Council approved a resolution demanding “immediate, safe and unhindered” deliveries of life-saving aid be rushed to Gaza “at scale”. Members had wrangled for days over the wording.

At Washington’s insistence, they toned down some provisions and avoided calling for a ceasefire that would stop the war, which began with unprecedented attacks 11 weeks ago.

The bombardments came after the UN Security Council approved a resolution demanding “immediate, safe and unhindered” deliveries of life-saving aid be rushed to Gaza “at scale”



Residents of the refugee camp of Bureij arrive in Deir al Balah in the central Gaza Strip following an evacuation order. – AFP

ISRAEL STRIKES GAZA AFTER UN CALLS FOR MORE AID

It is still unclear what impact the vote will have on the ground, where Gazans have been forced into crowded shelters or tents, and are struggling to find food, fuel, water and medical care.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said a “humanitarian ceasefire” is the only way for aid “to be effectively delivered”.

The issue was not the number of aid trucks, he said, but “the way Israel is conducting this offensive is creating massive obstacles” to aid distribution.

Israel launched a relentless bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza, where 20,057 people have been killed, mostly women and children, according to the Palestinian government.

A report by Washington’s Director of National Intelligence, quoted this month by US media, said nearly half of munitions dropped by Israeli aircraft on Gaza were “dumb” bombs -- less accurate unguided munitions.

The UN estimates the fighting has displaced 1.9 million of Gaza’s 2.4 million population.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said a majority of those uprooted from their homes were now going “entire days and nights without eating”, and “famine is looming”.

Many Gazans have been forced to move multiple times. On Friday, thousands fled central Gaza after an army evacuation order.

UNRWA, said the latest evacuation order would effect more than 150,000 people.

— AFP



Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmed Aboul Gheit attends a news conference at the Arab Gulf Summit in Riyadh. – Reuters file photo

Top Arab diplomat: UN resolution on Gaza aid overdue, inadequate

CAIRO: The head of the Cairo-based Arab League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, on Saturday criticised as overdue and inadequate a United Nations resolution for more humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, according to Egyptian media.

After days of wrangling, the UN Security Council on Friday adopted the resolution calling for more humanitarian aid for civilians in the Gaza Strip, agreeing on a significantly watered-down text that allowed the United States, Israel’s biggest backer, to abstain.

Aboul Gheit considered the resolution as having come late and falling short of the objective of fulfilling a full ceasefire in the densely populated enclave, Egyptian TV reported.

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“The resolution is an attempt to prevent famine in the strip and save humans, mainly women and children, from a catastrophic situation, but it is not enough to stop the Israeli aggression machine, especially as it does not include a ceasefire,” the broadcaster quoted Aboul Gheit as saying.

“What is required is not just the entry of humanitarian aid into the strip, but basically to protect civilians from constant bombardment and fulfilling a sustainable ceasefire,” he added. The top Arab diplomat said blocking an “immediate ceasefire is a licence to kill”.

The resolution calls on Israel to enable “the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian aid. — Agencies



The UN Security Council meets about the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, at UN headquarters in New York. – AFP



Palestinian children wait to collect food at a donation point in a refugee camp in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP

Anguish grows for families of the Palestinian strip Christians

GAZA: A few days before Christmas, Khalil Sayegh learned his father had died due to a lack of medical care, Sayegh said by telephone from Washington DC where he works.

“I was told by a relative... who had learned it from a priest,” he said.

The news left him feeling shattered, he said, adding that he has yet to speak with other relatives stuck in Gaza which has been under heavy Israeli bombardment since October 7.

Mobile and Internet services, as well as electricity, have been largely disrupted in the

Palestinian territory since the war broke out.

“Days go by without us having any news,” said Sayegh, 29.

“We live with fear... not knowing if they are dead or alive, if they have food and water or if they are hungry.”

The war has reduced much of Gaza to rubble and put out of action most of its hospitals, particularly in the north of the territory, the United Nations says.

Food, medicine, water and fuel are hard to come by.

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem reported that on



Members of clergy change oil in a lamp in the Church of the Nativity, in Bethlehem. – Reuters

December 16 two Christian women were “murdered” by an Israeli army sniper inside the same church where Sayegh’s family are sheltering.

Pope Francis deplored the deaths, which he said happened in a church complex “where there are none but families, children, people who are sick and have disabilities”.

The Israeli army said it had “no reports of a hit on the church”, stressing it “does not target civilians, no matter their religion”.

A Jerusalem-based nun, who declined to be identified, said

she is only able to reach two other nuns sheltering at the Holy Family Church every three or four days.

On Monday, they told her that water supplies were cut and that none of the displaced had been able to shower for at least two weeks. “God be with them. Father Ibrahim Nino of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem said the displaced at the church have enough food, water and electricity.

Church in Bethlehem decided to dampen Christmas celebrations in solidarity with Gazans. — AFP

Learning resilience from Gaza



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

The current genocide in Gaza teaches the whole world about resilience as we see people digging out their loved ones from under the rubble with their bare hands and fighting for their lives trying to survive while the politicians around the world fail to reach a ceasefire.

A friend was asking what keeps the people in Gaza so strong.

Many factors contribute to emotional strength against adversity and in the case of people in Gaza faith would be at the top of the list.

Believing in god and surrendering to his power allows people to seek meaning in what they witness. When Hamas took hostages back on October 7 many people saw that as an act of madness and a poorly calculated move yet we soon realised it was not up to us to make that judgment but for the people of Gaza who witnessed apartheid daily.

The second factor is the support of others even when the US blocked the ceasefire vote at the UN, individuals around the world continued to show

their support, through peaceful protests which the police in several cities originally banned, probably for the first time in history.

Such bans give people more reason to protest for their freedom to express their political opinions and show empathy for people in Gaza and the whole of Palestine.

No one can argue that social media platforms played a major role in educating people about what is taking place in Gaza and in showing the truth that official media that support the Israeli propaganda tried to hide.

I used to view the social media platform TikTok as a place for teenagers to dance and exchange silly and sometimes dangerous challenges yet it proved to be one of the popular platforms since it is not subjected to censorship by the United States.

Viewers using TikTok were able to see footage of the actual military attack and listen to people in Gaza challenging the lies about the presence of Hamas forces in Al Shifa hospital.

International public support was also demonstrated by boycotting companies that

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announced their support for Israel and fed their soldiers with burgers and fries wrapped in an Israeli flag. Something we only used to see during football matches where companies advertise their products during the game but not during the war that kills innocent civilians. Therefore, people who boycotted such companies are standing for their values against capitalism.

Many people started discovering new meaning in their lives after learning the truth about what has been happening in Gaza and the whole of Palestine for years. Myself included, we learned to value the small things in life such as living and a free country and being able to express one’s faith without threats, being able to return home to a loving family, and experiencing the warmth of connecting with friends around the world. Such things are not available to people in Palestine.

Finally, as the current war brings us together as human beings, let us revisit our values away from capitalistic propaganda and think about our brothers and sisters around the world who are experiencing political conflicts, and let us pray for a better world.

Saboteurs try to outfox hunters in UK’s countryside

SYLVAIN PEUCHMAURD

Emerging from woods in a quiet corner of rural England, a small band of anti-foxhunting campaigners have just one goal: to confuse the pack of dogs chasing a fox and prevent its death.

These “hunt saboteurs” regularly gate-crash meetings across the country in what has become a fierce clash of cultures.

“Kermit to Animal, are you receiving?” crackles the radio from one old Toyota 4X4 to another, each with their own codename.

The field sport of foxhunting, in which a pack of hounds chases and kills a fox accompanied by riders on horseback, was once an integral part of country life.

But the use of dogs to hunt wild animals has seen outlawed in England and Wales since 2004.

Trail hunts, which allow packs of dogs to follow a route artificially laid with fox scent, are allowed.

But critics say they are used as a cover for fox hunts to continue as before.

They say dogs still chase and kill live animals on these hunts, with organisers then claiming it was accidental.

Hunters counter that they comply with the law and that it is the saboteurs who are illegally interfering with their monitoring activities.

Today the saboteurs’ target is the Thurlow Hunt in rural Suffolk, eastern England.

Armed with maps on their phones and drones overhead, around 20 saboteurs exchange information over their radios about the position of the riders, taking care not to risk driving the fox back towards the pack.

Spotting a saboteur, one rider -- dressed in a traditional red huntsman’s jacket -- looks unhappy and turns back. The barks of the dogs echo in the distance and hunt members including children on ponies gallop past. “We don’t want to lose sight of them,” says Angela Vasiliu of the North London Hunt Saboteurs. The saboteurs try to distract the dogs with loud cries and by spraying lemongrass to confuse their sense of smell.

If they fail to put them off and a fox is killed, at least they hope to gather evidence for prosecutions under the 2004 law.

Video taken by the hunt saboteurs led to the conviction of one member of the Thurlow Hunt in 2019, with the footage showing hunt members and saboteurs fighting over a fox’s remains during the traditional Boxing Day hunt on December 26, 2017. — AFP



Constant Méheut

The writer is the reporter at the Paris bureau of NYT

More drones, fewer parks. Ukrainians urge spending shift as war drags on

Baving rain and snow, hundreds of Ukrainians gathered last week outside the Kyiv City Council with signs reading, “I don’t want a park” and “Why do I need paving stones?” They chanted, jumped and clapped as they called for an end to road repairs and a freeze on the construction of a new subway depot.

Protesting the renovation of one’s city may seem highly unusual, especially in a country whose president was elected four years ago on a promise to repair roads. But protesters said a more urgent cause demands funding today — the war effort.

“This money should be spent on buying weapons,” said Yevheniia Klyshal, a 29-year-old nutritionist who was waving a sign that read, “New roads won’t win this war.”

The protests, which have also been seen in other major Ukrainian cities such as Odesa and Lviv, have reflected a growing sentiment: as the war against Russia drags on and Ukraine runs out of weapons and ammunition, the whole country must be put on a war footing.

Since Russia attack last year, large numbers of Ukrainians have raised money to buy weapons and volunteered for the army. But with the war raging far from several large Ukrainian cities, many citizens have returned to a semblance of normal life, going to work and schools during the day, and restaurants and bars at night.

Now, with Ukraine’s counteroffensive failing to yield major gains and as Russia regains the initiative in parts of the battlefield, calls have been growing for all Ukrainians to play a greater role in the war effort.

In places such as Kyiv, protesters say that will mean forgoing the comforts of life far from the front line and reallocating most public resources to the army.

“The war will last long,” said Iryna Ignatovych, a founder of Money for the AFU (the initialism for Armed Forces of Ukraine), a citizens group behind the Kyiv protests. “Russia is a very big country with a lot of resources. Ukraine is not so big, so in order to



Ukrainian soldiers with a tour guide in the port area of Odesa, which has been struck by drones and missiles.

win, we must redirect all our efforts to help our military. The rear must support the front.”

“It’s a question of the nation’s survival,” Ignatovych said.

The protests began in Odesa in late August, when a few dozen Ukrainians demanded that money earmarked for repairing a courthouse be spent

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on the army instead. The initiative struck a chord with many citizens and the movement quickly spread to other cities. In Kyiv, demonstrators have gathered every Saturday since mid-September under the Soviet-style building of the local city administration to press for changes in the city’s public spending.

Much of their anger has been directed at the Kyiv city budget for 2024, which includes \$1 million to rebuild a crossroads and \$670,000 to renovate a park opened only five years ago. “It’s just luxury,” Ignatovych said.

Some Kyiv city councilors have suggested that it was not the capital’s main role to finance the war effort and that substantial funds have already been allocated to funding army brigades. Still, the capital’s military budget for 2024 — about \$27 million, according to official figures — is only a fraction of this year’s, which has outraged protesters.

“I want the budget to be used for the defence of our country, not to repave sidewalks or put asphalt on roads that already look normal,” said Tetiana Nagumuk, who was standing among protesters last week, a Ukrainian flag draped around her shoulders.

Around her, hundreds of people in their 20s and 30s held up placards highlighting what they saw as absurd wartime investments.

“You’re building roads for the occupiers,” said one. Another was scrawled with a slogan alluding to the air raid alerts that routinely rattle the capital. It read: “Kyiv in 2024 be like: Attention! Missile danger. Proceed immediately to the renovated park” with the word “shelter” crossed out.

— The New York Times

The key to quality travel experiences

Birkat Al Mouz, Nizwa, Muscat, As Sifah, Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, Wadi Mayh, Sur, Ras Al Hadd, Ras Al Jinz, Al Asala... Lena and I are rediscovering Oman, and loving it! As the world 'gets smaller,' thanks to greater travel opportunities, greater affluence, and the broader effects of the World Wide Web, cultures get exposed to others in a process that can be uniquely rewarding. Especially around Christmas and New Year there is so much more travel, all over and across the globe, most often to visit friends and relations. However, due to our thirst for different experiences, many want to try new experiences, often with their children.

Within this, unintended cultural clashes can occur from the most innocent of situations, so whichever side of the cultural divide we are on, it pays to remind ourselves of the pitfalls and necessities of cultural awareness if we travel or host those from another environment.

Culture shock can occur from immersion in a new culture, for a short time, even for a few days. While the 'tourist' may be nervous because they do not speak the host's language, know their customs, or understand their daily routines and behaviour in daily life. They may also find that friendliness does not necessarily mean friendship, or that attempts to share humour may miss their mark. Uncertainty as to whether to shake hands, to kiss on one cheek or two during an embrace, how or when to start a conversation, or how to approach someone they don't know.

This can lead to a 'push back,' and to reject not only what they have found difficult, but the entire environment and experience. They often take refuge in feeling that their own culture is bigger, better, brighter, and in every way superior, making this widely known, and creating a more antagonistic environment than is appropriate. The complexity and the extent of culture shock are consequently, and significantly affected by fragility in their sense of security, their linguistic abilities, even their personality.

For example, I'm going to the Kruger Park in South Africa next year, chaperoning a student group as they work alongside locals to ensure the



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

work that is relevant to the needs of their communities. Africa is a much-storied land of drama, violence, history, danger, colour, life, and death.

Therefore, the difference will be light years away from that of the West. Appreciating the niceties and sensitivities of the local tribes will be essential to enjoying a quality working and cultural experience in an environment where the native Xhosa, Zulu, Tsonga, Ndebele, and the mainly Dutch and German settlers share the land for mutual benefit, in what has become a huge cultural melting pot.

Speaking of which, the local ethnic cuisine which I'm really looking forward to. I also want to enjoy the local brai, or barbeque. I'm not a sophisticated foodie... but I do like a good feed!

The most difficult thing for any traveller is to 'leave home, at home' and embrace the 'other world,' experience. These students must keep an open mind and a positive attitude, especially considering it will not be a leisure holiday, but a working experience that will open the students up to meeting new and different people who have very different ways of living, be sharing their food, appreciating the most precious thing may well be a glass of water, and so much more.

They will need their resilience to overcome the challenges they will surely face, and to be patient in developing an understanding of how different we can be. I just know the students I will chaperone in the world's most famous wildlife park, 'The Kruger,' will have the cultural experience of a lifetime, and hopefully, improve lives through work projects in community health, education, wildlife, and conservation environments, as the Turing Foundation seeks to offer "sustainable and transformative experiences that provide real value where it's most needed."

Hopefully to develop compassionate young adults who understand the political, social, and economic nature of other cultures.

Culture is something we should all appreciate and respect, something I'm doing right now as I travel throughout the Sultanate of Oman, greeting old and new friends along the way... and it feels great.

INDIAN SANTAS PARADE



Christians dressed as Santa Claus gesture during a religious procession ahead of Christmas festivities in Amritsar, India. — AFP

CULTURE SHOCK CAN OCCUR FROM IMMERSION IN A NEW CULTURE, FOR A SHORT TIME, EVEN FOR A FEW DAYS. CULTURE IS SOMETHING WE SHOULD ALL APPRECIATE AND RESPECT

Will Trump be on the ballot?

On March 5, 2024, the people of Colorado will vote in a 'primary election' to determine which candidates can compete for the US presidency in November.

The question now looming is whether former President Donald Trump's name will appear on the Republican Party's primary ballot.

In a recent decision — variously characterised as a "bombshell," "explosive," and "a huge moment for democracy" — the Supreme Court of Colorado answered "no."

A 4-3 majority on the court ruled that Trump's fate was sealed by Section 3 of the Fourteenth Amendment, which prohibits "insurrectionists" from holding federal or state office.

The Court's decision follows from a lower state court determination that Trump engaged in insurrection in late 2020 and early 2021, by knowingly and intentionally seeking to disrupt the orderly transition of power.

In addition to lying about election fraud, he also incited his followers to disrupt the counting of electoral votes, and simultaneously participated in a plan to replace certified state electors with fake pro-Trump slates. The Court concluded that these actions amounted to an active rebellion against the US Constitution.



Richard K Sherwin

The writer is Prof Emeritus of Law at New York Law School

FOLLOWING A SUPREME COURT RULING DISQUALIFYING TRUMP AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE IN THE STATE, THE COURT NOW MUST ALSO WEIGH IN. IT IS A FRAUGHT TIME FOR THE REPUBLIC, AND FOR THE HIGH COURT ITSELF

Trump's behaviour places him in the company of past government officials who, in 1860 and 1861, participated in their states' secession from the Union and ensuing establishment of the Confederate States of America. That effort failed, following a protracted and bloody conflict. The end of the Civil War (1861-65) was consummated by a bundle of Constitutional Amendments that have been referred to as America's "second founding": the Thirteenth Amendment, which ended the institution of slavery, the Fifteenth Amendment, which established universal male suffrage, and the Fourteenth Amendment, which endowed "all persons" with federal rights of due process and equal protection and, in Section 3, sought to further safeguard democracy by barring insurrectionists from public office:

"No person shall be a Senator or Representative in Congress, or elector of President and Vice President, or hold any office, civil or military, under the United States, or under any State, who, having previously taken an oath... to support the Constitution of the United States,

shall have engaged in insurrection or rebellion against the same, or given aid or comfort to the enemies thereof."

While the two Colorado courts agreed that Trump "engaged in insurrection," their legal analyses diverged.

The lower court ruled out disqualifying Trump from participating in the Colorado primary election on the grounds that the term "officer" does not apply to the presidency. But the state's Supreme Court called this interpretation absurd.

In the Court's view, the plain meaning of the word "office," based on how it was used at

the time the amendment was drafted, undoubtedly included the presidency. Moreover, the higher court notes, what sense would it make for the drafters to disqualify every oath-breaking insurrectionist except the most powerful one? Surely, no one believed that Jefferson Davis, the former president of the Confederacy who had previously sworn to uphold the US Constitution as a senator and secretary of war, would be eligible to become US president. The Congressional Record, which documents the debates surrounding the amendment, offers unambiguous support for

this view.

The last word on this controversy has yet to be heard. It lies secreted in the hearts and minds of the current US Supreme Court, which will soon have to rule on the matter. In the meantime, Trump's name will remain on the ballot. The Colorado Supreme Court stayed — or postponed — its ruling from taking effect until January 4, 2024: the day before the Colorado secretary of state is required to certify the candidates on the state's presidential primary ballot. The outcome thus depends on what the US Supreme Court decides to do before the stay ends.

There is ample room for the high court — with its hard right majority — to reverse the Colorado decision.

For one thing, it could reject both state courts' findings of fact regarding Trump's engagement in insurrection. Typically, however, higher courts tend to defer to lower courts' fact-finding. After all, reviews on appeal involve a cold record; there is no opportunity to assess a witness's demeanor or other hints of credibility (or a lack thereof) that live trial testimony offers.

@Project Syndicate, 2023



Trump's behaviour places him in the company of past government officials participated in their states' secession from the Union and ensuing establishment of the Confederate States of America.

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FIH HOCKEY5S WORLD CUP TROPHIES UNVEILED

PROMOTIONAL CAMPAIGN TO TARGET YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, DEC 23

The Oman Hockey Association (OHA) and the Hockey5s World Cup organising committee kick-started the final campaign for the inaugural edition of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup by unveiling the men's and women's trophies in Muscat on Saturday.

Chief guest Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary for Sports and Youth at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, unveiled the new-look trophies of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup Oman 2024 at a colourful function at Al Mouj Walk Way here on Saturday.

Other dignitaries present included Sayyid Idris al Busaidy, Director-General of Finance and Administration at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Oman Hockey Association (OHA) Chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, OHA officials and members of the organising committee of the Hockey5s World Cup.

Oman's newly-built state-of-the-

art hockey stadium at Al Amerat will play host to the first edition of men's and women's FIH Hockey5s World Cup matches from January 24 to 31, 2024.

On January 24, the 16 women's teams from around the world will compete to become the first ever Hockey5s World Champions. The men will follow, on January 28, for another four days of intense competition.

"This is an exciting start to the final build-up for the FIH Hockey5s World Cup. The men's and women's trophies are unveiled here today and the organising committee along with the Oman Hockey Association will not spare any measures to promote this great event to be hosted by the Sultanate of Oman," Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma, OHA Chairman, said.

"The trophy will have a tour around Oman, passing to public avenues, malls and schools to introduce the community to the great spectacle of hockey," Dr Marwan added.

The trophy is commissioned by the world hockey governing



Unveiled the new-look trophies of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup Oman 2024 at Al Mouj. PHOTOS BY HUSSAIN AL MAQBALI



The new-look trophies of the FIH Hockey5s World Cup



body FIH with its headquarters in Switzerland. It is made in the shape of Hockey5s World Cup and represents modern Oman with its edgy curves.

Oman's men's and women's hockey team captains posed with the chief guest and the OHA chairman along with the men's and women's Hockey5s World Cup trophies and mascots to kick-start the exciting run-up to the global showdown of hockey.

MUCH-AWAITED EVENT

Oman men's team captain Salah al Saadi said he can't wait for the World Cup to start.

"This is a great occasion for Oman and Oman hockey players. It marks a significant milestone in my hockey career too. I hope to make an impressive performance for Oman during the World cup," the 36-year-old centre back told Oman Daily Observer.

Former veteran hockey coach of Oman and Seeb Club Abdulrahman al Raisi said the World Cup will see the rejuvenation of hockey in the country.

"A lot of youngsters are playing hockey in Oman. With the World Cup, it will make a major leap in terms of popularity and game awareness," the 69-year-old said.

The organising committee hopes to attract the hockey lovers and general public to the World Cup which will have a minimal ticket price of RO 1 to enjoy the matches.

Organising committee member Zuhair al Ajmi said the committee will make every effort to ensure the World Cup is a grand success in terms of crowd participation.

"The OHA has built a great stadium in Al Amerat and people can enjoy world-class hockey matches in a great atmosphere. Hockey5s is a fast and exciting version of the game that attracts everyone," he said.

Before the World Cup, the new hockey stadium in Al Amerat will open to international matches with an eight-team FIH Men's Olympic Qualifier tournament from January 15 to 21, 2024. Three teams will qualify from the Muscat qualifiers to the Paris Olympics 2024.

Ahli Sidab triumphs over Salalah

A L S E E B D O M I N A T E S N I Z W A I N O B L

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, DEC 23

The second round of the Oman General Basketball League 2023-24 witnessed remarkable victories, with Ahli Sidab defeating Salalah with a score of 85-53 and Al Seeb surpassing Nizwa with a score of 86-49. The games, held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher, showcased intense competition and outstanding performances.

In the first match, Ahli Sidab dominated the first three quarters, before Salalah made a slight comeback in the fourth quarter.

Ahli Sidab started the game by taking the lead and scoring two points through Sami al Ghilani with a shot from under the basket, while the first quarter ended with Ahli Sidab leading 23-14.

The second quarter did not bring anything new as Ahli Sidab continued to dominate both defensively and offensively, widening the gap ending with Ahli Sidab leading 47-24.

In the third quarter, Ahli Sidab maintained their superiority, scoring 26 points, while Salalah scored 10 points, ending with Ahli Sidab leading 73-34.

In the fourth quarter, the game continued with Salalah making a push, but Ahli Sidab maintained their scoring advantage. Salalah's players scored

19 points, while Ahli Sidab scored 12 points, resulting in Ahli Sidab winning the match 85-53.

Al Seeb secures top spot in OBL

In the second match, Al Seeb managed to surpass Nizwa in an exciting game where the winner dominated in the first three quarters in terms of scoring and widening the gap. Nizwa could not stage a comeback in the fourth quarter, and the result remained unchanged. While with these results, Al Seeb tops the rankings with 22 points.

Al Seeb started the game aggressively. Al Seeb extended the lead by adding 18 points, while Nizwa added 10 points, ending the first quarter with Al Seeb leading 22-12.

In the second quarter, Al Seeb's superiority continued, and their players managed to score points. Al Seeb added 19 more points, while Nizwa scored 8 points. The first half ended with Al Seeb leading 44-22.

In the third quarter, Al Seeb's players continued to pressure Nizwa and scored more points, adding 28 points. Nizwa scored only 8 points to end with 72-30.

In the fourth quarter, the game continued with both teams attacking, but Nizwa had an advantage in scoring, adding 19 points. Al Seeb added 14 points, and the match ended with Al Seeb defeating Nizwa 86-49.



Wide community in Physical Activity Day event in Musandam



MUSCAT: As many as 400 citizens and residents participated in the ‘Physical Activity Day’ activities organised by Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) represented by Oman Sports and Active Society Committee in cooperation with the Department of Culture, Sports and Youth in Musandam Governorate on Wednesday, under the auspice of Mubarak bin Ali bin Said al Rahbi, Head of the Musandam Governor’s Office.

The event aimed to promote health and physical fitness by encouraging participants to practice physical activity and adopt a healthy lifestyle, and creating an opportunity for interaction between different ages through sports and activities.

The events included many activities for different ages, including a march for athletes starting from the Khasab Port gate to the Bassa Beach, various

traditional Omani games, and swimming and athletics competitions, most notably long jump, and show jumping for different age groups.

Additionally, a roping competition for adults, mountain climbing for children and adults, various activities for scouts, guides, and troopers, as well as various sports competitions for children.

Also a health workshop to educating community about the importance of healthy nutrition and its role in improving public health, enhancing healthy food decision-making skills, and encouraging them to adopt a healthy lifestyle by reducing the consumption of nutritional supplements and focusing on beneficial foods.

The events received great interaction, high competition in various sports, and fruitful cooperation within the governorate institutions with OOC to make this success.



Mountain climbing for children



Danuel House Jr (25) moves against Toronto Raptors. – USA TODAY Sports

SIXERS’ EMBIID CONTINUES DOMINANT RUN, NUGGETS OUTLAST NETS

LOS ANGELES: Joel Embiid shook off an ankle injury to score 31 points and grab 10 rebounds on Friday, propelling the Philadelphia 76ers to a 121-111 NBA victory over Toronto with his 13th straight game with at least 30 points and 10 boards.

Embiid, the reigning NBA Most Valuable Player, had plenty of support with Tyrese Maxey and Tobias Harris scoring 33 points apiece for the 76ers.

Embiid scored just two points in the first quarter after twisting his ankle in an awkward landing under the basket.

After a brief trip to the locker room, he finished the first half with 11 points, three rebounds, six assists and five turnovers.

Harris kept the Sixers afloat, scoring 24 first-half points to help them take a 61-58 lead at the break after the Raptors had led by as many as 15.

Embiid came alive in the third

period, scoring 17 straight 76ers points in a run that included a three-pointer that put the Sixers up 90-77.

Despite the occasional grimace of discomfort, Embiid extended the NBA’s longest stretch of 30-point, 10-rebound games since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar had 16 straight in 1971-72. Embiid put his slow start down to lack of aggression.

“I think I took two shots in the first six or seven minutes, but I just let the game come to me,” he said. “I didn’t force anything.

“It came to me and then in the third quarter, I just found opportunities and made a few shots.”

The Raptors, led by Pascal Siakam’s 31 points, got the deficit down to three late in the third before the Sixers pulled away again. Maxey added 10 assists and Harris added eight rebounds and seven assists to his season-high

in points as the Sixers won for the eighth time in their last nine games.

Nurse said he wasn’t surprised the Sixers came out a little flat after beating Western Conference leaders Minnesota on Wednesday behind a 51-point performance from Embiid.

“It wasn’t just (Embiid),” Nurse said. “It was everybody.

“Then Joel got going ... he started punching through, started making some jumpers ... he just finally got in his rhythm and got the shooting going.”

Nurse said the team would keep an eye on Embiid’s ankle with a Christmas Day game at Miami coming up to start a four-game road trip.

“I’m sure it’ll be sore tomorrow,” Nurse said.

In Brooklyn, Jamal Murray scored 32 points and Nikola Jokic added 31 points with 11 rebounds as the reigning champion Denver

Nuggets held off the Nets 122-117.

Aaron Gordon added 18 points and Michael Porter Jr. scored 15 for the Nuggets, who won their third straight.

Cam Thomas led the Nets with 23 points. Cameron Johnson added 17 as seven Brooklyn players scored in double figures.

The Golden State Warriors and Sacramento Kings notched convincing home victories.

Warriors star Stephen Curry made a season-high eight three-pointers on the way to 30 points, sitting out the entire fourth quarter in a 129-118 victory over the Washington Wizards and former Warrior Jordan Poole.

Sacramento’s Domantas Sabonis had his fourth triple-double of the season with 28 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists to help the Kings to a 120-105 victory over the Phoenix Suns, who were led by 28 points from Kevin Durant. — AFP

Bangladesh coast to historic win in third ODI against New Zealand

NAPIER, New Zealand: Bangladesh’s pace attack shredded New Zealand’s batting on a green Napier pitch to record a historic nine-wicket win in the third and final one-day international on Saturday.

Having been well beaten in the first two matches to cede the series, Bangladesh produced a remarkable form reversal at McLean Park to dismiss the hosts for just 98 in 34.1 overs.

The run chase was a procession, with captain Najmul Hossain Shanto scoring an unbeaten half-century as they coasted to 99-1 in 15.1 overs.

It was Bangladesh’s first ODI win over the Black Caps on New Zealand soil, where they had lost the 18 previous fixtures since their first attempt in 1990.

Shanto said victory would be a source of pride and was just reward for the improvements he believes his eighth-ranked team are making.

“Really proud of the boys playing in this match,” he said.

“Before we started this series we really believed that we could win the series.

“The last couple of matches we played well but we couldn’t finish. Today the boys played some good cricket and we got the result.”

Shanto’s contribution began with him winning the toss and inserting the Black Caps on a lush, bouncy surface which also offered sideways movement -- and his seamers responded.

Three of them picked up three wickets as New Zealand were skittled for their lowest total in 45



Bangladesh celebrate bowling New Zealand’s Josh Clarkson (R). – AFP

ODIs between the teams.

Tanzim Hasan Sakib (3-14) and Soumya Sarkar (3-18) both bagged career-best figures while Shoriful Islam’s 3-22 included the

scalp of top-scoring Will Young, caught in the gully for 26.

Sakib said his methods were simple. “I tried to bowl wicket to wicket and I tried to bowl line and

length. The wicket did the rest of the work. It really helped me.”

Young has been in superb touch in the series, scoring 105 and 89 in the wins in Dunedin and Nelson respectively.

Captain Tom Latham (21) put on 36 with Young for the third wicket but his dismissal -- clean bowled by Islam -- sparked a collapse which saw the last eight wickets fall for 40 runs, many of them to wayward shots.

There was an early blemish in the run chase when opening batter Sarkar -- who scored 169 in a losing cause in Napier on Wednesday -- was forced to retire hurt for four because of an eye problem.

Loose New Zealand bowling meant there were few problems from that point, with Shanto

(51 not out) putting on 69 with opener Anamul Haque, who was the only batsman dismissed when edging paceman William O’Rourke on 37.

O’Rourke had earlier been struck for four successive boundaries by the free-hitting Shanto in the 11th over of the innings.

New Zealand had rested a number of senior players for the series and Latham said some of his newer squad members will have learned a lot.

“Obviously it was a very below-par performance,” he said.

“Bangladesh found a way to bowl on that surface and managed to get plenty out of it. We weren’t able to build any sort of pressure and put it back on them so it’s pretty disappointing.” — AFP



Kyle Walker lifts the trophy after the Fifa Club World Cup final at the King Abdullah Sports City. – AFP



Rodri celebrates on the podium with the golden ball trophy alongside silver ball trophy Kyle Walker and bronze ball trophy winner Fluminense's Jhon Arias. – REUTERS



Manuel Akanji celebrates with the trophy after winning the Club World Cup final. – REUTERS



JEDDAH:
JULIAN ALVAREZ scored the fastest ever goal in a Club World Cup final as Manchester City thrashed Brazilian side Fluminense 4-0 on Friday to cap a remarkable year by capturing their fifth trophy of 2023.

Pep Guardiola's team, who were missing injured striker Erling Haaland at the global tournament, had already captured the FA Cup, Premier League, Champions League and UEFA Super Cup this year.

The Spaniard hinted that his time at the club might be coming to an end when he said "the job was done" and "there was nothing else to win" after eight years at the helm.

"I have the feeling we've closed a chapter. We've already won all the titles," Guardiola told a news conference. "There's nothing left to win. I have the feeling the job is done, is over."

Guardiola, who arrived at City in 2016, claimed his 16th title with the club. He added he wanted to write a new chapter with the team where he has 18 months left on his contract.

"Now it's Christmas time, buy another book and start to write it again. The last eight years it's over," he said.

"When I close the chapter it's for eight years of incredible work behind the scenes. Today we celebrate on the plane, tomorrow rest. "The players out there are still hungry and motivated. It's a beautiful, beautiful day." Captain Kyle

Walker added: "To win these five trophies — for me, the five biggest prizes available to us — is incredible.

"I am so proud to have been a part of this and I can honestly say it's an honour to play alongside these players; I couldn't ask for better team-mates.

"It's really, really hard to win consistently, so to sit here today having won the (five titles) is really special and a huge achievement."

Alvarez had the travelling City fans cheering 40 seconds after kick off.

Keeper Fabio did well to push Nathan Ake's long shot off the post but

Alvarez was quick to the rebound, stooping to his hands and knees to chest it home.

OWN GOAL

Nino scored an own goal in the 27th minute, deflecting a shot from Phil Foden sideways into the net.

Foden put the game away in the 72nd minute when he slid to poke in a hard cross across the box from Alvarez.

"It was an unbelievable match," Foden told FIFA.com. "The lads showed not only quality, showed heart and determination. I'm delighted with the outcome.

"This is so important for the club," he added. "I'm delighted. It is massive for the club."

Alvarez completed his brace in the 88th with a strike from just inside the box, prompting delighted City fans to break into "Blue Moon."

The victory made Guardiola the first manager to guide three different clubs to Club World Cup titles, winning with Barcelona in 2009 and 2011, then Bayern Munich in 2013.

CLOSING THE CIRCLE

Guardiola stressed to his players this week about the importance of "closing the circle" on the team's trophies, and achieving a "once-in-a-lifetime" goal.

Message received. City never allowed Fluminense, who play the quintessential Brazilian short-passing possession style, to find their stride.

"Fair play to them, I love the way they play with short passes, they didn't make it easy for us," Foden said.

The Brazilians' best chance would have been a penalty that referee Szymon Marciniak initially awarded after Ederson brought down Paulo Henrique Ganso. But technology showed he was offside.

City keeper Ederson had little to do, but made a terrific save just before half-time when Jhon Arias met a corner with a thunderous header that Ederson dove across the net to push away.

"We faced a City which have been the best team in the world for the last five years and they know how to make the most of the opportunities they create," Fluminense manager Fernando Diniz told Brazilian TV Globo. "They are always spot on, scored really early and they punished us for the mistakes we made. We have to be proud for our incredible year and to have paved the road that led us here. It was an amazing ride and there is nothing to be ashamed of."

— Reuters

MANCHESTER CITY BEAT
FLUMINENSE TO CAPTURE
CLUB WORLD CUP



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Oman has
great potential
as clean
hydrogen
exporter: EU
Commissioner

NASRULAH AL AJMI
MUSCAT, DEC 23

European Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson (pictured), on her recent maiden visit to the Sultanate of Oman, affirmed Oman's potential to emerge as a major player in the clean hydrogen export market. In an exclusive interview with the Observer, Commissioner Simson also acknowledged the importance of Oman's solid port infrastructure in addressing transportation challenges for hydrogen and its derivatives. "I chose Oman as my first destination because I do see that Oman has great potential to become one of the biggest hydrogen, clean hydrogen exporters of the region," said Commissioner Simson.

The Commissioner acknowledged Oman's substantial renewable energy capacity, particularly from wind and solar sources, as a cornerstone for the production of green hydrogen. This aligns seamlessly with the global push towards cleaner and more sustainable energy solutions.

Furthermore, she commended Oman's political commitment to clean energy, emphasising its dedication to environmentally responsible practices, thereby enhancing its appeal as a hydrogen exporter.

The solid and well-established port infrastructure in Oman was highlighted as a critical factor, facilitating the efficient transportation of hydrogen and its derivatives.

Commissioner Simson emphasised that Oman's geographical location, combined with its logistical infrastructure, positions the country as a key player capable of meeting the growing global demand for hydrogen.

Commissioner Simson elaborated on the European Union's recently finalised hydrogen and natural gas market package. She explained the EU's efforts to establish infrastructure planning, including a list of 10 port facilities and terminals.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Oman's Q3 GDP reaches RO 11.022 billion,
non-petroleum activities show resilience

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, DEC 23

Oman's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the third quarter of 2023 (Q3) at current prices reached RO 11.022 billion, a slight decrease of 6.5% from last year's Q3 GDP which stood at RO 11.792 billion. According to preliminary report issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), the overall GDP of Oman for the first nine months of the year amounted to RO 31.416 billion, a decline of 3.87 per cent compared to RO 32.681 billion during last year's first nine months.

The report highlights the challenges faced by the country's economy, especially in the petroleum sector, while showcasing the resilience of non-petroleum activities.

The petroleum sector, which has traditionally been a major contributor to Oman's economy, experienced a contraction of 28.3% compared to the same period last year.

The sector generated RO 3.337 billion during the Q3 compared to last year's RO 4.654 billion. This contraction was primarily driven by a decrease in both crude oil



The growth in services activities was propelled by various subsectors, including wholesale and retail trade.

(-32%) and natural gas (-0.6%) production.

The decline in crude oil production can be attributed to various factors, including global energy market fluctuations and the ongoing efforts of oil-producing countries to stabilise prices.

On the other hand, the marginal decrease in natural gas production reflects a relatively stable demand for this resource.

Despite the challenging environment in the petroleum sector, non-petroleum activities demonstrated resilience during

the same period. Total non-petroleum activities experienced a positive growth rate of 4.6%, indicating the diversified nature of Oman's economy.

The sector contributed RO 8.008 billion during the Q3 2023 compared to the same period last year with RO 7.652 billion. This growth was primarily driven by agriculture, forestry, fishing (5.3%), and services activities (12.9%), showcasing their importance in sustaining economic stability.

Within the non-petroleum sector, agriculture, forestry,

and fishing activities witnessed growth of 5.3% in Q3. This can be attributed to favourable weather conditions, government support initiatives, and advancements in agricultural practices.

The sector's growth was primarily driven by an increase in crop production and improved performance in the fishing industry.

Services activities, another prominent contributor to Oman's GDP, recorded a growth rate of 12.9% in Q3. The sector generated RO 5.937 billion during the Q3 compared to last year's RO 5.257

billion. This growth was propelled by various subsectors, including wholesale and retail trade (6.8%), transportation and storage (2.7%), and financial and insurance activities (6.8%).

The resilience of these sectors highlights the ongoing efforts to diversify Oman's economy beyond oil and create sustainable sources of income.

However, not all sectors within the non-petroleum category fared well. The industry activities segment witnessed a decline of 15.2% in Q3. The sector contributed RO 1.868 billion during the Q3 compared to RO 2.202 billion during the same period last year.

This can be attributed to a significant decrease in manufacturing (-24.2%) and the negative growth in mining and quarrying (-1.9%). Factors such as supply chain disruptions, global economic uncertainties, and reduced demand for certain manufactured goods contributed to these contractions.

Current prices refer to the actual prices of goods and services at a given point in time. They reflect the prevailing market conditions, including inflationary factors.

Buoyed by rising domestic demand, leading
Omani organic farm eyes major expansion

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, DEC 23

The demand for organic produce in Oman is on the rise. Data from research conducted by Mordor Intelligence indicates that growing numbers of consumers in Oman are opting for organic fruits and vegetables on health grounds.

However, despite the growing demand for organic produce, the organic farming landscape in Oman still remains in its infancy.

Last week, the Observer spoke to the CEO and Co-Founder of Oman's largest commercial organic farms — YUZU Agriculture — to learn more about this promising sector.

"YUZU was started with the purpose of giving people a source of produce that can be trusted to be chemical-free as well as to deliver a whole new level of produce quality and flavour that we humbly believe is unmatched in Oman," shares HH Sayyid Adam al Said, who started the company in 2016 alongside his



From left to right: Founders of Yuzu Agriculture Sayyid Omar al Said, Sayyid Fahar al Said, and Sayyid Adam al Said.

two brothers, Sayyid Omar, and Sayyid Fahar.

Today, the fully operational farm in Barka, (Al Batinah South Governorate), produces around 30 kinds of produce which are sold through different outlets across the country.

These include a wide range of vegetables, including leafy greens, herbs, broccoli, marrows such as zucchini, and roots.

Additionally, the farm also grows honeydew melons and strawberries on occasion. In addition to offering edible flowers and sunflower bouquets.

"We aim to be as omnichannel as possible," explained the CEO, who added that the products can be bought at grocery stores, through the company's online store or delivered directly. Additionally, the company

There are loyal,
dedicated customers
for organic, and
there is the ability to
supply this demand
profitably with the
right know-how,
technologies, and
vision.

SAYYID ADAM
AL SAID
CEO and Co-founder

participates in fairs and markets, he said.

In 2020, the company became the first Omani agro producer to obtain a USDA Organic Certification at the end of a rigorous three-year-long certification process.. To ensure the continued validity of the

certification, only USDA-certified organic inputs are used, while chemicals of any kind are strictly avoided, according to Sayyid Adam.

In regards to the company's customer base, the CEO says that it includes consumers from all walks of life. And while he acknowledges the significant role that awareness of organic farming plays in a person's decision to go organic, he argues that it is not the sole factor.

"Many consumers may be middle income cancer patients who after research conclude that organic is good for their recovery. Many are also those who simply recall their village life here in Oman and want vegetables that look and taste like the ones from their childhood, free of anything artificial."

Nonetheless, he believes that the dedicated customer base signals a lucrative opportunity for the organic market in Oman. "...It's very clear to us that a new chapter has begun.

OQ spends \$974m in goods and services, boosting ICV

MUSCAT: OQ, the globally integrated energy group, has announced its expenditure on goods and services up to the third quarter of 2023, totalling approximately \$974.07 million.

Of this, \$753.11 million was allocated to goods and services through local suppliers, resulting in \$314.17 million being retained as In-Country Value (ICV).

The group has reported spending a total of \$172.53 million on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) up to the third quarter of this year. This includes a significant amount of \$56.99 million explicitly allocated for SMEs holding the Riyada Card.

This expenditure aligns with the group's strategic focus on enhancing its ICV contribution, in tandem with government efforts and the objectives of Oman Vision 2040, demonstrating a steadfast commitment to invest and support



The group has reported spending a total of \$172.53 million on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) up to the third quarter of this year.

local markets, goods and SMEs. Recognising the significance of supporting Omani goods, OQ has given special attention to goods made in Oman in its procurement policies. This includes offering up to a 10 per cent price preference for Omani goods and specifically targeting Omani goods in some contracts and procurements. As a result, spending on goods

manufactured in the Sultanate of Oman reached approximately \$122.41 million. Furthering its dedication to local industry, OQ has launched initiatives aimed at industry localisation, notably the recently signed agreements to establish projects in the Ladayn Polymer Park. These projects are expected to contribute an ICV of around \$6



million annually. Eng Mabrook bin Hamed al Siyabi (pictured), General Manager of In-Country Value at OQ, remarked, "Our focus at OQ is set on maximising our In-Country Value contribution across all our projects and activities. We recognise the pivotal role local businesses play in building our national economy and driving sustainability. To this end, we invest in programmes that boost the growth and development of

local businesses and create opportunities for the supply of local products. Our commitment extends to sourcing goods and services from SMEs and locally registered suppliers, creating job opportunities, and fostering skill development and innovation. Al Siyabi elaborated that ICV represents the total expenditure retained within the country, contributing to business development, human capacity building, and productivity stimulation in the national economy. To this end, OQ has established a robust framework aimed at maximising ICV. Key components of this strategy include the formation of a dedicated ICV unit, the implementation of comprehensive group-wide performance metrics to monitor ICV, and the integration of ICV

requirements into procurement policies. Furthermore, the group ensures that all tenders are transparently displayed on the e-procurement platform (Tawreed), with ICV being a primary criterion in bid evaluations. The effectiveness of these strategies is continuously assessed through a specialised ICV monitoring and reporting platform. Emphasising the role of employment, training, and scholarships in OQ's ICV initiatives, Al Siyabi revealed that the group's Omanisation rate reached about 84 per cent by the end of 2022. He further explained that in the training sector, OQ has invested in developing 800 leaders through the "Masar" programme, to foster leadership to guide the group through its transformation phase.

MG's unbeatable features now meet unbelievable prices



MUSCAT: MG Oman is proud to present a stellar lineup of vehicles with unmatched features at prices that set a new benchmark in the automotive industry. Beginning at just RO 6,295, this deal includes the power-packed fastback sedan MG GT, the MG 6, known for its dynamic design and efficient performance, and the T60, a versatile pickup built for the rigours of both work and adventures. Adding to the luxury segment are the sophisticated MG HS, the powerful MG RX5, the elegant MG RX8 and the sleek MG RX8 Black Edition, each offering a unique blend of comfort and

cutting-edge technology. Mohsin bin Hani al Bahrani, CEO of MHD ACERE says, "Our diverse range of MG models is designed to cater to every preference, and this campaign is a testament to our commitment to affordability and quality." In addition to the exceptional starting prices, customers will benefit from free insurance, free registration, and a free 10k service, ensuring a seamless buying experience. The campaign reflects MG's dedication to customer satisfaction, as evidenced by MG's recognition as Oman's Most Trusted Brand of 2022.

SOHAR Port signs agreements aimed at boosting its marine services

MUSCAT: In a strategic move that enhances In-Country Value (ICV) and supports local companies, SOHAR Port and Freezone signed three key agreements aimed at boosting its marine services. These agreements are a pivotal step in putting to action the port's dedication to nurturing local talent. The first agreement with Global Tank Solution LLC outlines a plan to revolutionise the vessel tank cleaning services at the port. By introducing advanced mechanised cleaning technology and skill development opportunities, automated and non-man entry tank cleaning systems. This collaboration is expected to sharpen the competitive edge of local companies in the maritime sector. In another agreement aimed at elevating its bunker services, SOHAR partnered with Global Oil Resources LLC. This partnership will precipitate opportunities for local companies to interface with major enterprises in the marine



These agreements are a pivotal step in putting to action the port's dedication to nurturing local talent.

fuel logistics and supply chain, thereby advancing Oman's global operations. Global Oil Resources LLC will be able to supply bunker to vessels calling Sohar Port with MGO and VLSFO The third agreement signed, SOHAR's collaboration with American Medical Center, in partnership with Star Lake Medical Services, introduces a comprehensive range of medical services for seafarers. This initiative is poised to stimulate growth in the local healthcare sector by increasing demand for medical supplies, services, and expertise. Sharing his insights on these developments, Batti al Shibli, Harbour Master, SOHAR Port and Freezone, said, "By integrating these specialised services at SOHAR Port, we are elevating our operational efficiency and significantly contributing to the growth of Oman's maritime industry and economy. These collaborations align with our broader ICV strategy, our commitment to creating sustainable opportunities for Omani Companies, and our role in helping the Sultanate of Oman achieve the goals outlined in Oman Vision 2040."

Sohar International bids adieu to its chairman



MUSCAT: Sohar International – the fastest growing bank within the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the departure of its esteemed Chairman of the Board of Directors, Mohamed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi (pictured). As per a disclosure on the Muscat Stock Exchange, Al Ardhi has tendered his resignation from the Board, effective from January 1, 2024, a decision accepted during the Board meeting held on December 21, 2023. The disclosure also announced the appointment of Said bin Mohamed al Aufi, the current Deputy Chairman, as the new Chairman of Sohar International, and Tareq bin Mohamed al Mugheiry as the Deputy Chairman effective from January 1, 2024.

Mohamed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi has played an indelible role during his tenure as Chairman, orchestrating Sohar International's ascent to new heights. His dedication, vision, and strategic leadership have been foundational in shaping the bank's success, marking an era of significant growth and accomplishment. Under Al Ardhi's guidance, Sohar International achieved notable milestones aligned with a robust strategic framework. These milestones encompass the complete rejuvenation of the brand, substantial organic and inorganic growth propelling the bank to become the country's fastest-growing and second-largest financial institution, and the extension of operations across borders amongst others. In recognition of his outstanding leadership, Al Ardhi, has been awarded the "Lifetime Achievement award" by the renowned Alam Al-Iktissad magazine awards.

Meethaq Islamic banking takes part in decrypt the future of Islamic banking forum

MUSCAT: In order to reinforce its commitment to advancing Islamic Banking practices, Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat participated in the 2nd edition of Decrypt the Future of Islamic Banking Forum, which came this year under the title "Islamic Financing in Digital Transformation Era: Vision for Achieving Sustainable Development". The event was organised under the auspices of Tahir bin Salim al Amri, Executive President, CBO, and attended by a large number of officials and experts from the sector from different institutions. The forum touched upon the recent updates and opportunities in Islamic banking sector and



financial technology in Oman. Discussions included the role of Islamic financing in enhancing sustainable development, opportunities and challenges

of digital era, and the profound impact of Islamic banking services. During the forum, attendees got introduced to innovation in

Islamic banking products, Islamic banking and social justice, fintech and Islamic banking and artificial intelligence. The forum served as a meeting ground for specialists in Islamic banking and finance in Oman fostering collaborative dialogues aimed at propelling sectoral growth. About Meethaq's participation, Sami Bait Rashid (pictured), Assistance General Manager, Meethaq Personal Banking, said: "We are pleased to participate in the second edition of this forum to contribute along with the other institutions in enhancing the role of Islamic banking in the Sultanate of Oman. In Meethaq, we are keen to work towards achieving common

goals and contributing in the development of national economy. As a pioneer in Islamic banking sector, Meethaq will continue to enhance its leadership position by developing and offering the best Sharia-compliant services and products." Meethaq has been keen to participate in the events related to fostering the concept of Islamic banking, and the services provided through Islamic financing. Since its inception, Meethaq has been providing a comprehensive range of value-added products and services that undergo rigorous Sharia compliance certification by the Sharia Supervisory Board and adheres to guidelines set forth by the Central Bank of Oman.

Oman has great potential as clean hydrogen exporter: EU Commissioner

FROM PAGE 13

This planning allows trading partners to strategise routes based on EU planning, contributing to a more streamlined and predictable market. Discussing the EU's certification schemes for green and low-carbon hydrogen, Simson highlighted the need for predictable demand.

The EU, already consuming 10 million tonnes of grey hydrogen, has set ambitious targets for replacing at least 42% of it with renewables by 2030. This commitment provides a clear and predictable market for green hydrogen, making the EU an attractive global market, she said.

The Commissioner shared insights into the EU's plan to replace Russian natural gas with green hydrogen, requiring 10 million tonnes by 2030.

While acknowledging Oman's potential to become a major exporter, she emphasised the global outreach needed to meet the demand. Priority corridors for transporting green hydrogen via pipelines were outlined, including North Africa, Ukraine, and the North Sea.

Commissioner Simson

addressed challenges in scaling up the green hydrogen industry, such as the need for larger electrolyzers.

She discussed the EU's investments in innovative solutions, utilising funds collected from industries emitting CO2.

She emphasised that the partnership extends beyond trade, encompassing technology sharing and mutual efforts to clean industries.

In this regard, she highlighted the EU's experience in transitioning to a green economy and expressed eagerness to collaborate with Oman for mutual benefit.

Simson added: "I had a chance (...) to meet the representatives of Omani companies and also with Europeans who are eager to bring their technological knowhow to Oman.

And I think that one of the key elements is that green transition brings new high quality jobs. So for us, our green deal was our growth strategy. And I see that we share the same understanding this brings, such as new job opportunities, and helps us to meet the climate targets."

Yanqul copper-gold project set to make headway in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, DEC 23

Australian-based engineering and project management firm Lycopodium has announced that it has secured a contract to provide Engineering, Procurement and Construction Management (EPCM) services for the Yanqul Copper Gold Project being developed by Mazoon Mining LLC (MMC), a 100 per cent subsidiary of Minerals Development Oman SAOC (MDO).

The contract award marks a key step by Mazoon Mining to unlock the promising copper potential of its vast concession in the Wilayat of Yanqul in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Covering an area of 370 sq kilometres, the concession hosts five mines located at Bishara, Hail Al Safl, Al Jadeed, Al Raki and Asghar.

"We are delighted to be working with Mazoon Mining for the delivery of this important project. Lycopodium prepared the Definitive Feasibility Study for the project in 2020, and it is therefore very pleasing to have this opportunity to now progress to the construction phase," said Lycopodium Limited's Managing Director, Peter De Leo, in a statement.

MDO Group CEO Nasser al



Mazoon Mining is owned 100% by Minerals Development Oman (MDO), the flagship mining sector company of the Sultanate of Oman and part of Oman Investment Authority.

Maqbali was quoted as adding: "As we congratulate Lycopodium for being awarded the EPCM contract, we look forward to the delivery of a world-class project."

As part of its contract valued at around RO 12 million, Lycopodium will provide EPCM services for the process plant and related infrastructure and services, in addition to the management of non-process plant related contractors.

At the heart of the project is a 1.65 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa) throughput capacity process plant. Ore from the open pit mines will be channelled to a new onsite processing plant for the production of copper concentrate (in addition to the potential to recover associated gold as well).

Actual work on the Engineering, Procurement and Construction Management phase will commence in Q1 2024

and conclude in Q2 2026, the Australian firm added.

Significantly, the Mazoon project is expected to capitalise on the premium value that copper currently commands in international commodity markets.

Together with earnings from the relatively small quantities of gold ore occurring naturally with copper ore, overall revenue from the project is expected to be promising.

Buoyed by rising domestic demand, leading Omani organic farm eyes major expansion

FROM PAGE 13

There are loyal dedicated customers for organic, and there is the ability to supply this demand profitably with the right know-how, technologies, and vision."

The company is currently focusing on increasing the market size efficiently by building supply and demand gradually.

"The focus now is on continuously increasing the size of the market efficiently by building supply and demand in a gradual and careful unison.

A key focus will be scaling our successful model to loop between winning and delivering the benefits from the substantial economies of scale and already developed advanced technologies which hitherto have been barely scratched at the surface. It's certainly an exciting time to be in this sector."

The sector, however, is not without its challenges. "It's not an easy sector. Starting YUZU involved overcoming knowledge gaps, environmental challenges, and standard entrepreneurial hurdles in a niche market." According to Al Said, it was challenging to establish YUZU at a time when there wasn't much information about organic farming in Oman.

"If you imagine where we were seven years ago on day one, the challenge was to build a thriving company in a niche sector where there



The farm offers a wide range of organic produce.

was virtually no knowledge, tools, or suppliers, in soil, which is sandy, with water that is salty, and in an environment where pests multiply extremely fast due to the combination of heat and humidity. These operational challenges, paired with the steep climb in general of just being an entrepreneur, made it a formidable endeavour."

Nevertheless, the CEO believes that organic farming goes hand in hand with Oman's goals of achieving sustainability and food security. "It's important to note that an agricultural sector that is not sustainable is logically not food secure — and organic farming directly addresses this. We believe this realisation is spreading across our government, who may also see the substantial potential of organic to raise food quality and value, to help curb pesticide overuse, and to help build food traceability."



Arugula bed

The company aims to achieve a 2% organic certification in the local produce market by the year 2040 — a goal Al Said says seems small, but is "equivalent to continuously feeding around 100,000 people."

"This is more likely to mean millions of people across Oman buying organic at least once per week," he added. Significantly, the company is currently planning to expand its operations to target foreign markets.

"YUZU is currently planning its next big expansion project which will be one of the largest organic farms in the GCC. Investors who believe in the long-term future of organic and who want to be a part of building the new paradigm of the agricultural sector should definitely get in touch with us!"

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 23

The National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) has released its annual report on the labour market in the Sultanate of Oman, which reveals an increase in the employment rate in 2022.

According to the report, the total number of employed people in Oman in 2022 was about 2.5 million, an increase of 16.2% from the previous year. Omanis made up about 32% of the total employed, compared to 68% of expatriates.

The unemployment rate in Oman in 2022 was about 3.3%, an increase of 1.4 percentage points from the previous year. The unemployment rate for men was 1.6%, compared to 4.8% for women.

At the sector level, the private



sector accounted for about 19.5% of the total employed in Oman, compared to 16.25% for the government sector and 14.3% for the family sector.

At the level of educational qualifications, the number of employed people with a qualification below a general education diploma was about 30.9%, compared to 24.2% with a general education diploma. At the governorate level, Muscat Governorate accounted for about 33% of the total employed in Oman, compared to 16.4% for North Al Batinah Governorate.

Increased agro production boosts food security and economic growth

QASIM AL MAASHANI
MUSCAT, DEC 23

The total value of agricultural production in Oman in 2022 was about RO 5.3 billion, representing an increase of 3.9% from the previous year, according to figures released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI,) perennial forage crops accounted for the highest share of total production at 43%, followed by fruit cultivation at 29%.

Livestock production also increased in 2022, with the total production of red meat reaching

49,000 tonnes, up 2% from the previous year. Cattle accounted for the largest share of total production at 60%, followed by sheep at 35%.

The total production of fresh milk in Oman in 2022 was 224,000 tonnes, up 2% from the previous year.

Cattle again accounted for the largest share of total production at 60%, followed by sheep at 35%.

The report emphasised that the increase in production in the agricultural and livestock sectors contributes to food security in Oman, as domestic production



The increase in production in the agricultural and livestock sectors contributes to food security in Oman.

meets about 80% of the country's needs for meat and dairy. It also

contributes to economic growth by providing jobs and income for

farmers and herders.

The following are some of the factors that contributed to the increase in production in the agricultural and livestock sectors in Oman in 2022:

* Government support for the agricultural and livestock sectors, through the provision of loans, grants, and technical assistance.

* Increased investment in the agricultural and livestock sectors, from the public and private sectors.

* Technological advances in agriculture and livestock. Despite the increase in

production in the agricultural and livestock sectors, there are some challenges that they face, such as: Limited agricultural land and pastures; Climate change; and Competition from imported agricultural and livestock products.

The Omani government is working to address these challenges by implementing ambitious plans and programmes to develop the agricultural and livestock sectors, which will contribute to achieving food security and promoting economic growth.

Steering through 2024's economic uncertainties

As we step into 2024, the global economic landscape is poised for a period marked by recalibration and strategic shifts.

The forecasts and analyses from leading financial institutions provide valuable insights into the trends and challenges that may shape the year ahead.

The BlackRock Investment Institute's 2024 Global Outlook presents a scenario where markets have been caught in a tug-of-war between hopes for a soft economic landing and fears of recession induced by higher rates.

This dynamic has led to considerable market volatility. The US economy, in particular, has navigated through two significant shocks: the pandemic



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and a structural worker shortage due to an aging population.

The pandemic initially drove a mismatch in consumer spending and production, fuelling inflation. However, as this mismatch resolves, inflation is expected to decline.

A notable point in BlackRock's analysis is the emergence of a worker shortage in the US, a trend also observed in Europe and China, which may act as a long-term production constraint, inhibiting these economies from reaching their pre-pandemic growth rates without reigniting inflation.

BlackRock foresees a future of slower growth, higher inflation, higher interest rates, and increased volatility.

Citi Private Bank, in its Wealth Outlook for 2024, delineates the market's journey since the

pandemic began.

The initial phase, spanning 2020-2021, was characterised by stimulus-driven euphoria, followed by a period of caution in 2022-2023. For 2024-2025, Citi envisions a normalisation phase, predicting a global economic recovery led by the US.

Despite an anticipated deceleration in economic activity in early 2024, the bank projects no synchronised recession.

Following this slowdown, an economic acceleration is expected later in the year, with global GDP growth estimated at +2.2% and +2.8% for 2024 and 2025, respectively. Citi Private Bank's outlook hinges on rising corporate profits and the possibility of the US Federal Reserve lowering rates if unemployment spikes, with inflation stabilising at 2.5% by

the end of 2024.

"In our view, 2024 will be a tale of two halves for fixed income" states the Wells Fargo Investment Institute's 2024 Outlook shedding light on the expected trends, particularly in the US Treasury yields.

The institute anticipates a volatile year for these yields, with a decline in the first half due to an economic slowdown, followed by a rise in the second half as recovery takes shape.

This presents opportunities for positive returns in certain fixed-income asset classes. Wells Fargo's report also highlights the challenges for developed-market ex-US fixed-income performance due to ongoing inflation and high policy interest rates.

The euro zone, according to Wells Fargo, may face a recession and fiscal policy challenges,

while the US dollar is expected to remain strong, at least in the first half of the year. The outlook for emerging-market debt is neutral, with potential improvement in the latter half of 2024.

In summary, the 2024 outlook from BlackRock, Citi Private Bank, and Wells Fargo collectively indicates a year of economic transitions. This period is likely to be characterised by volatility, inflationary pressures, and strategic shifts in monetary policies, with prospects of gradual recovery and stabilisation towards the latter half of the year.

As these institutions suggest, navigating the economic landscape of 2024 will require a keen understanding of these evolving dynamics and a flexible approach to investment and policy decisions.

Is France's economy now stronger than Germany's?

The contrast between the French and German economies has rarely appeared so stark.

While France continues to enjoy surprisingly strong growth and is increasingly attractive to both foreign and domestic investors, Germany is struggling – even if it is far from being the sick man of Europe – owing to a severe political crisis that has cast a shadow over its economic outlook and is weighing heavily on economic sentiment.

But this interpretation overlooks a fundamental fact: Germany and France are more interdependent than ever. To maintain economic growth and assert their influence globally, they must work together to strengthen the European Union.



MARCEL FRATZSCHER

The author, a former senior manager at the European Central Bank, is President of the think tank DIW Berlin and Professor of Macroeconomics and Finance at Humboldt University of Berlin.

The French economy demonstrated remarkable resilience during the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2022 energy crisis. Over the past two years, France has boosted its competitiveness, improved its business environment, and attracted more than twice as much foreign direct investment as Germany.

By contrast, Germany's declining competitiveness has forced it to rely on substantial subsidies to lure international investors and support its own industry.

Consequently, while France is expected to grow by 1% in 2023, German GDP is expected to contract, followed by minimal growth in 2024.

These diverging trajectories can be attributed to three main factors. First, the French presidential system allows President Emmanuel Macron to set clear priorities and implement new measures quickly.

This has enabled Macron to pursue major reforms of France's pension system and labour market, streamline existing regulations, and establish bold industrial-policy goals that are now beginning to yield significant returns, including steady declines in unemployment.

Meanwhile, Germany is grappling with political gridlock. The so-called traffic-light coalition – comprising Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democratic Party, the Greens,

WHILE THE FRENCH ECONOMY DEMONSTRATES REMARKABLE RESILIENCE, GERMANY'S GROWTH ENGINE APPEARS TO BE SPUTTERING. BUT THE TWO ECONOMIES ARE MORE INTERDEPENDENT THAN EVER, AND THEIR SIZE IMPLIES THAT THEY MUST WORK TOGETHER TO REFORM AND STRENGTHEN THE EUROPEAN UNION IF THEY ARE TO ASSERT THEIR INFLUENCE GLOBALLY.



France's President Emmanuel Macron (left) and Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz bump fists after holding a joint news conference at the conclusion of an EU Summit in Brussels, Belgium, in this file photo. – Reuters

and the Free Democrats – is failing. Deep ideological divisions have led to a political impasse that is threatening to paralyse the country, reflected in the government's ongoing struggle to finalise its 2024 budget.

Germany's complex federal system, known for its robust checks and balances, was designed to cement its democratic principles and prevent a return to authoritarianism.

As such, it prioritises stability over speed and flexibility. This preference is now taking a toll on the economy, as Germany urgently needs to implement major regulatory, fiscal, industrial, and trade reforms.

Another critical difference between France and Germany lies in their different approaches to economic openness.

Germany's postwar economic model has relied heavily on exports, which now account for nearly half of the country's total economic output.

This model has been shaped by political forces, foreign-policy preferences, and – before the euro – by monetary policies centred around a strong Deutsche Mark.

Moreover, Germany's economic and fiscal policies

have historically favoured the industrial sector, from automobiles to chemicals and mechanical engineering. This fixation has led German politicians to focus on boosting the industrial sector's share of economic output, which is currently nearly double that of France.

Despite these differences, the economies of France and Germany have far more in common than is generally acknowledged. While France has outperformed Germany over the past four years, it is still catching up to the remarkable economic boom Germany experienced in the 2010s.

Notably, Germany has one of the lowest unemployment rates in Europe, and its companies have maintained their strong global market shares.

Moreover, in response to the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and heightened geopolitical tensions, both Germany and France have pursued increasingly protectionist economic agendas.

Both have adopted national industrial policies that involve subsidising domestic companies through reduced electricity prices, direct financial assistance, and various tax benefits, and have effectively launched a subsidy race to attract foreign

investors and multinational companies such as Tesla and Intel. These measures are unfair to companies in weaker European economies, reduce competition, and risk undermining the single market, the EU's most significant economic achievement.

Both countries also have robust social-welfare systems in need of immediate reform. As inflation fuels social polarisation and political discord, far-right movements are gaining ground.

The wave of populism and right-wing extremism engulfing many Western democracies is now heading for Germany. With the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) on course to win three key state elections in 2024, Germany could be facing an even deeper political crisis.

Lastly, both Germany and France are threatened by the escalating geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China.

To maintain economic growth, both countries must move away from nationally oriented economic and fiscal policies and work together to reform and strengthen the EU. The latest reform of the Stability and Growth Pact is insufficient to foster investment and the transformation of the

European economy. On their own, the French and German economies lack the necessary scale to compete effectively against the world's two largest economies, especially in critical emerging sectors like artificial intelligence and digital services. Both governments would be wise, therefore, to focus on their similarities rather than their differences. Instead of competing against each other, they should unite around a common cause.

After all, the prosperity France and Germany enjoy today can be largely attributed to their close partnership over the past 70 years, which has been instrumental in advancing Europe's economic interests.

Faced with strong opposition from Germany, Macron seems to have abandoned his ambitions to reform Europe.

This is a mistake. Both governments should change course and bolster the EU's single market, complete the banking union, pursue capital-market union, develop a joint industrial policy, and streamline regulation and bureaucracy.

And, not least, a common fiscal capacity is vital for crafting economic and industrial policies that embody European values and objectives.

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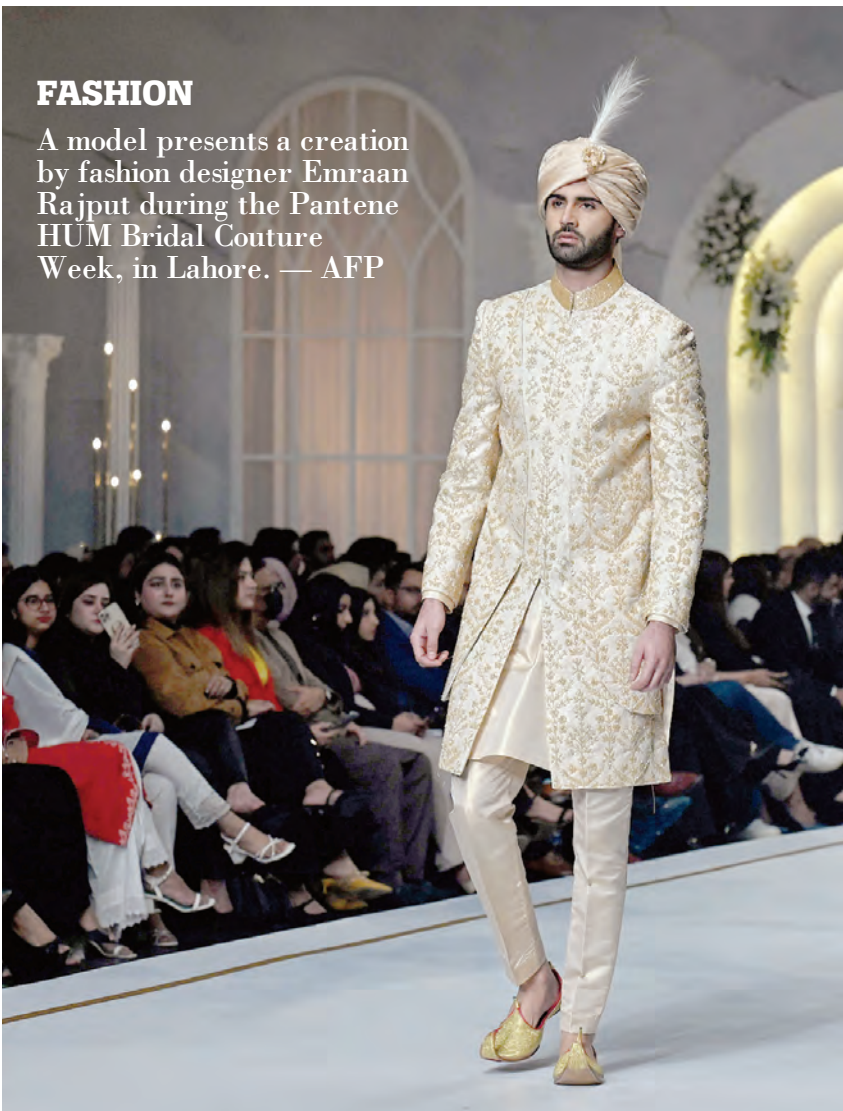
SPAIN

The bell tower of a church is seen during sunset in the village of Montmaneu, north of Barcelona, Spain. — REUTERS



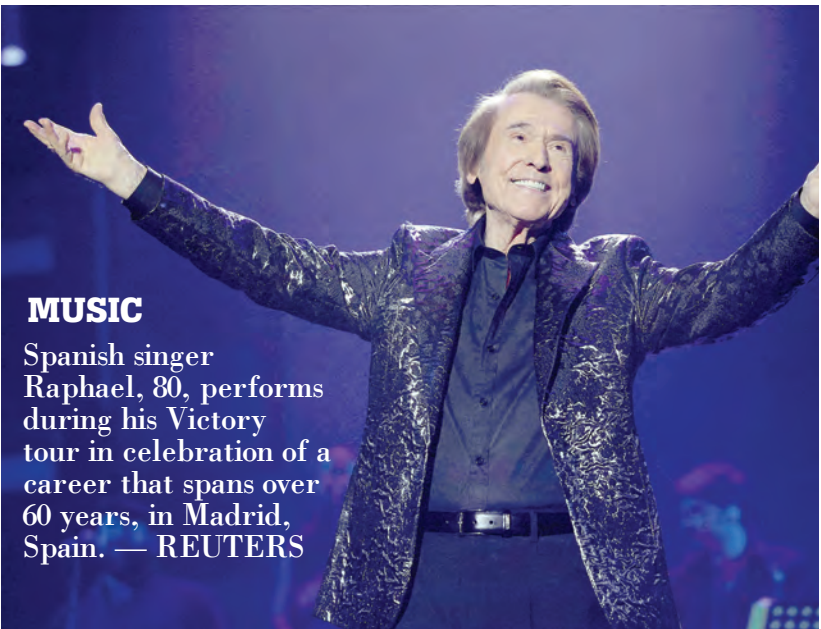
LIFESTYLE

Children playing with bubbles at a kindergarten during an event to celebrate International Children’s Day in Nanjing, in China’s eastern Jiangsu province. — AFP



FASHION

A model presents a creation by fashion designer Emraan Rajput during the Pantene HUM Bridal Couture Week, in Lahore. — AFP



MUSIC

Spanish singer Raphael, 80, performs during his Victory tour in celebration of a career that spans over 60 years, in Madrid, Spain. — REUTERS



GAZA

Minarets are silhouetted in front of the setting sun in Rafah, on the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP

art & life



Hujrat al Sheikh walkway paves the way for cultural exploration

In a bid to enhance the cultural and historical allure of Wadi al Maawil in Al Batinah South Governorate, a collaborative effort between the Al Batinah South Governor's Office, the Al Batinah South Municipality, and supportive local residents is shaping the Hujrat al Sheikh walkway project.

This ambitious initiative spans an area of approximately 1,250 square metres, weaving its way through the heart of the wadi, connecting three significant historical and cultural sites: Haret Hujrat al Sheikh, Al Safala Castle, and Beit al Ghusham Museum.

Scheduled for completion by the end of April 2024, the walkway is not merely a pathway but a journey through the rich tapestry of Wadi al Maawil's landscapes. Saud bin Hilal al Maawali, Deputy Chairman of the Municipal Council of Al Batinah South, shared with the media that the route meanders through palm groves, diverse trees, oases, and villages, offering visitors a sensory exploration of the region's natural beauty and cultural heritage.

The project has been crafted with legacy in mind. Nizwa Stone, chosen for the construction, is a testament to a commitment to preserving the heritage style. The stone adds a timeless elegance to the project and ensures appropriate



lighting along its length. Al Maawali revealed plans for the promenade to be operated using tourist carts, providing an eco-friendly means for visitors to traverse the historical sites seamlessly.

Post-completion, the Hujrat al Sheikh walkway is set to become more than a picturesque route; it will transform into a living exhibition. Dedicated stations along the path will display household products from local craftsmen and traditional industries, showcasing the unique heritage of Wadi al Maawil. The inclusion of sitting areas designed for the elderly aims to create a welcoming environment for all visitors.

Emphasising Wadi al Maawil as a prominent tourist destination in Al Batinah South Governorate, Al Maawali stressed the project's significance in introducing visitors to the distinct heritage and tourist elements that set the governorate apart. With its wealth of historical landmarks, castles, forts, oases, mosques, and ancient heritage houses, Wadi Al Maawil stands as a treasure trove waiting to be explored. The completion of the Hujrat al Sheikh walkway will add another layer of charm to this already enchanting destination, enhancing its allure for tourists seeking a unique blend of history, culture, and natural beauty.



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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



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EVERYONE KNOWS that a dancer's performance career ends with age. But what about a dance teacher's? At the School of American Ballet, a generational shift is under way. Not only do former and current New York City Ballet members, including Arch Higgins, Darci Kistler, Katrina Killian and Jonathan Stafford, dominate its staff, but Peter Martins, the artistic director and chairman of faculty at the school, has put programmes in place to pump even more new blood.

"When people decide to teach when they retire, it's too late," Martins said in an interview at the City Ballet-affiliated school. "The obvious reason is, why? Do you want to have a paycheck? You can't be a teacher for that reason."

In striking early, Martins, also the ballet master in chief of City Ballet, is following George Balanchine's lead. When Balanchine asked Suki Schorer to begin teaching at the school in 1961, she was 21 and had only been in the company for two years. After the venerable Danish teacher Stanley Williams died, Martins approached Peter Boal and Jock Soto – at that time still dancing – to fill the gap.

"You have to keep constantly finding people who will be the teachers for the future," Martins said. "It's not a science. You don't know who will end up being a good teacher. So you have to ask people, and you have to give them a chance. You put them in front of the class."

As part of his mandate to develop new teachers, Martins started a fellowship programme, now in its third year, in which company members watch classes at the school and fill in when necessary. The fellowships are open-ended; currently, Megan Fairchild, Jennifer Ringer, Abi Stafford and Sebastien Marcovici are taking part and are paid \$50 for each class they observe.

The programme appears to be working: Kaitlyn Gilliland, a fellow who stopped dancing because of injury, was just named assistant children's ballet master.

"When I left dancing, I left because I still wanted to love it and I felt like that was slipping away from me," said Gilliland, who is also a pre-med student at Columbia University. "Being here makes me love it again in a very different

way."

Dena Abergel, another former City Ballet dancer, will take over the children's ballet master position from Garielle Whittle, who recently retired. Kay Mazzo, the school's co-chairwoman of faculty, who began teaching there in 1983 at Balanchine's request, said that while the fellowship programme is not a broad teaching programme, "it's specific for securing the faculty that we want here."

She added: "We're fortunate in having our students go to the company and then come back. We're all speaking the same language, which is the Balanchine aesthetic."

Last spring, Martins expanded his programme to include School of American Ballet students, choosing two that showed promise as teachers. He assigned them classes – not to watch but to teach.

Silas Farley, an apprentice at City Ballet, and Christina Ghiardi, a member of Boston Ballet II, relished the experience. For Farley, teaching other students wasn't a new opportunity. He presided over his first class at 13 as a student at North Carolina Theater School of Dance. While teaching a men's class over the summer, he was clearly in his element as he led dancers through a brisk series of jumps.

"It doesn't lose any of the brilliance at high speed," he said while clapping out the tempo. "We go fast. The School of American Ballet – faster than your school since 1934!"

Farley's enthusiasm for ballet holds no bounds. Martins found much to admire in both of his student teachers; in the case of Farley's classes, he said: "Every step had a purpose. It was perfectly constructed with the music. It was a little bit on the complex side, but it was not too bad."

Later this fall, more students will be selected to participate in the fellowship programme, which Martins said also helps them improve as dancers: "You listen to music differently, you learn manners, how you talk to your colleagues and how you deal with the pianist. The hope is that one day they might get bitten."

That hope also extends to Fairchild, who has spent much of her time observ-

ADOPTING THE CLASSROOM AS A STAGE



ing children's classes.

"You get involved in this professional world, and you forget that this used to be something so exciting that you would get to do after school," she said. "It reminds me of a more innocent time, and it's wonderful while I'm dancing to get to see that again." Some company members, like Stafford, who is on faculty, have even changed the course of training. He proposed a basic partnering class for younger dancers and now teaches it on

his day off. Martins admires Stafford's seriousness.

"I'm not looking for clones," Martins said. "Everybody has to be individual, but they all have to buy into the aesthetic – the way we teach, the way we dance. How we dance is so different than anybody else in the world, and it all starts here. So you continue the cycle."

For Farley, that cycle means everything. "It's kind of a miracle that anyone gets into a professional ballet company,

when you think of all the different points where the funnel gets finer and finer," he said. "You get to a company audition, and all your best friends, who you worked your whole life with, don't make it, and you are the one girl who does. The whole stage is filled with the survivors. To think of all the sacrifice to get them to that moment? People are laying their lives down so that someone else can have an opportunity, and that's teaching. It's the lifeblood of ballet." — **NYT**

HEALTH

What to Know About the Flu Virus?

EACH FALL, THE FLU emerges as a formidable force, spreading through the droplets produced when people cough, sneeze or talk, and sometimes hitching a ride to our noses by way of the infected surfaces that we touch. Influenza viruses cause tens of millions of illnesses and thousands of deaths in the United States each year.

There are two players every flu season: influenza Type A and Type B. Influenza A tends to pop up early in the season and accounts for more than 75 per cent of all cases, while influenza B typically has a distinct but much smaller peak in late February or March.

"You tend to have one or the other virus predominant at any given time," said Anice Lowen, an associate professor of microbiology and immunology at the Emory University School of

Medicine. Here's what to know about the flu viruses.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TYPE A AND TYPE B?

Influenza A viruses come in many varieties. Four subtypes commonly affect humans, Lowen said – you may have heard of H1N1, for example. But many more influenza A viruses have been identified in animals, which makes it a potential source of pandemics whenever a new type of influenza A jumps to humans, she said. All four flu pandemics – in 1918, 1957 and 1968 and the swine flu pandemic of 2009 – were caused by Type A viruses.

Influenza B viruses, however, only circulate in humans. They are divided into just two lineages that cause seasonal outbreaks, Lowen said. Because influenza B viruses evolve more slowly than influenza A viruses, they have shorter and more predictable flu seasons.

Still, each year experts closely monitor flu patterns all over the world and try to predict how the viruses might mutate, said Dr. Sean Liu, an assistant professor of infectious disease at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. "We haven't come up with a 100 per cent accurate way to do it," Liu said. "That's why the efficacy of flu vaccines varies from season to season."



In the United States, flu shots are updated annually to include two types each of influenza A and B viruses; scientists pick strains of the viruses expected to be dominant that year. "Your antibodies and your immunity toward these viruses wane over time," Liu said. "So the updated vaccine helps remind your body how to react when you face new

versions of the virus."

Public health officials recommend everyone six months and older get an annual flu shot.

WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF AN INFLUENZA INFECTION?

If you do get sick with the flu, the most common symptoms include a sudden onset of fever, chills, muscle aches, fatigue and

respiratory ailments, such as a cough or sore throat.

Most otherwise healthy people are sick for three to seven days, Liu said. In some cases, the cough and fatigue can linger for two weeks.

In the past, doctors thought that Type A infections were more severe than Type B. But studies have shown that both Types A and B result in similar numbers of hospitalisations and deaths in adults. In children, however, influenza B may cause more severe disease and is associated with higher rates of mortality.

The most common complication of severe influenza is pneumonia, a lung infection that can result from the flu virus or from a secondary bacterial infection, Liu said. The flu can also trigger an extreme inflammatory response in the body and worsen existing chronic conditions like asthma or heart disease.

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHICH TYPE YOU HAVE?

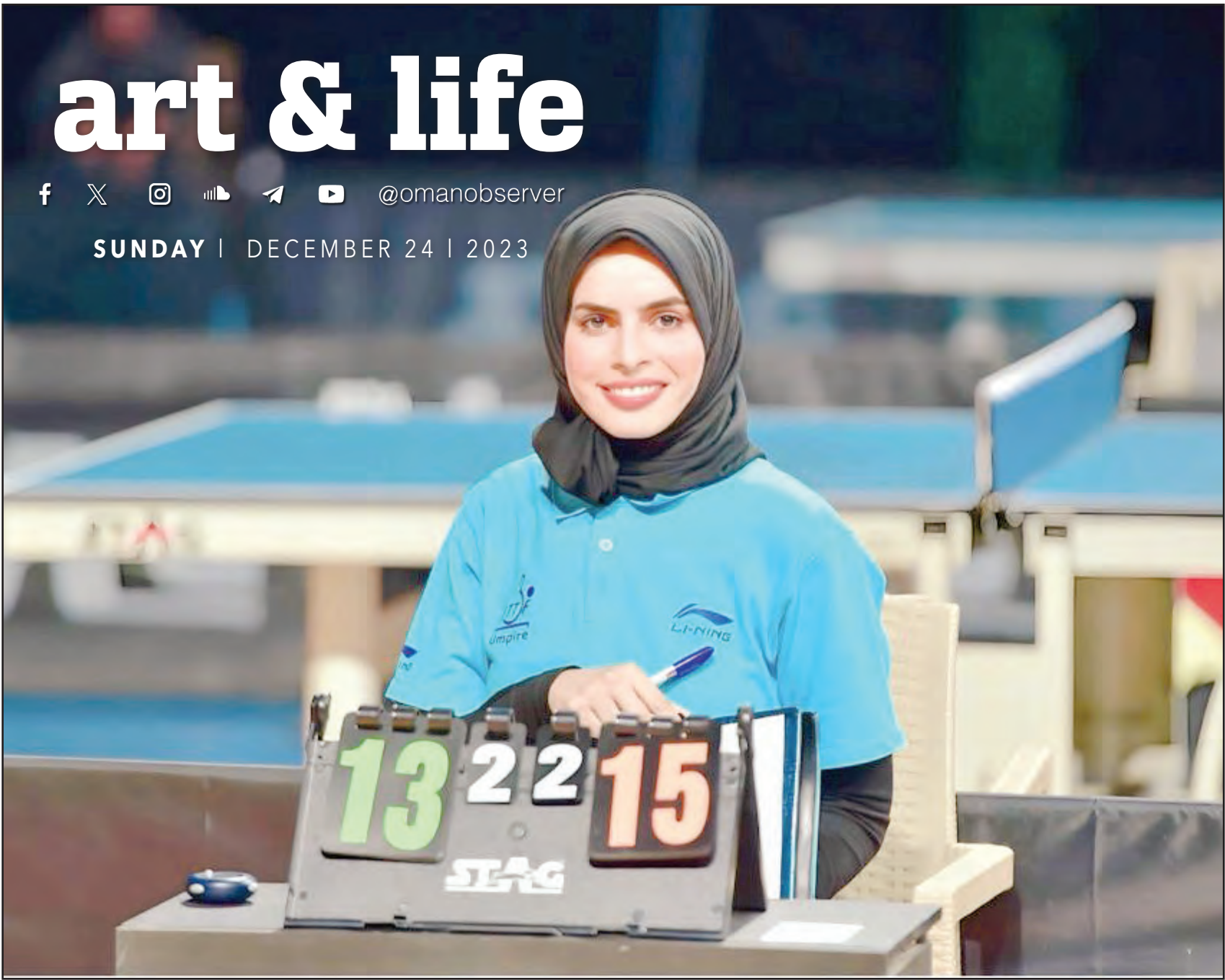
Some rapid tests available at doctors' offices and urgent care centres can distinguish between influenza A and B, although they tend to have low sensitivity, a measure of how well a test performs at catching cases of flu. Doctors can also order more sensitive PCR tests to identify the specific flu virus causing infection, Liu said, "but it doesn't

change management much."

HOW DO YOU TREAT INFLUENZA?

The approach to treating the flu, regardless of type, revolves around relieving symptoms and supporting the body's natural defences, Liu said. There are four approved antiviral medications, including Tamiflu, that are commonly prescribed to shorten the duration and severity of illness. Doctors typically reserve these antivirals for people at risk of developing severe complications, Liu said, including people 65 years and older; those who are pregnant or have chronic conditions like asthma, diabetes or heart disease; and children younger than 5. Because the drugs shave off only a day or so of illness, experts believe the benefits are not worth the cost of treatment for most people.

For those recovering at home, doctors recommend staying hydrated, getting plenty of rest and using over-the-counter medications to reduce fever as needed. But if your symptoms persist, you develop a sustained fever of 102 degrees or higher, you have difficulty breathing or you experience severe chest or stomach pain, it is important to seek medical attention immediately. These may be signs that you need a stronger influenza treatment.— **NYT**



Aisha al Saadi is a beacon for women in sports

BY SIHAM AL SAIDI

Aisha bint Said al Saadiyah is a beacon of dedication and passion for sports. A seasoned physical education teacher and an external lecturer, Aisha's influence extends far beyond the confines of the classroom, immersing her in the expansive world of sports.

Aisha's vibrant personality is a mosaic of diverse hobbies, including travelling, photography, swimming, refereeing, and driving. These facets enrich her multifaceted character and contribute to her dynamic presence in sports.

Her athletic prowess is evident across various dimensions – she is a physical education teacher and an international table tennis referee proudly adorned with the prestigious Blue Badge. Aisha also serves as a referee for football matches, showcasing her versatility in the sporting domain.

Locally, Aisha has left an indelible mark on Oman's sporting landscape, actively participating in ITTF and WTT table tennis tournaments. Notable events include the World Cadet Challenge and the Oman Youth Table Tennis Championship. Her impact extends to academic institutions' table tennis events and national tournaments such as OmanTel and the Oman International Table Tennis Championship.

Internationally, Aisha's journey knows no borders, as she competes in ITTF and WTT events worldwide. Her presence graces tables at prestigious championships like the Saudi International Paralympic Table Tennis Championship, the Asian Youth Championships in Doha, the Vichy Global Games, and the World Table Tennis Championships in Tunisia.

Aisha's accomplishments shine like stars in the sky – holding the esteemed Blue Badge as the first woman to receive it as an international table tennis umpire, earning a research certification from King Saud University, and officiating in renowned tournaments worldwide, including WTT events in China and Africa, showcasing her unwavering commitment and expertise.

A strong support system stands behind Aisha's athletic achievements, with her family and Coach Mohammed al Jassasi playing pivotal roles. Al Jassasi, her mentor and friend, is the primary source of inspiration throughout her journey.

Aisha's path to becoming the first female international umpire is paved with experiences from local, interna-



tional, and world championships. Despite her remarkable achievements, she humbly acknowledges facing no significant challenges in her professional life.

When questioned about the perceived difficulty of being a female referee in international games, Aisha draws upon her rich experience from officiating in numerous

global tournaments. She credits her ability to overcome challenges to learning from seasoned referees and maintaining a resilient mindset.

Aisha's ambitions reach beyond horizons, as she aspires to officiate in Olympic and global championships, persistently advancing her career to umpire major events that hold vital significance in achieving

her goals.

"Success in achieving a goal one aspires to makes a person a fighter, and pursuing dreams through various means without despair."

Coach Aisha's journey, adorned with achievements and fuelled by unique dedication, represents the tale of a pioneer carving her legacy in the vibrant sports history stories.