

P13

AWARD ANNOUNCED FOR 400KV OMAN DIRECT LINK POWER PROJECT



P12

AUSTRALIA CRUISE PAST INDIA IN ASIAN CUP GROUP OPENER



P19

PRINCE'S 'PURPLE RAIN' IS BEING DEVELOPED AS A STAGE MUSICAL



■ RIYADH

OMAN, SAUDI REVIEW ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, paid a visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the aim of enhancing bilateral cooperation and economic relations between the two brotherly countries. During the visit, the minister met Eng Khalid bin Abdulaziz al Falih, Saudi Minister of Investment, Bandar bin Ibrahim bin Abdullah Alkhorayef, Minister of Industry and Mineral Resources, Faisal bin Fadhil Alibrahim, Minister of Economy and Planning, Eng Suhail bin Mohammed Abanmi, Governor of Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority, and Mohammad bin Abdulaziz al Abduljabbar, Chairman of the General Authority of Foreign Trade in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. **DETAILS ON P13**

■ MUSCAT

BIDS INVITED FOR MUTTRAH PROJECT



The Muscat Municipality has invited pre-qualification applications from companies to participate in the Muttrah Square project, which will be developed near the fish and vegetables market. As per the details, the scope of the project includes preliminary works, marine works, sky bridge, soil improvements, civil construction works, softscape and hardscape works, irrigation, electrical, fountain, water feature, surface water drainage, operational service, telecommunication and electronic works, civil defence, and any other unlisted works to deliver the project in all aspects. The last date for the sale of documents is January 23, while for bid submission is February 18. **DETAILS ON P2**

Royal Academy of Management trains 247 in various fields

MUSCAT: The Royal Academy of Management was inaugurated on January 11, through Royal Decree No 2/2022, in line with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's vision for advancing human capital in both public and private sectors. This initiative is fully aligned with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040, aimed at equipping and empowering Omani professionals. The academy operates under the esteemed honorary patronage of His

Majesty the Sultan, with the objective of cultivating capable leaders and national talents to strengthen the Omani economy. Since its establishment, the Royal Academy of Management has been dedicated to nurturing and enhancing leadership communities across diverse administrative levels, with the aim of building an innovative, forward-thinking, and opportunity-generating environment. This is achieved through

fostering leadership communities across administrative levels using modern administrative methodologies. The Royal Academy of Management actively engages with key leadership communities across diverse sectors, fostering collaborative communication channels and pathways for unified action. Within the government sector, it focuses on cultivating national leaders across various administrative levels, targeting senior and

executive leaders to fortify the capabilities of future leaders and establish a network of highly qualified individuals. The academy conducted six executive programmes, including the Public Policy and Strategic Planning Programme, which encompassed the under-secretaries pathway and the general managers pathway, as well as the Master of Leadership and Management, and Train the Trainer Programme. **DETAILS ON P4**



In a bid to cushion trade and harness the unique economic potential of North Al Batinah Governorate, the Sohar Festival kicked off its second edition with a dynamic collaboration between diverse parties of the community and the private sector. As one of the Sultanate of Oman's economic hubs, North Al Batinah aims to show its cultural, heritage and sports appeal through this festival, drawing visitors from all walks of life and interests. **DETAILS ON P3**

UN envoy urges restraint over Yemen strikes

CAIRO: The United Nations on Saturday voiced concern that regional tensions involving Yemen could adversely affect efforts to end a years-long civil war in the country. The United States and its allies last week launched a series of strikes targeting Yemen's Ansar Allah fighters after they had repeatedly attacked commercial ships in the Red Sea. UN special envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg said he had noted "with serious concern the increasingly precarious regional context, and its adverse impact on peace efforts in Yemen." He stressed "the need to protect Yemeni civilians, and to safeguard the progress of peace efforts in Yemen" made in recent months. Calling for de-escalation, Grundberg urged all involved to "prioritise diplomatic channels over military options." Earlier on Saturday, the US army said it had struck a radar facility in Yemen. In recent weeks, the Ansar Allah has claimed a string of attacks on ships in the Red Sea - one of the most important shipping routes for world trade, against the backdrop of the ongoing Gaza war. The strikes

came a day after US and British forces hit scores of targets across the country, heightening fears that Israel's war with Palestinians could engulf the wider region. Violence involving groups in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria has surged since the war in Gaza began in early October. The Ansar Allah fighters, who say they are acting in solidarity with Gaza, have carried out a growing number of missile and drone attacks on what they deem Israeli-linked shipping in the key Red Sea international trade route. Around 12 per cent of global trade normally passes through the Bab al Mandeb Strait, the Red Sea entrance between southwest Yemen and Djibouti. But since mid-November, the attacks have affected trade flows when supply strains are already putting upward pressure on inflation globally. Analysts said the Western strikes are unlikely to stop Ansar Allah. They will "diminish but not end the threat to shipping", said Jon Alterman, director of the Middle East Programme at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. **SEE ALSO P6**

El Nino could make 2024 hotter than 2023

GENEVA: This year could be hotter under El Nino's influence than the record-shattering 2023, the United Nations warned on Saturday, as it urged drastic emissions cuts to combat climate change. The UN's World Meteorological Organization said new monthly temperature records were set every month between June and December, and the pattern is likely to continue due to the warming El Nino weather phenomenon. The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) predicted there is a one in three chance that 2024 will be warmer than 2023 — and a 99-per cent certainty that 2024 will rank among the five warmest years ever. Nasa climatologist Gavin Schmidt, director of the Nasa Goddard Institute for Space Studies, estimated the odds were even higher. "I put it at about 50-50: 50 per cent chance it'll be warmer, 50 per cent chance it will be slightly cooler," he said, adding there were



Human activity is warming the planet, driving more frequent and intense extreme weather events, like wildfires in California. — **AFP file photo**

hints of "mysterious" changes to Earth's climate systems, that would nonetheless require more data to confirm or refute. The UN's WMO weather and climate agency said July and August last year were the two hottest months ever recorded, as it officially confirmed 2023 had been the

warmest year on record "by a huge margin". The WMO said the 2023 annual average global temperature was 1.45 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels (1850-1900). The 2015 Paris climate accords aimed to limit global warming to well below two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels -- and 1.5C if possible. The WMO's new secretary-general Celeste Saulo warned that El Nino, which emerged mid-2023, is likely to turn up the heat even further in 2024. The naturally-occurring climate pattern, typically associated with increased heat worldwide, usually increases global temperatures in the year after it develops. "The shift from cooling La Nina to warming El Nino by the middle of 2023 is clearly reflected in the rise in temperature," she said. "Given that El Nino usually has the biggest impact on global temperatures after it peaks, 2024 could be even hotter." — **AFP**



Activists and supporters wave flags and carry placards, including a 'Stop Bombing Yemen' sign, during a National March for Palestine in central London on Saturday. — **AFP**



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Sohar Festival highlights cultural, economic splendour

SIHAM AL SAIDI
SUHAR, JAN 13

The Sohar Festival kicked off its second edition on January 11, with a collaboration between diverse parties and the private sector. North Al Batinah aims to showcase its cultural, heritage, and sports aspects through the festival, drawing visitors from all walks of life.

The festival was inaugurated by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, along with Mohammed bin Sulaiman al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North.

The Sohar Festival unfolds as a month-long celebration at the Sohar Entertainment Center, showcasing the rich cultural tapestry and economic richness.

Mohammed al Kindi, Governor of Al Batinah North highlighted that Sohar festival aims to create spaces for entertainment, cultural displays, heritage exhibits, and sports events, attracting visitors of varied interests.



Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, opening the Sohar Festival.

The festival shines a spotlight on the youth's talents, fostering positive impacts on local trade, particularly in the tourism sector.

This year's festival introduces a set of new events spanning cultural, heritage, and sports domains alongside the entertainment range, aimed at achieving not just recreational but also substantial business goals. Attendees can participate in seminars, attend lectures, engage in training workshops, explore book fairs, and enjoy poetry sessions. The festival

is also a platform supporting local producers, job seekers, and small to medium-sized enterprises. To accommodate a growing number of local and international visitors, the festival has transformed the Sohar Entertainment Center into a permanent venue with features like the electronic dome, a grand stage, galleries, platforms, and dedicated spaces for participation from other Oman governorates.

Notably, a gaming zone and a children's theatre add family-friendly dimensions to the festival's offerings. Due to the

The Sohar Festival provides a platform for local job seekers and offers opportunities for employment aligned with its diverse activities

Gaza war, the Sohar Festival has committed a portion of its proceeds to support those affected, and extend solidarity with the Palestinians.

The Sohar Festival 2024 provides a platform for local job seekers and offers 200 opportunities for employment aligned with its diverse activities. Over 160 productive families and 24 craftsmen from various Oman governorates actively contribute, underscoring the festival's commitment to fostering economic growth.

Projections suggest a visitor count exceeding 928,000, a testament to the festival's growing popularity and its vital role in promoting Al Batinah North's cultural and economic assets.



Khasab Port receives over 76,156 tourists in 2023

KHASAB: Khasab Port in Musandam, one of Oman's vital economic ports, has become a cornerstone for enhancing tourism and commercial activity.

Recent expansions, including a main breakwater, commercial berths, and deepening the port basin, have transformed it into an active commercial port, particularly in attracting major cruise ships.

Maryam bint Mohammed al Shehiya, Head of the Tourism Promotion Department at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Musandam, highlighted the port's significance.

She noted that the influx of cruise ships has brought tourists from around the world to explore cultural monuments such as Khasab Fort and Al Kamazir Castle. Tourists also engage in various recreational activities, including

dolphin watching and sea or land trips, coordinated with local tourist offices. She highlighted that the peak tourism season in the Musandam Governorate commences annually in November. During the period up to December 2023, an impressive 76,156 tourists arrived via large ships, with the number of these formidable vessels totalling around 52.

Emphasising the commitment to local communities, she mentioned that the port has designated marketing outlets for families to showcase and sell their products to cruise ship tourists. Furthermore, she pointed out the multitude of events, activities, and festivals taking place in the governorate through collaborative efforts between the Musandam Governor's Office and various relevant authorities. — ONA

Annual charitable carnival ‘Play and Enjoy’ concludes

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 13

The Association for Children with Disabilities, in collaboration with the Industrial and Consumer Solutions Company, held the sixth edition of its annual charitable carnival, ‘Play and Enjoy’. The event held at the Omani Automobile Association headquarters concluded on January 13 and was dedicated to providing an inclusive experience for children of all abilities.

The carnival, held under the patronage of Lujaina bint Mohsen Haidar Darwish, Chairwoman, Infrastructure and Technology Management Council, had a diverse range of activities like horseback riding and motorcycle adventures to creative face painting and stage performances, ‘Play and Enjoy’ created an inclusive space where families came together for fun and laughter.



Lujaina bint Mohsen Haidar Darwish and Khadija bint Nasser al Saatiyah at the event.

The carnival featured special corners showcasing products along with fast-food stalls, adding to the festive atmosphere. The collaborative efforts with key partners such as the Fellowship Fund team, Oman Z71 team, and the Saham Volunteer Team elevated the carnival to become a significant platform for community engagement.

All proceeds from the carnival contribute to

the Association's ongoing initiatives to enhance services, programmes, training, and rehabilitation for the approximately 400 children under its care. As a non-profit voluntary charitable organisation, the Association relies on such events to sustain and improve the quality of support provided to children across its various rehabilitation centres. Khadija bint Nasser al

Saatiyah, Chairwoman, Association for Children with Disabilities, emphasised that the primary goal of organising the carnival annually is to discover and highlight the abilities and skills of individuals with disabilities.

Khadija added that the event also emphasises the association's role in working towards the integration of individuals with disabilities into the broader society.

She stressed the importance of holding the carnival to actively integrate children with disabilities. “Children with disabilities urgently need recreational activities to engage in their leisure away from the school environment. They need to go out and spend time with their families to enjoy their lives. The association, seeks to activate various activities that integrate and highlight the abilities and skills of children with disabilities in society,” she added.



جهاز الضرائب
TAX AUTHORITY

Announcement



The Tax Authority would like to draw the attention of taxpayers who are subject to Income Tax and their fiscal year ended on December 31, 2023 to submit their tax returns and pay the tax due, according to the forms prepared for this purpose through Tax Authority's Portal: www.taxoman.gov.om not later than **April 30, 2024**

We hope everyone will abide and commit to the deadline of sumbitting the return.

R O Y A L A C A D E M Y O F M A N A G E M E N T

Elevating Oman’s leadership landscape



The RAM actively engages with key leadership communities across diverse sectors, fostering collaborative communication channels and pathways for unified action.



Under National Initiative for the Development of Local Administration, specific programmes cater to the development of their excellencies, governors.



About 600 individuals, representing beneficiaries across various sectors and programmes passed through the diverse programmes and initiatives of RAM.

JANUARY 11 is the anniversary of the establishment of the Royal Academy of Management (RAM) under the honorary patronage of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. The RAM was inaugurated on January 11, through Royal Decree No 2/2022, in line with His Majesty’s vision for advancing human capital in both public and private sectors. This initiative is fully aligned with the aspirations of Oman Vision 2040, aimed at equipping and empowering Omani professionals.

The Academy operates under the esteemed honorary patronage of His Majesty, with the objective of cultivating capable leaders and national talents to strengthen the Omani economy.

Since its establishment, the RAM has been dedicated to nurturing and enhancing leadership communities across diverse administrative levels, with the aim of building an innovative, forward-thinking, and opportunity-generating environment. This is achieved through fostering leadership communities across administrative levels using modern administrative methodologies.

The RAM actively engages with key leadership communities across diverse sectors, fostering collaborative communication channels and pathways for unified action.

Under National Initiative for the Development of Local Administration, specific programmes cater to the development of their excellencies, governors, and chairmen of Muscat and Dhofar Municipalities, as well as the programme of their excellencies the walis. Engaging 44 participants from 11 governorates across Oman, these programmes encompass 8 dialogue and intellectual sessions, complemented by 2 field visits.

Furthermore, the Academy extends its leadership focus to the Council of Oman, conducting an induction programme tailored for the members - honorees and their excellencies of the State Council and Majlis Ash’shura.

Notably, about 600 individuals representing beneficiaries across various sectors and programmes passed through the diverse programmes and initiatives of RAM. The Academy’s programmes and initiatives have garnered insights and feedback from numerous excellencies, esteemed guests, partners and participants.

Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, emphasised the significance of the Governors’ Programme within the broader National Initiative for the Development of Local Administration. He highlighted its pivotal role in addressing decentralisation, governance, and enhancing the efficacy of decentralised practices, emphasising their crucial role in realising economic and social development goals.

Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy, emphasised its significance as a testament to the profound commitment to nurturing leadership within both sectors, fostering a balanced approach.

Dr Al Saqri noted, “The programme reflects the keen interest in developing leadership in the two sectors in a balanced manner, pushes towards a partnership that accommodates the new roles of the government as an engine of development and new administration for the private sector as its operator, to establish a new phase for the future of business in Oman.”

Prof Sanjeev Khagram, Dean and CEO of the Thunderbird College of Global Management at Arizona State University, says, “We look forward to collaborating with the Academy in its ambitious and effective efforts in developing leaders of the public and private sectors in Oman to become ready for the future.”

Eng Ahmed al Haddabi, Executive Manager, Strategic Planning Unit, Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, says, it was an opportunity to enhance cooperation between us, which will reflect positively on increased cooperation between units of

THE ACADEMY
ACTIVELY
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PATHWAYS FOR
UNIFIED ACTION

the state’s administrative apparatus.

RAM collaborated with 89 local companies and small enterprises spanning 13 diverse fields, covering leadership, management, and various domains. Through the Academy’s initiatives, these partnerships resulted in a substantial rate of benefit for local companies of approximately 32.5 per cent. Additionally, the Academy significantly contributed to the qualification of 24 Omani trainers, and the deployment of 26 facilitators across different governorates played a pivotal role in extensively disseminating knowledge and expertise.

The outreach of the RAM across its diverse social media platforms has been substantial, amassing a remarkable total of 1.1 million impressions and engaging in approximately 529,000 interactions. This active presence reflects broad audience engagement and interest in the Academy’s initiatives and content.

RAM hosted numerous visitors from local, Arab and international institutions who shared their impressions of the facility.

Mulham bin Bashir Al Jarf, Oman Investment Authority, described the Academy as an exemplary institution. He was impressed by both its structural design and the competence of its leadership.

Moosa bin Khalfan al Muqbali from the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies commended the Academy’s building for its state-of-the-art technical equipment and highly advanced support resources, acknowledging its modern infrastructure.

Said bin Salim al Hajri, State Audit Institution, expressed admiration for the Academy’s distinctiveness, praising its high level of organisation and punctuality.

The RAM has made significant strides in digital services and transformation, introducing over 150 digitised services to elevate the digital user experience. Notable among these initiatives are the My E-space platform, aimed at streamlining user interactions, and an artificial intelligence programme designed to address inquiries efficiently.



UN AID CHIEF
CALLS FOR
CEASEFIRE,
URGES ACTION
TO END WAR



MARTIN GRIFFITHS

GAZA: The UN aid chief on Friday said he was “deeply alarmed” by Israeli ministers’ statements about “plans to encourage the mass transfer” of Palestinian civilians from the Gaza Strip to third countries and he called anew for a ceasefire.

“Unless we act, it will become an indelible mark on our humanity,” Martin Griffiths, the UN Under-Secretary for humanitarian affairs, told the UN Security Council. “I reiterate my call for this council to take urgent action to bring this war to an end.”

Griffiths painted a dire picture of a worsening humanitarian catastrophe in the Gaza Strip as

Israel presses the offensive it launched after the Oct. 7.

Quoting Gaza’s health ministry, he said that more than 23,000 Palestinians have been killed and more than 58,000 injured since Israel launched the offensive.

The “horrific” situation created by the “relentless” Israeli operation can be seen in the displacement of 85 per cent of Gaza’s 2.3 million Palestinians “forced to flee again and again as the bombs and missiles rain down,” Griffiths continued. “There is no safe place in Gaza,” he said.

“We are deeply alarmed by recent statements by Israeli ministers regarding plans to encourage the mass transfer of civilians from Gaza to third countries, currently referred to as ‘voluntary relocation,’” he said.

Such statements, Griffiths said, raise concerns “about the possible forced transfer or deportation of the Palestinian population from the Gaza Strip” in violation of international law.

The statements by far right-wing Israeli cabinet ministers also have prompted the United States, Israel’s closest ally, to raise similar concerns.

US Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield and her British counterpart, Barbara Woodward, repeated those concerns during the meeting.

“These statements, along with statements by Israeli officials calling for the mistreatment of Palestinian detainees or the destruction of Gaza, are irresponsible, inflammatory, and only make it harder to secure a lasting peace,” Thomas-Greenfield said.

Israeli officials, including PM Benjamin Netanyahu deny they have plans to forcibly move the Palestinian population from Gaza.

— Reuters



Israeli military vehicles operate during a raid in Faraa refugee camp, near Tubas in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. — Reuters

WEST BANK
SETTLEMENT
ATTACK KILLS
THREE

TEL AVIV: Israeli forces killed three Palestinians who had attacked a Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank, the army said.

The military said in a statement that there had been an “infiltration” in the Adora settlement, around 20 kilometres west of Hebron city, and that Israeli soldiers had come under fire.

The soldiers searched the area and “three assailants were identified and neutralised by the security forces”, the statement said.

When questioned, the Israeli army confirmed the death of the three assailants, while the Palestinian agency Wafa identified them as a 19-year-old and two 16-year-olds.

Israeli emergency medical service Magen David Adom said its team was treating a man who was shot in the leg. It did not identify the

wounded man.

Palestinian officials have not yet commented on the incident.

In a separate incident in the West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said a man was killed after being severely beaten by Israeli forces in Zeita, north of the city of Tulkarem.

Excluding annexed east Jerusalem, around 490,000 Israelis live in settlements in the West Bank that are deemed illegal under international law.

Violence has surged in the West Bank since October 7, when the Palestinian armed group launched an attack in southern Israel that sparked a full-scale conflict in the Gaza Strip.

Israeli army raids and attacks on settlers have killed at least 338 people in the West Bank since then, according to a tally based on sources on both sides.

More than 520 Palestinians were killed in the West Bank last year, according to the Palestinian health ministry.

Over the same period, Palestinian groups carried out attacks in Israel and the West Bank that killed at least 41 people, according to the Shin Bet security agency.

— AFP

Health ministry says dozens
killed in vicious strikes

GAZA: Health officials in Gaza said on Saturday that Israeli strikes overnight killed at least 60 people in the besieged territory, which was also grappling with a telecommunications blackout on the war’s 99th day.

Witnesses in the Gaza Strip reported Israeli bombardment in the early morning. A correspondent said intense shelling and air strikes hit the Palestinian territory’s south overnight. “I was visiting my sister, and when I returned I found my house was bombed,” said 60-year-old Samir Qashta, a resident of Rafah in southern



Mourners react near the bodies of Palestinians killed in an Israeli strike, at Abu Yousef al-Najjar hospital, in Rafah. — Reuters

Gaza, where many people have fled. The Israeli army said its forces had struck dozens of rocket launchers that were “ready to be used” in central Gaza, and

eliminated four of them in air strikes on Khan Yunis, Gaza’s major southern city, near Rafah.

Ashraf al-Qudra, spokesman for the health ministry in the Palestinian territory, reported “more than 60 martyrs” in Israeli air strikes and artillery fire, with dozens more wounded.

Israel’s relentless bombardment of Gaza since October 7 attack has killed at least 23,843 people, mostly women and children, according to an updated toll on Saturday from the territory’s health ministry.

At Rafah’s Al-Najjar hospital, mourners gathered and prayed around the bodies of slain relatives. A man held the body of a child, wrapped in white cloth, ahead of burial.

— AFP

ISRAEL PRESSES ON
WITH GAZA OFFENSIVE
APPROACHING
100 DAYS OF WAR

GAZA: Israel kept up bombardments in the Gaza Strip on Saturday as its deadly war on the enclave’s Palestinians approached 100 days with no end in sight.

In the southern city of Rafah, an Israeli airstrike on a house sheltering two displaced families killed 10 people, the Gaza health ministry said.

Holding up a photo of a dead girl with a piece of bread in her hand, Bassem Arafah, a relative, said the families in Rafah had been eating dinner when the house was struck on Friday night.

“This child died while she was hungry, while she was eating a piece of bread with nothing on it, where is the International Criminal Court to see how the children die?” Arafah said.

Israel says it targets groups and does all it can to minimise harm to non-combatants as it wages urban warfare in the densely populated Palestinian enclave.



A picture shows smoke billowing over Khan Yunis in the southern Gaza Strip during Israeli bombardment. — AFP



A man sits amid the rubble following Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP



People inspect the damage following Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip. — AFP



Pro-Palestinian activists and supporters wave flags and carry placards during a National March for Palestine in central London. — AFP



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US Trade Representative Katherine Tai and India's Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, pose for a picture before the start of their meeting in New Delhi, India. – Reuters file photo

INDIA, US SEEK TO BOLSTER TRADE TIES, WORK ON CRITICAL MINERALS

NEW DELHI: India and the United States have agreed to bolster trade ties and deepen cooperation in areas such as critical minerals, the United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai said on Saturday.

India's trade minister Piyush Goyal and Tai held their annual trade policy talks in New Delhi on January 12. Tai is on a three-day visit to India.

The two nations are pushing to improve bilateral trade prospects, overcoming diplomatic tensions after Washington late last year alleged that an Indian official was linked to a foiled plot to murder a Sikh separatist leader on US soil.

India has said any such action was contrary to government policy and launched its own investigation into the allegations.

During talks between Tai and Goyal, India said it was interested in a bilateral critical mineral partnership.

Washington and New Delhi would exchange information to deepen their partnership in this area, said an Indian official, who didn't wish to be named as discussions are not public.

"In terms of the roadmap for critical minerals, we are going to begin with fact-finding, exploring and establishing a common vocabulary and then develop our tools and ideas from there," Tai told a news briefing in New Delhi.

India also asked the United States to improve its visa processes for

business professionals from India and requested Washington restore duty-free access to some goods under the so-called generalised system of preferences, according to a joint statement issued after the January 12 meeting.

A US trade preference programme, which India had access to for decades, was ended by former President Donald Trump in 2019.

During her talks in New Delhi, Tai asked India to ensure that New Delhi's policies on laptop imports do not restrict trade.

Last week, Ukrainian leaders pitched for India to help rebuild its war-ravaged economy at a business summit organised by India primarily to seek inward global investment.

Suggesting that Ukraine's recovery would be "a win-win for Ukraine and international partners," Kyiv's Deputy Economy Minister Volodymyr Kuzyo proposed a recovery vision for Ukraine in a presentation in India's western Gujarat state.

India has also increased energy purchases from Russia to all-time highs, to the chagrin of some Western nations who support Ukraine in the war. India has traditionally strong ties with Russia, and beyond energy, it remains significantly dependent on it for arms, ammunition and nuclear technology.

– Reuters

YEMENIS DEFLIANT AFTER US CARRIES OUT NEW STRIKE

ADEN: The Ansar Allah movement threatened a "strong and effective response" after the United States carried out another strike overnight, further ratcheting up tensions as Washington vows to protect shipping from attacks.

The strikes have added to concerns about the escalation of the conflict that has spread through the region since the Palestinian groups and Israel went to war, with allies also entering the fray from Lebanon, Syria and Iraq.

The latest strike, which the United States said hit a radar site, came a day after dozens of American and British strikes on Ansar Allah facilities in Yemen.

"This new strike will have a firm, strong and effective response," Nasruldeen Amer, the movement spokesperson said, adding there had been no injuries nor "material damages".

Mohammed Abdulsalam, another spokesperson, said that the strikes, including the one overnight that hit a military base in Sanaa, had no significant impact on the group's ability to prevent Israel-affiliated vessels from passing through the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea.

The Yemeni group says their maritime campaign aims to support Palestinians under Israeli siege and attack in Gaza.

The group has also fired drones and missiles up the Red Sea at Israel itself.

The guided missile destroyer Carney used Tomahawk missiles in the follow-on strike early on



Yemenis rally to denounce air strikes launched by the US and Britain, in Sanaa, Yemen. – Reuters

Saturday local time "to degrade the groups's ability to attack maritime vessels, including commercial vessels," the US Central Command said in a statement on X.

In Sanaa, government employee Mohammed Samei said the attacks were an act of "brutal aggression" and marked a new stage of a war Yemen had endured.

Hussein Kabsi, a retired government employee, said supporting the Palestinians was a "religious and moral duty".

"Our stance is unwavering, we will (continue) to stand with

The guided missile destroyer Carney used Tomahawk missiles in the follow-on strike early on Saturday, it came a day after dozens of American and British strikes

our brothers in Palestine and Gaza until victory and until all Palestinian land is liberated — not just Gaza," he said.

On Friday, hundreds of thousands of people rallied in Sanaa, chanting slogans denouncing Israel and the United

States, footage broadcast by Al-Masirah TV showed

US President Joe Biden warned that he could order more strikes if they do not stop their attacks on merchant and military vessels in one of the world's most economically vital waterways.

White House spokesperson John Kirby said the initial strikes had targeted the ability to store, launch and guide missiles or drones, which the group has used to threaten shipping. He said Washington had no interest in a war with Yemen. It was said that five fighters were killed in the initial strikes. — Reuters

DR Congo says pullout of UN peacekeepers has started

KINSHASA: The withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from the Democratic Republic of Congo "has commenced", the foreign minister announced on Saturday, with completion due by the end of the year.

The DRC called for the withdrawal despite United Nations concern about violence in the eastern part of the country.

The UN Security Council voted in December to accede to Kinshasa's demand for a gradual pullout by the MONUSCO mission which had arrived in 1999.

Despite a volatile domestic situation, the government had for months been calling for an accelerated withdrawal of the peacekeepers.

Kinshasa considers the UN force to be ineffective in protecting civilians from the armed groups and militias that have plagued the eastern DRC for three decades.

The accusation is similar to that made by other African countries, notably Mali, which also demanded the emergency departure of the UN mission there.

Foreign Minister Christophe Lutundula and MONUSCO chief Bintou Keita told a press conference in the capital they would work for an "exemplary" withdrawal.

The UN force today fields 13,500 soldiers and 2,000 police



UN peacekeeping troops patrol the streets in armoured personnel carriers in Democratic Republic of Congo's capital Kinshasa. – Reuters file photo

deployed across the three eastern provinces of Ituri and South and North Kivu.

The pullout is due to take place in three phases with completion depending on regular assessments.

Phase one is to see the departure of peacekeepers from South Kivu by the end of April.

Lutundula said the plan was not at the stage of "seeing soldiers board planes".

But "the withdrawal has commenced in the sense that we are at work", he said.

Keita said the first of 14 UN bases in South Kivu would close by February 15 at the latest and be handed over to Congolese security forces.

The first base to be handed over is at Kamanyola on the border with Burundi.

A final date for the full withdrawal has not been set by the United Nations.

"Normally on December 31 we will be at the end of the withdrawal process," said Lutundula.

The departure did not mean "the end of the war", the minister said referring to Kinshasa's accusation that Rwanda gives military support to the M23 rebel group in North Kivu.

The MONUSCO chief recalled that DRC had "nearly seven million displaced people, including 5.5 million in the east," and all in need of protection.

SHORT TAKES

ANKARA

Türkiye says it 'neutralises' 20 PKK members in Iraq

Türkiye has carried out airstrikes, "neutralising" 20 members of the outlawed PKK Kurdish group and destroying 29 targets after Turkish soldiers were killed in a clash, the Defence Ministry said on Saturday.

In a statement on the X social media platform, the ministry said airstrikes were conducted in the Hakurk, Metina, Gara and Qandil regions of northern Iraq. It said the targets included caves, bunkers, shelters and oil



facilities. The ministry also said the operations had "neutralised" 20 members in the region. Ankara typically uses the term "neutralised" to mean killed.

— Reuters

BEIJING

At least 10 dead in China mining accident

At least 10 people were killed and six are missing after an accident at a coal mine in central China's Henan Province, state media said on Saturday.

The accident, a likely coal and gas explosion described as an "outburst", happened around 2:55 pm on Friday in Pingdingshan, state broadcaster CCTV said.

Search and rescue efforts were continuing, CCTV said.

State news agency Xinhua said 425 people were working



underground when the blast took place.

Those in charge of the mine have been taken into custody by authorities, Xinhua said.

— AFP

SEOUL

N Korea halts radio broadcasts with Yonhap

North Korea stopped operating a radio station used to send coded messages to its agents in South Korea, the Yonhap news agency said on Saturday, the latest sign the isolated country is shaking up the way it handles relations with Seoul.

North Korea has been stepping up pressure on Seoul in recent weeks, declaring it the "principal enemy", saying the North will never reunite with the South and vowing to enhance its ability to deliver a nuclear strike on the US and allies in the



Pacific. Radio Pyongyang in the past broadcast mysterious coded numbers presumed to be targeted at Pyongyang's spies operating in South Korea. Its website was also down on Saturday. — AFP



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In brief

■ LONDON



POST OFFICE ‘COULD FACE £100M BILL AND INSOLVENCY’

The UK Post Office could be facing a £100-million bill and insolvency after claiming tax relief for its compensation payments to sub postmasters, according to a tax expert.

Dan Neidle, the head of non-profit organisation Tax Policy Associates, said the Post Office claimed £934m tax relief for its compensation payments, and suggested it could be “unlawful.”

The Horizon scandal saw more than 700 sub postmasters and sub postmistresses handed criminal convictions after faulty Fujitsu accounting software made it appear as though money was missing at their branches.

— dpa

■ SYDNEY



RESIDENTS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA TO FLEE WILDFIRE

Residents in the state of Western Australia were urged to evacuate their homes on Saturday, as a bushfire burned out of control near the state’s capital Perth, amid soaring temperatures.

More than 40 bushfires were burning on Saturday in Australia’s largest state, with residents in the shire of Chittering, about 60 kilometres north of Perth, at risk from the uncontained blaze, according to fire authorities.

“You are in danger and need to act immediately to survive. There is a threat to lives and homes,” the state’s Department of Fire and Emergency Services said on its website regarding the fire in Chittering, a rural area home to around 6,000 people.

— Reuters

■ BOGOTA



MUDSLIDE KILLS AT LEAST 17 IN NORTHWEST COLOMBIA

A mudslide brought on by heavy rains in northwest Colombia killed at least 17 people and injured 35, authorities said on Saturday. The mudslide, which happened on Friday afternoon, covered a busy highway that connects the cities of Quibdo and Medellin in the Pacific province of Choco.

An unknown number of people are still missing as mud completely engulfed several cars on the road, authorities said.

“So far 17 bodies have been recovered from the area of the tragedy,” the government of Choco said on its X account, adding that injured people were brought to hospitals. — Reuters

RUSSIA SAYS STRUCK ‘UKRAINIAN MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX’

MOSCOW: Russia on Saturday said it destroyed all targets in a barrage of strikes on facilities producing ammunition and drones in Ukraine.

“This morning the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation carried out a group strike... against facilities of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex,” the defence ministry said in a daily briefing.

It said it was targeting places producing shells, gunpowder and unmanned aerial vehicles.

“All designated facilities were hit,” it added.

Ukraine earlier said it logged 40 drones and missiles launched from Russia, with eight missiles destroyed and “more than 20 devices” disabled by electronic warfare.

No fatalities were reported so far, but Ukrainian authorities said a civilian was wounded in the northeastern Sumy region.

The air force in Ukraine’s neighbour Poland said it had briefly activated air defence systems due to the increased level of threat, before returning to normal.

“A total of 40 means of enemy air attack were recorded,” the air force said, adding it destroyed eight missiles.



A Ukrainian serviceman of 2 battalion 92nd brigade fires a 120-mm mortar towards Russian troops, at a position near Bakhmut in Donetsk region, Ukraine. — Reuters

Ukraine’s air force said Russia attacked with a wide-range of weapons including cruise, ballistic, anti-aircraft missiles as well as drones.

“More than 20 devices” failed to reach their targets due to “active measures by means of electronic warfare,” it added.

Spokesperson Yuri Ignat later clarified.

“Either they fell in the fields, they were detonated in the air, or they were affected by means of radio-electronic warfare of our defence forces,” he said on television.

A missile attack in the

northeastern Sumy region wounded one civilian and damaged 26 buildings, Ukraine’s prosecutor general said.

“There is damage” in the northern region of Chernigiv, its governor Vyacheslav Chaus said, adding authorities were “not disclosing the places yet”.

No fatalities were reported so far, but Ukrainian authorities said a civilian was wounded in the northeastern Sumy region

Meanwhile, France’s new Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne on Saturday renewed his country’s support to Ukraine, choosing Kyiv for his first official visit abroad, as the war with Russia nears a second anniversary.

Sejourne arrived in Kyiv as Ukraine saw another wave of overnight strikes from Russia, which has intensified its aerial attacks recently.

The visit took place as allies struggle to secure funding, with some worrying that Kyiv could be forgotten amid new conflicts, including between Israel and Hamas.

The freshly-appointed foreign minister explained that “the fundamental principles of international law and the values of Europe, as well as the security interests of the French” were at stake in Ukraine. — AFP

Ecuador’s Noboa seeks tax hike to fund security

QUITO: The administration of Ecuadorean President Daniel Noboa has asked lawmakers to weigh an increase in value added tax (VAT) to finance efforts to combat crime gangs, as the armed forces increased operations in violent areas.

A dramatic spike in violence this week - including the on-air storming of a TV station, the hostage-taking of 178 prison staff by inmates and the kidnapping of police officers - appears to be a response by gangs to Noboa’s plans to tackle a dire security situation, the government has said.

Noboa, who took office in November, has declared a state of emergency and named 22 gangs as “terrorist” organisations.

A total of eight prison staff

have been released late on Thursday, prisons agency SNAI said in a statement on Friday.

Three were being held in Azuay prison in Cuenca, where 21 hostages have also been attended to by the Red Cross. Three were released from a prison in Canar province, while two others were freed in Esmeraldas.

The death of an inmate at a prison in El Oro province is being investigated, SNAI added.

The government has said operations to free hostages taken at least seven prisons are ongoing, but there has been scant information about their status, leading to criticism by their families and union.

“We want answers,” chanted family members protesting

outside the headquarters of the Cotopaxi provincial government.

“For six days we haven’t heard anything about them, we don’t know if they’ve eaten, if they’ve drunk water, if they’ve been mistreated,” said relative Monica Tito. “Mister President help us, free them!”

Videos purporting to show prison staff being subjected to extreme violence, including shooting and hanging, have circulated on social media, but the government has said no hostage has been killed and that some videos had been altered.

Security has worsened in tandem with serious economic troubles, as the country grapples with domestic liquidity problems, limited options for foreign financing. — Reuters



The fuselage plug area of Alaska Airlines Flight 1282 Boeing 737-9 MAX is seen during its investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) in Portland, Oregon. — Reuters file photo

US regulator grounds MAX 9 indefinitely, flights cancelled

WASHINGTON: The US aviation regulator extended the grounding of Boeing 737 MAX 9 airplanes indefinitely and announced it will tighten oversight of Boeing itself after a cabin panel broke off a new jet in mid-flight.

As United Airlines and Alaska Airlines cancelled flights through Tuesday, the Federal Aviation Administration also said it will require another round of inspections before it will consider putting the jets back in service.

Under more stringent supervision, the regulator will audit the Boeing 737 MAX 9 production line and suppliers and consider having an independent entity take over from Boeing certain aspects of certifying the safety of new aircraft that the FAA previously assigned to the planemaker.

The FAA said the continued grounding of 171 planes with the same configuration as the

one in the incident was “for the safety of American travellers.” The regulator said on Monday the grounding would be lifted once they were inspected.

Alaska Airlines and United Airlines, the two US airlines that use the aircraft involved, have had to cancel hundreds of flights in the last week due to the grounding as a widening crisis engulfed the US planemaker.

Alaska and United on Friday both cancelled all MAX 9 flights through Tuesday and United cancelled some additional flights in the following days.

On Thursday, the FAA announced a formal investigation into the MAX 9, which the FAA said had “significant problems” and noted Boeing’s history of production issues. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is investigating if the MAX 9 jet in the Alaska episode was missing or had improperly tightened bolts. — Reuters



Ecuador’s President Daniel Noboa visits the installations of local TV station TC after hooded and armed people took over the TV studio during a live broadcast, in Guayaquil, Ecuador. — Reuters

Do we need a career guide?



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

If your children are toward the end of their high school education, then you would probably struggle with them to select what major to study at college or university. In my case, the challenge was convincing my sons to balance passion with job security.

I was thrilled to find ‘My Career, My Life,’ by Dr Nagib Omar. This book in English can be used as a guide to help teenagers and their parents navigate a very important step in their life.

The author shares his journey and reflections to select his career and he does that in a way that attracts the reader to indulge in the book.

Dr Nagib starts his book by highlighting the role of parents, teachers, and career coaches as guides for a person making career choices. He starts the first chapter by saying “Did you know that parents have the greatest influence on their teen’s career choices?” This a very important statement since most teens understand that their parents have their best interests at heart and would know them better than anyone else, but it also shows how parents’ attitude toward their children is essential

in establishing self-confidence.

Sometimes people try to push their children to achieve the goals they were not able to achieve themselves which can be challenging to the young person who may not know what they want to do as a career and at the same time do not want to upset their parents.

This leads to misery and unhappiness when the young person realises that he is chasing his parents’ dreams and not his own.

The book goes on to describe how to find the right career starting by identifying your hobbies, values, the type of life you want and what are you willing to sacrifice.

Medical doctors for example spend many years studying medicine then postgraduate training and specialising which means long hours of study and several exams to pass before becoming a consultant.

Many doctors work long hours around people who are experiencing pain and ill health, which can be emotionally, draining. Knowing this before choosing medicine is crucial.

In the following chapters, the author provides

THE AUTHOR
STARTS HIS
BOOK BY
HIGHLIGHTING
THE ROLE
OF PARENTS,
TEACHERS, AND
CAREER COACHES
AS GUIDES FOR A
PERSON MAKING
CAREER CHOICES

the readers with tips to discover their strengths and find a career fit, what courses to take at university before taking them through the process of applying to a university, and how to proceed with career development after graduation.

The author provides the readers with tips to discover their strengths and find a career fit what courses to take at university before describing the process of applying to a university and how to proceed with career development after graduation.

He also shares secrets of a successful career and how to approach carer changes as one progresses through life.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading about the author’s personal experiences growing up in Kenya and how his parents had to work harder to support his education, which motivated him to reach his potential and help others around him.

In my opinion, this book should be made available for school students so they can have some insight on the journey awaiting them
I am confident you’ll enjoy ‘My Career, My Life,’ as much as I did. Happy reading!

German far right seeks to exploit farmer protests

Brandishing suspect flags and even posters calling for opponents to be sent to the gallows, the conspicuous presence of far-right protesters at week-long tractor blockades by farmers have sparked fears that extremists are seeking to exploit on the protest movement.

During a rally last week by German farmers angry at cuts in subsidies, police separated several dozen far-right supporters from the main demonstration.

The extremists from the “Freie Sachsen” group were brandishing royalist flags and mocked-up pictures of German politicians dressed as prisoners during the Dresden protest.

They are among radical groups that German authorities increasingly fear are seeking to co-opt the demonstrations, which began in December and have spread nationwide.

The protests escalated last week, when tractors blockaded roads and caused widespread disruption. Another major rally is planned for Monday in Berlin.

The farmers and some of their supporters have sought to distance themselves from the far-right groups. But the extremists seem determined to latch on to the protest movement.

The “Freie Sachsen” group, which brings together monarchists, conspiracy theorists and the far right, has posted messages of support for the farmers online.

Other groups, like neo-Nazi outfit “Third Voice” and nationalist movement “Ein Prozent” (One Per cent), have called for strikes and riots, according to the interior ministry.

They are accused of being behind controversial stunts during the protests, such as setting up gallows on the side of motorways and stopping Economy Minister Robert Habeck from disembarking from a ferry.

Habeck, from the Green party, has been a favourite target of the protests.

Stephan Kramer, intelligence service head in the eastern state of Thuringia, accused the far-right groups of “constantly and systematically seeking to subvert any form of legitimate public protest”. Since the start of the protests, farmers’ federation leader Joachim Rukwied has repeatedly insisted: “We don’t want right-wing and radical movements in our demonstrations.”

The farmers’ anger stems from a government decision to cut subsidies and tax breaks on diesel and agricultural vehicles.

The move was part of efforts by Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s coalition to find savings after Germany’s top court ruled in November that the government had broken debt rules. — AFP



REBECCA DAVIS
O'BRIEN

The writer is a reporter for TNYT

Trump’s dominance and snowy weather put Iowa’s caucus economy on ice

Even before a snowstorm brought Des Moines to a near standstill on Friday, the city felt decidedly more subdued than it usually does around the Iowa caucuses: quiet restaurants, empty streets, bartenders with little to do.

The numbers confirm it: The 2024 caucuses are expected to bring less than 40 per cent of the direct economic impact to the capital that the 2020 contest provided — an estimated \$4.2 million, down from \$11.3 million four years ago. Direct economic impact measures what visitors do, including sleeping, driving, eating and drinking. It is a striking decline that reflects, among other things, diminished media engagement in a presidential race that is less competitive than in past years, when the state has been inundated by presidential hopefuls, their campaigns and teams of journalists in hot pursuit. “Media is way down,” said Greg Edwards, CEO of the Greater Des Moines Convention and Visitors Bureau, which provided the numbers. “The major networks aren’t sending their major anchors like they have in the past.”

The \$4.2 million figure does not represent the caucuses’ total economic boom to Iowa.

Tens of millions of dollars have flowed into the state in recent months, culminating this week in a frenzy of events. The campaigns and their supporting super political action committees have spent \$119.6 million on television advertising in Iowa, according to an analysis by AdImpact, a media-tracking firm.

The impact of the caucuses on Iowa’s economy typically comes through two main channels. First, campaigns and political committees spend millions on Iowa-based consultants, strategists, advertising firms and television time as candidates try to introduce themselves to Iowans, generate interest and motivate likely caucusgoers. Will Rogers, a Republican operative in Des Moines, said a “crop of consultants” had grown up in Iowa, working to shepherd candidates toward the caucuses. He guessed that there were



Florida Governor and 2024 Republican presidential hopeful Ron DeSantis poses for a selfie with an Iowa voter at a campaign stop in Ankeny, Iowa. — AFP

more political consultants per capita in Iowa than almost anywhere else.

“The caucuses have minted a lot of money,” he said.

TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS HAVE FLOWED INTO IOWA STATE IN RECENT MONTHS, CULMINATING THE WEEK IN A FRENZY OF EVENTS

The caucuses also have a secondary effect on the economy, in the form of increased patronage at hotels, car-rental agencies, coffee shops, restaurants and even clothing stores. (Neophyte political reporters, for example, might forget to bring warm socks.) It is this measure that was lagging this season, even before the blizzard hit. Steve Cook, who runs an audiovisual company in Iowa City, is one of the many beneficiaries of the quadrennial surge of economic activity in Iowa.

His company, Steve Cook Sound, has handled events for several Republican candidates this cycle. To accommodate the increase in work in January, he brought in extra crews, covering dozens of events each week. In 2023, he had a tenfold increase in gross income, compared with threefold

in 2019, when he was primarily a subcontractor.

“The caucus is a huge bump for me,” Cook said. “The economic boom for Iowa is incredible.” But on Friday, Cook was holed up in his Iowa City office with his dog, directing his crews to stand down, or even turn around, while campaigns reassessed their plans because of the weather.

“I’ve had to do a lot of juggling as far as positioning people,” Cook said. He wasn’t even thinking yet, he said, about “revenue I could have made versus what I’m going to lose.”

This season, the Iowa boom has been hurt by a few factors, officials and political observers said, including Donald Trump’s runaway lead in primary polls. On the Democratic side, President Joe Biden has jettisoned Iowa in favour of South Carolina at the front of the nominating calendar — and, in any case, does not face any serious primary challenge. In 2020, more than 2,000 media representatives registered to cover the caucuses on the ground in Iowa, Edwards said. This time, there are just 900. In a downtown with 1,800 hotel rooms, that makes a big difference. The weather, too, has complicated things. The arrival of snow has led to cancelled flights. Subzero temperatures are expected to set in over the weekend.

— The New York Times

The changing face of the workplace...

Recent changes in the employment and workplace structures across several of the Sultanate of Oman's leading private sector employers, have almost certainly ushered in a wholesale revision of employment packages, more in keeping with economic imperatives and international employment agreements and standards.

While the informal 'sinking lid' policies being applied to expatriate employment are creating significantly greater opportunities for Omani graduates, the focus now must be to ensure the continued development of a vibrant national workforce, not only with continuous professional development and self-improvement as the basis of international competitiveness, but by meeting the organisational needs of new employees.

Employers must balance their naivety, and their job, and that's not easy! Most, for the last 50 years or so, have considered workplace inductions as fulfilling that task, however, wiser counsel is now prevailing, and what is known as 'onboarding,' over a three-, six-, or twelve-month period, linked to probationary employment, is now seen as much more effective in producing quality employees, and significantly higher rates of retention.

New employees will face challenges, but being prepared for the workplace, being wiser about what lies ahead, can mitigate those potential speed bumps. So here is some sage advice, cobbled over several generations on both sides of the employer/employee fence.

First, first impressions are vital, and being able to introduce yourself, demonstrating a measure of humility, eye contact, and a smile, are the four points of first contact: Lean in, handshake, first name, smile. Simple, yet effective. You will never remember everyone, or everything, from your workplace introduction... that's normal, but you can create a good impression, making your life much easier.

I know, 'we have the clocks, and you have the time...' But really, being at work on time, not leaving early, and taking your breaks according to your contract, is not only a matter of meeting your clients



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The writer is a media consultant

AN ABSOLUTE BOON IN LEARNING YOUR JOB, IS CARRYING A NOTEBOOK WITH YOU, AND MAKING FLOW CHARTS OF TASKS

needs but showing your respect for your employer and colleagues. Blaming 'traffic,' every day is a poor excuse for ten minutes of extra sleep. In a similar vein, maintain consistent dress, and personal presentation standards. Oh, and of course, wean yourself away from your mobile phone. Workplaces now rarely allow them.

An absolute boon in learning your job, is carrying a notebook with you, and making flow charts of tasks. There is nothing worse for colleagues than showing you the same thing repeatedly. Flow charts make all tasks easier when you consider that so many tasks today are process-driven... Step 1, step 2, etc, etc, and your ability to 'absorb' workplace information is critical towards being accepted as part of a team.

Task completion is imperative. There can be nothing worse for a client than to have their enquiry, or their needs, not met. This reflects badly upon you, and your employer, so, if you don't know... don't guess or assume... ask! And if you do get something wrong, don't ignore it, hope it will go away, or deny it. Own it! Take ownership, take responsibility, and take the consequences. Honesty is always the best policy.

In its earliest days, work can be a cold environment, you may feel like nobody 'likes' you, nobody will help you, and you have no friends... well, insecurity does that, and often a new employee is a threat to the status quo, so you must be what you will always need to be in the workplace... resilient. That ability to recover, adapt, bounce back, is what will make you indispensable to your employer. Well, that and a work ethic. Most of you will think you know what work is, but really you have no idea, and will find your workplace a rude awakening... but that's why you get the 'big bucks,' as they say.

The workplace, for most of us, completes us! In a very modest way, we are forced to confront difficulties in an almost gladiatorial manner, workplace 'gallows' humour helps, but as Nietzsche intimated about the school of life... 'what doesn't kill us makes us stronger.'

AEROBATIC FEATS!



The Surya Kiran aerobatic display team of the Indian Air Force (IAF) flies Hawk Mk-132 aircraft during an airshow in Mumbai, India, on Saturday. – Reuters

Pandemic or not, medical oxygen remains essential

Among the most shocking images from the Covid-19 pandemic were of people gasping for air, unable to breathe, their blood oxygen so severely depleted that some died in ambulances lined up outside hospitals. In wealthier countries, there was a panicked rush to expand ventilator capacity to deal with the surge of people experiencing acute respiratory distress. In countries like India and Kenya, there was an even more desperate scramble to find oxygen cylinders for loved ones. In low- and middle-income countries, nine out of ten hospitals lacked the equipment to provide oxygen therapy.

Seeing people dying for lack of oxygen, the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, Unitaid, USAID, and other global agencies took action. Under the umbrella of the Access to Covid-19 Tools Accelerator, we established the Oxygen Emergency Taskforce to coordinate the emergency response, broaden access, and secure supplies. Since then, the taskforce has overseen an investment exceeding \$1 billion for oxygen-related needs, primarily via the Global Fund Covid-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM). These funds have gone towards procuring oxygen cylinders and bulk



PETER SANDS

The writer is Executive Director of the Global Fund

FAR TOO MANY PEOPLE DIED FROM LACK OF OXYGEN DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS, AND FAR TOO MANY ARE DYING UNNECESSARILY TODAY FROM OTHER CONDITIONS BECAUSE MEDICAL OXYGEN IS NOT ROUTINELY AVAILABLE

storage tanks, installing oxygen production machines (known as pressure swing adsorption plants), and offering specialised training for health workers.

Tragically, this response came too late for too many people, because the peak of the pandemic coincided with a worldwide shortage of oxygen cylinders. Furnishing a hospital with a sustainable oxygen supply takes many months, given the need to install sophisticated equipment and pipework; and training health workers to provide oxygen safely cannot be done overnight.

Following the acute phase of the pandemic, the Oxygen Emergency Taskforce's focus shifted towards ensuring greater access to medical oxygen on a sustainable basis, so that what happened with Covid-19 is never repeated. Moreover, there is a compelling case for expanding access to medical oxygen even without the threat of a pandemic. Lack of oxygen in low- and middle-income countries leads to 800,000 preventable deaths every year. Newborn babies die of respiratory distress syndrome. Mothers die when complications in childbirth result in hypoxemia. Acute trauma victims — from violence or traffic

accidents, for example — also die from lack of oxygen. Surgical procedures for a wide range of conditions, including cancer, cannot be carried out without medical oxygen.

It would be difficult to identify a better example of an investment that simultaneously reinforces pandemic preparedness and saves lives now. Research by the Every Breath Counts Coalition shows that hospitals that offer paediatric care with a fully functioning supply of oxygen can reduce deaths due to child pneumonia by almost half, and all children's deaths by one-quarter.



In low- and middle-income countries, nine out of ten hospitals lacked the equipment to provide oxygen therapy.

To maintain the pace of progress in expanding access to medical oxygen, the Global Fund and Unitaid, alongside other partners, have transformed the Oxygen Emergency Taskforce into a Global Oxygen Alliance, known as GO2AL. Its objectives are to provide financial support for oxygen production and supply, comprehensive technical and training assistance, and advocacy for equitable access.

National governments are also taking the lead. For example, this past April, Kenyan President William Ruto and county governors set aside \$41.7 million

for a programme to distribute medical oxygen cylinders and bulk storage tanks to the country's healthcare centres. With the support of the Global Fund and other partners, Kenya also is building a nationwide network of oxygen-production plants, bulk-storage tanks, and cylinder distribution channels to ensure that hospitals and primary-care facilities have sufficient supplies.

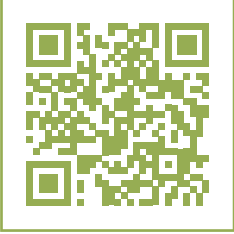
Far too many people died from lack of oxygen during the Covid-19 pandemic, and far too many are dying unnecessarily today from other conditions because medical oxygen is not routinely available. That is why we have embarked on the most ambitious effort yet to increase access to medical oxygen in low- and middle-income countries.

To date, and thanks to the generosity of donors led by the United States and Germany, the Global Fund has invested \$617 million to support 98 countries and six regional projects in their efforts to increase access to oxygen. Doing so will save millions of lives and significantly improve low- and middle-income countries' ability to respond to future disease threats.

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RED WARRIORS READY TO IMPRESS IN DOHA

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 13

Red Warriors are raring to go in the AFC Asian Cup 2023 and are all set in their desire to go further than last 16 round as they had reached to this round in the previous edition of the Asian Cup in UAE. With less than 48 hours, Oman national football team will commence their campaign in the Asian journey in Doha against Saudi Arabia on Tuesday after several training sessions took place at the Qatar University Football Complex during the couple days ago. Oman, under watchful eyes of the Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic, completed their preparations in style after registering two victories against UAE (1-0) and China (2-0) in their latest abroad camp in UAE, Abu Dhabi. Head coach Branko utilised the opportunity to give his squad the chance to play and evaluate them during the matches

beside impending different sets of teams technical tactics in both matches. Furthermore, the friendly games gave further picture for the coaching staff on the mistakes occurred in different areas including the defence and attacking sides. The head coach and his assisting team worked hard during the warm up sessions on improving those areas. Moreover, the focused were on training the players on snatching the proper scoring attempts and creating more attacking chances. The goalkeepers including Ibrahim al Mukhaini, Fayez al Rushedi and Ahmed al Rawahi trained separately under the supervision of the goalies coaching staff. The training sessions were attended by the Oman's ambassador in Qatar Sayyid Ammar bin Abdullah al Busaidy and OFA officials. Ahead of each training session, Coach Branko deliver an encouraging speech to the squad and directing them to deliver their best in this assignment.



The scheduled training session on Saturday and Sunday will be closed for the media while the training session on Monday will be open for media people for the first 15 minutes. Red Warriors will aim to register a strong start in the key Asian Cup opening match against Saudi Arabia on Tuesday at Khalifa International Stadium in Doha. Then, they will face a confident Southeast Asian team Thailand on January 21 at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium before concluding their group matches against Kyrgyzstan on January 25 in the same venue.

Unveiling details of hosting FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier in Muscat today

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 13

The organising committee of 2024 FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier – Muscat will unveil the details of the Olympic Qualifier event at Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat on Sunday in a press meet. Muscat city is among the three cities around the World to host one of the Hockey Olympic Qualifiers beside Valencia (Espain) and Ranchi (India). In Muscat, eight teams will vie for the three direct spots to the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris during January 15 to 21. The pool A will be comprised from Great Britain, Malaysia, Pakistan and China while Pool B will feature Germany, New Zealand, Canada and Chile teams. FIH decided moving the hosts of Hockey Olympic Qualifier from Pakistan to Oman after Oman Hockey Association (OHA) delivered a comprehensive and strong bid that featured sporting infrastructure including the newly built stadium and its relevant top sporting facilities. Hosting of the 2024 FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier – Muscat is a good rehearsal for the organising committee ahead of the main hosts represented by FIH Hockey 5s World Cup - Oman 2024 which will be hosted during January 24 to 31 at Oman Hockey Stadium in presence of 32 teams around the world. On the other hand, Dato Tayyab



Tayyab Ikram

Ikram, FIH President, will arrive to Muscat on Sunday and he will be one of the speakers during the press conference. He will highlight on the importance of the Hockey Olympic Qualifier event and Oman's readiness to host the international mega events. The 2024 FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier event will begin on Monday by holding four matches. Germany team will take on Canada in the opener at 14:00 and this match will be followed by New Zealand and Chile. Then, Malaysia will play against China and Great Britian will face Pakistan. The group matches will begin on Monday and will run until Thursday. On Saturday, the semifinal matches and classification matches will take place while in the following day the final match and the bronze match to decide the three top winners.





OAA CONCLUDES INTERNAL CAMP FOR TALENTED ATHLETES

The Oman Athletics Association (OAA) concluded the first indoor camp for the Talented Athletes as part of the Junior Athletes Preparation Center programme at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher. The camp was for four days during January 10 to 13 in presence of many young category participants. The sports festival accomplished promising results with many new young faces who produced an outstanding show.

Trophy and spectacle on the menu as Barca face Madrid in Super Cup final

RIYADH: The Real Madrid and Barcelona managers see the Spanish Super Cup final as an occasion that stands out both for the trophy on the line and the sporting spectacle it creates, as they prepare for Sunday's match to be played in Riyadh for the second year.

Super Cup's second El Clasico final in a row will see the LaLiga giants face off on foreign soil for the third time in a year, after Barcelona won last January's final 3-1, also in Riyadh, and beat Madrid 3-0 in a friendly in the United States in July.

"It's always exciting to prepare

for this type of match. It's going to be a great spectacle," Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti told reporters on Saturday.

Though Madrid have had the upper hand in the rivalry this season, beating Barca 2-1 in October and building a seven-point lead at the top of the league, Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez said no one had an advantage going into the final.

"I have the feeling that Madrid is stronger when Barca is stronger. Since I've been on the (Barcelona) bench, to win a title we've had to go above Madrid. It's all very even," he said.

"We will try to dominate the game, impose our personality, our way of playing and dominate the ball. We have the example of last year and this is the ideal scenario to show it again."

While Xavi drew inspiration from last year's final, Ancelotti played down its relevance.

"Real Madrid don't go out for revenge, they go out to the limit because that's the requirement of this shirt and this club," he said.

"We're one step away from the first trophy of the season. We're going to try to do what we have to do, which is to try to win the final." — Reuters



Spanish Super Cup - Real Madrid Training

Morris scores late equaliser to rescue point for Luton at Burnley



Luton Town's Carlton Morris scores their first goal past Burnley's James Trafford. — Reuters

BURNLEY, England: Carlton Morris scored a controversial last-gasp goal as Luton Town escaped Turf Moor with a precious point against Burnley in a 1-1 Premier League draw on Friday between two sides fighting relegation.

The hosts looked set for victory after Zeki Amdouni's first-half goal before Morris headed in the equaliser in the 92nd minute. Burnley protested that Luton's Elijah Adebayo impeded goalkeeper James Trafford, but following a VAR check, the goal stood.

"I'm new to this ownership thing, so if I get fined by the Premier League, so be it... This is as blatant and obvious of a foul as you could have," Burnley part-owner and former NFL player JJ Watt posted on X. "To miss this on the field AND miss this on VAR is truly disgraceful."

Burnley manager Vincent Kompany was perplexed by the call, telling TNT "I don't get it anymore."

"There's a clear attempt to stop the goalkeeper getting up," he added. "It's experience, it's well done to try, it doesn't take anything away from the performance for Luton, I thought they were incredible today, but it's just the moment there the referees have got to get it right."

Rob Edwards' Luton are 18th in the standings but level on 16 points with 17th-placed Everton. Burnley are 19th with 12 points, having played one game more



than their opponents.

"An away point in the Premier League is big, especially for a team in our position," Edwards told TNT.

The match was all Luton before Amdouni scored against the run of play in the 36th minute after Wilson Odobert beat his man with a step-over then played the ball across the box for Amdouni to fire home his fourth league goal of the season.

The goal lifted Burnley and the game that marked the return of the Premier League after a 10-day break was evenly matched the rest of the way, with Luton having a narrow 14-13 edge on shots over the hosts throughout the match.

Luton had some good earlier chances including Ross Barkley's first-half rocket that forced Trafford into an acrobatic leap to

save.

But Trafford and Burnley were aggrieved in stoppage time when the keeper appeared to be prevented, by the frame of Adebayo, from challenging a ball into the middle of the box which Morris rose to head in to salvage a draw for the visitors.

"To be honest I have seen a couple where goalkeepers get protection and I am pleased they (VAR) have seen sense as the big man just out jumped him," the goalscorer said. "We definitely deserved something, but we dug in and that shows our character and what we are about."

Chelsea striker David Fofana watched the match from the stands. Fofana, 21, has been linked in British media reports with a loan move to Burnley after the forward's loan spell at German side Union Berlin was cut short. — Reuters

Man City's Haaland out until end of January, says Guardiola

LONDON: Manchester City striker Erling Haaland will be sidelined until the end of January due to a foot injury, manager Pep Guardiola said.

City play Newcastle United in the Premier League later on Saturday, visit Tottenham Hotspur in the fourth round of the FA Cup on Jan. 26 before hosting Burnley in the league on Jan. 31.

Guardiola said he expects the 23-year-old Norwegian to return to training during their camp in Abu Dhabi next week.

"It's the bone. It needs time," Guardiola told reporters ahead of

the trip to St. James' Park.

"It's fine, but the doctors decided to stop for one week and maybe restart in Abu Dhabi. Hopefully, at the end of this month, he'll be ready. It was a little bit more than we expected in the beginning."

Haaland, the joint top scorer in the Premier League alongside Liverpool's Mohamed Salah with 14 goals, has missed City's last eight games in all competitions.

"We need him," Guardiola said. "Hopefully he can come back and play the last four or five months without a problem."

The City manager also said



Chelsea's Marc Cucurella fouls Manchester City's Erling Braut Haaland to concede a penalty. — Reuters

Swiss defender Manuel Akanji would be out of action until the end of the month but did have some positive news on Kevin De Bruyne, with the Belgian set to return to the starting 11.

The 32-year-old, who suffered a hamstring injury on the first day of the season against Burnley, came on as a substitute in the FA Cup win over Huddersfield last weekend.

Guardiola gave a positive response when asked if the midfielder could start at Newcastle. "Yes. From what I saw yesterday I feel really good, he was dynamic, and the minutes

he played was better than the training sessions before the Huddersfield game.

"He is getting better now, he will have a few days off after this game and can train in Abu Dhabi to be better for the next few months," he added.

City are third, five points behind leaders Liverpool, but Guardiola's side have a game in hand and the manager still believes they can win a fourth consecutive league title.

"How many points left? 18 or 19 games ... so obviously mathematically possible," the manager said. — Reuters



Australia cruise past India in Asian Cup group opener

AL RAYYAN, QATAR: Australia dominated India to beat the south Asian side 2-0 in their Asian Cup Group B opener on Saturday in front of a crowd largely made up of Indian fans at the Ahmad bin Ali Stadium.

After a cagey opening 45 minutes, Australia got on the board through Jackson Irvine before Jordan Bos made it 2-0 seconds after coming on as a substitute.

The encounter felt almost like a home game for India with the crowd at the Ahmad bin Ali Stadium largely made up of fans from the Indian diaspora in Doha and they made their presence felt, roaring the team on despite Australia's early dominance.

Spurred on by the crowd, Indian skipper Sunil Chhetri missed a golden opportunity when he sent a header wide, but Australia turned the screws thereafter and controlled possession as India rarely managed to venture out of their own half.

With India pegged back, Connor Metcalfe saw one of his efforts swatted aside by Gurpreet Singh and Mitchell Duke had a close-range shot blocked by Sandesh Jhingan while Martin Boyle skied a volley from the edge of the six-yard box.

India held firm until the break, but five minutes after the restart Gurpreet failed to deal with a cross, his tame effort to palm it away falling to Irvine, who needed no second invitation to score.

The goal took the wind out of India's sails and Australia capitalised with a second in the 73rd minute when Riley McGree dribbled into the box and cut a pass back to Bos to score seconds after coming on.

The match also saw Japan's Yoshimi Yamashita become the first woman referee to officiate a men's Asian Cup encounter, with assistant referees Makoto Bozono and Naomi Teshirogi making it an all-female trio. — Reuters



India's midfielder #07 Anirudh Thapa and defender #02 Rahul Bheke fight for the ball with Australia's forward #09 Bruno Fornaroli during the Qatar 2023 AFC Asian Cup Group B football match between Australia and India at the Ahmad bin Ali Stadium in Al-Rayyan, west of Doha. — AFP

Japan eye on strong start against Vietnam

IRAN TAKE ON PALESTINE WHILE UAE TO FACE HONG KONG IN GROUP C

DOHA: Philippe Troussier will draw inspiration from Japan's success at the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 when he leads Vietnam against his old employers in the nations' intriguing Group D opener in the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 on Sunday.

The Frenchman led the Japanese to the AFC Asian Cup title in Lebanon in 2000 but will go head-to-head against the Samurai Blue for the first time at Al Thumama Stadium aiming to do to what Hajime Moriyasu's side did against Germany and Spain a little over a year ago.

Japan handed the European duo surprise defeats in the group phase of the Fifa World Cup to progress to the knockout rounds and Troussier hopes to use those performances as a template as his current team eye a place in the Round of 16.

"It's important to be reactive, to disturb them, to destroy them, to cut the line between them, to make them know we can be aggressive and maybe to make trouble to the work of this team, like Japan made big trouble against Germany," Troussier said.

"(Spain lost) not because Japan was better, Japan destroyed them and it's clear we are in this position."

The nations met at the quarterfinal stage of the last AFC Asian Cup, with Japan handing the Vietnamese a 1-0 defeat after the Southeast Asians had secured their place in the knockout

rounds by the slimmest of margins.

Moriyasu, head coach of Japan, confirmed Kaoru Mitoma will not start against Vietnam as he continues to recover from an ankle injury sustained in the Premier League last month and that the Brighton & Hove Albion winger will be assessed ahead of the second group game against Iraq.

The Japan coach took his nation to the 2019 final and he will be looking to manage his squad as best as possible as he attempts to go one step further in 2023. "Mr. Troussier is the former coach of Japan and he knows Japanese football well," said Moriyasu. "I'm sure he's done a lot of analysis of our team but we have done a lot of analysis of their team too. My coaching staff have been working hard on this.

"It will be a very good game, but we have to have balance between being aggressive and also be cautious of their attack as well.

"We have seven matches if we go to the final so we have to take each match by itself and I think all our players will be participating as a team. We have to think about the seven matches in total."

IRAN VS PALESTINE
Islamic Republic of Iran head coach Amir Ghalenoei is eyeing a winning start when his side take on Palestine in their AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 opener on Sunday as he returns to the country where he played four decades ago.



Vietnam players during training session

The 60-year-old IR Iran boss had previously managed Team Melli in the 2007 AFC Asian Cup, where they reached the quarterfinals, but he believes the game in Asia has made huge leaps since the tournament held in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

"I would like to say I'm very happy being in Qatar. I have very good memories here, I played here 40 years ago at Al Sadd Club and I have very happy memories here," said Ghalenoei, who wore the colours of the Qatari giants between 1987 and 1989, leading them to two consecutive league titles.

"I believe this Asian Cup will be one of the best because Qatar has experience from the World Cup so they will organise a great competition."

Meanwhile, Palestine head coach Makram Daboub hailed his upcoming opponents as one of his favourites to win the title, but insisted his squad are relishing the challenge.

"Iran are one of the best teams in the continent. They have a lot of top players and are a talented group. It's between them, Korea Republic and Japan for the title in my opinion. Recently we played very well against Australia, Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia, so in one match, we fancy our chances, and we can dream of going through to the next round," said Daboub.

The Tunisian tactician has been working in Palestinian football since 2010 before eventually being appointed head coach of the national team in 2021, and he believes his players are used to overcoming challenges.

UAE VS HONG KONG
Head coach Paulo Bento will warn his United Arab Emirates players against underestimating Hong Kong when the two sides meet in their opening AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023 Group C tie on Sunday.

The East Asian team are the lowest ranked side in the competition but Bento said his players must be cautious in their approach.

"We have a lot of respect for our opponents. They play an intense game and are very good at making transitions, so I don't think the match is going to be

easy at all," said the former South Korea head coach.

"Moreover, we have a fairly young team and while it's a great opportunity for the players to experience a competition of this stature, it would have been great if a couple of our more experienced players, who are nursing injuries, had been available for the first match."

"But in the end, what matters is the attitude and despite being young and maybe less experienced than the players in many other teams, these boys have the hunger to make their country proud, which to me is the utmost priority," said Bento.

Hong Kong head coach Jorn Andersen was pragmatic in his expectations, despite his side qualifying for the AFC Asian Cup for the first time since 1968 and advancing to the 2022 Asian Games semifinals, also for the first time.

"We are coming here after being away for over five decades and we are very aware of the gap that exists between us and some of the higher-ranked teams. But on a positive note, it is a great opportunity for Hong Kong, China football," said Andersen.

Despite setting low expectations, the Norwegian said the recent addition of players such as Everton Camargo and Michael Udebuluzor had already raised the bar and fostered a renewed sense of confidence in the team. — AFC



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Production gathering station in Greater Saqr Area contributes 30,000 boepd

MUSCAT: As part of Petroleum Development Oman's (PDO) efforts to enhance the oil production for the Sultanate of Oman through sustainable methods, the company awarded the Production Gathering Station in the Greater Saqr Area in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands to Enerflex in August 2021.

PDO will celebrate the opening of the station next Wednesday at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance.

Eng Ali bin Mohammed al Wardi, Director of Strategic Projects (South) at Petroleum Development Oman, said that the project, which is located near the Amal oil field in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands, aims to enhance the extraction of oil from six fields, namely Saqr, Northeast Saqr, North Saqr, Masbah, Rakd, and South Rakd, using a unified development methodology and utilising water-flooding techniques.

He added, in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), that the total cost of the project, both capital and operational, is RO 77 million and it consists of two main sections.

The first section includes the construction of the production gathering station itself (which includes the construction of the enhanced flotation tank along with oil export pumps, high-pressure pumps for injecting the accompanying water, a clean energy production unit from



The total cost of the project, both capital and operational, is RO 77 million.



PDO plans to reduce the company's emissions by 50 per cent by 2030.

recycling the associated gas instead of burning it, and the construction of all necessary facilities such as control room, substation and transformers).

The second section involves works in the fields of the Greater Saqr Area, which extend over an area of 112 square kilometres (such as the main oil delivery pipelines, a gas pipeline with a length of 23 km, and water

injection pipelines).

The project took 30 months to implement, and the station was operational on February 22, 2023. He clarified that the production capacity of the station is approximately 30,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boepd).

Regarding the project's contribution to the local value added, Al Wardi said

that Omani manpower in the project's operations represents more than 80 per cent so far, distributed across various administrative levels.

He noted that spending on small and medium-sized enterprises in providing goods and services amounted to more than RO 2.265 million, while spending on registered suppliers in Oman exceeded RO 11.57 million.

He confirmed that the project aligns with the strategic direction of PDO in terms of focusing on achieving the target of oil production growth in a sustainable manner, as well as plans to reduce the company's emissions by 50 per cent by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 (which is one of the national objectives).

It is estimated that this project will contribute to reducing



Omani manpower in the project's operations represents more than 80 per cent so far, distributed across various administrative levels

ENG ALI BIN MOHAMMED AL WARDI

Director of Strategic Projects (South)
Petroleum Development Oman

approximately 6,600 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent annually.

Al Wardi said that the project follows a policy of not routine flaring of gas associated with production, in line with the company's commitment to the World Bank's 2030 initiative to stop routine flaring; as the station is equipped with units for gas extraction and reuse in operational activities, and the remaining gas is sent to a gas-fired generator to generate electricity consumed in the project. — ONA

Oman, Saudi discuss ways to enhance economic relations



MUSCAT: Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the aim of enhancing bilateral cooperation and economic relations between the two sisterly countries.

During his visit, he met Eng Khaled bin Abdulaziz al Falih, Saudi Minister of Investment, Bandar bin Ibrahim bin Abdullah al Khorayef, Saudi Minister of Industry and Mineral Wealth, Faisal bin Fadel al Ibrahim, Minister of Economy and Planning, Eng Suhail bin Mohammed Abanmi, Chairman of the Zakat, Tax and Customs Authority, and Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al Abduljabbar, President of the General Authority for Foreign Trade of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The meeting discussed ways to enhance joint cooperation and develop bilateral relations between the two sisterly countries in the fields of trade, industry and investment promotion, facilitating the difficulties facing trade between them, and increasing trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in continuation of the efforts of the two countries to enhance trade exchange continuously and create strategic economic partnerships in various fields, and enhance Omani exports to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The meeting was attended by Faisal bin Turki al Said, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman accredited to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and several officials from both sides. — ONA

Award announced for 400kV Oman Direct Link power project

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 13

Prominent international energy consultancy firm Energoprojekt Entel has announced that it has been selected by the Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority (GCCIA) to provide consultancy services linked to the execution of the Oman Direct Link project — a new interconnection initiative that will link the main grid of the Sultanate of Oman with that of the GCCIA.

A joint stock company collectively owned by the GCC states, the GCCIA is responsible for constructing, maintaining and operating the 400kV grid interconnection of the national grids of the six-member GCC

bloc.

In a post, the regional arm of Energoprojekt Entel described the 400kV Oman Direct Link Project as "one of the most prestigious power transmission projects in the Gulf region in recent years".

"Interconnecting electrical grids of the Gulf countries is paving the way for a new era of energy collaboration and power trading in the Gulf region and (Energoprojekt Entel) is honoured that it can play its part in this process," it further noted.

According to the project consultant, the 400kV Oman Direct Link initiative will enable direct interconnectivity between the existing GCCIA 400kV transmission network with Oman's main grid.

It entails the construction



The new 528-km interconnect is due for completion in 2026.

of a new 400kV double circuit overhead line connection, spanning a total route length of 528 km, from GCCIA's Silaa

Substation in the UAE to an existing 400/220kV substation of Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) at Ibri.

En route, this overhead line will be integrated with an intermediate 400kV GCCIA substation located near Madinat Zayed in the UAE, as well as a new 400kV GCCIA substation in Oman, adjacent to the existing 400/220kV substation of OETC in Ibri.

Slated for completion in 2026, the 400kV Oman Direct Link project will be the second such interconnect between Oman and the GCC bloc when it eventually comes on line. The first interconnect was established in 2012 at Mahadha where a 220 kV system links Oman with the GCCIA via the UAE (Abu Dhabi) power system.

According to Nama Power and Water Procurement Co (PWP) — the sole national buyer

of electricity and potable water in Oman — the new 400kV interconnection will open up direct access with all member states of the GCCIA — a move that will "enhance the benefits in stability, generation planning and trade opportunities relative to the existing 220 kV link via the UAE".

Highlighting the significance of the project in its 7-Year Outlook for 2023–2029, Nama PWP noted that the project would enable net transfer capacity to increase from 400 MW presently to about 1,300 MW when it is operational.

Thus, in addition to facilitating two-way power transfers, particularly during emergencies, the two interconnects will also contribute to planning reserve requirements, it added.

Omran Group celebrates completion of Phase 1 of Madinat Al Irfan project (East)



MUSCAT: In line with efforts aimed at achieving the goals of the national tourism strategy and consolidating the status of the Sultanate of Oman as a global tourist destination, the Oman Tourism Development (Company Omran Group) will celebrate the completion of Phase 1 of Al Irfan City (East) through the official opening of JW Marriott Muscat Hotel tomorrow (Monday).

The opening ceremony will be under the auspices of Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. JW Marriott Muscat Hotel, a 5-star hotel with an investment cost of approximately RO 47 million, features 304 hotel rooms and suites.

It is part of the Marriott Bonvoy International Hotel chain and the first JW Marriott hotel in the Sultanate of Oman, serving as a major complement to the first phase of the city's development project and the second completed hotel within it.

The opening of the hotel, which has achieved the (LEED Gold) certification issued by the US Green Building Council, comes as part of the efforts of Omran Group to keep pace with the growing tourism movement in the Sultanate of Oman by

enhancing the assets of the hotel group and developing tourist destinations.

The hotel is distinguished by its strategic location in the heart of Madinat Al Irfan (East) and its direct connection to the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, contributing to supporting the tourism movement in general and promoting efforts for the Sultanate of Oman to become a global centre for hosting major meetings, conferences, and exhibitions.

Al Irfan City (East), which has completed its first phase with the opening of JW Marriott Muscat, also includes the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, a four-star Crowne Plaza hotel, and a business complex to serve as the headquarters for leading companies such as Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel).

The city represents a vibrant tourist destination that contributes to enhancing social, economic, and environmental aspects, reflecting the pivotal role of Omran Group in the development of the tourism sector in Oman through urban development projects that support the country's tourism growth.

— ONA

Nama completes third phase of sewage network in Suhar

SUHAR: Nama Water Services is working on implementing projects that aim to preserve the environment and public health, protect groundwater sources from pollution, and provide an alternative source of fresh water that can be used for irrigation of gardens and green spaces and other uses in light of population and urban growth, through expanding sewage water transportation networks.

Among the projects currently being implemented by the company is the completion of the third phase of the sewage network in Suhar. The project aims to serve the community by connecting approximately 4200 residential and commercial units in the area and linking them to the existing sewage network according to the project's plans. The project was awarded in December 2023, and it is expected to be completed by December 2025.

Engineer Hassan bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al Farsi, Projects Director in the Regional Governorates at Nama Water Services, said that the project will provide sewage services in some residential and commercial areas in Hambar and Al-Tareef that were not covered in previous projects, in addition to the Ghail Al-Shbool area and the coastal areas in Sabara, Al-Shizaw, and Al-Hazira, where sewage services will be provided using the air discharge technique due to the high level of groundwater in these areas.

He also noted that the Gulf Services Company for Petrochemicals and Trade will implement the project.

He added, in a statement to



Eng Hassan bin Abdullah bin Mohammed al Farsi

the Oman News Agency, that the project will serve the community, reduce their suffering by disposing of sewage waste in a faster, safer, and healthier way, and reduce the number of sewage water tankers in the areas, which will contribute to reducing costs for the subscribers.

He explained that the completion of the sewage network construction project in the state of Suhar (Phase III) is

one of the important projects to complete the infrastructure in Al Batinah North Governorate and to continue the government's efforts to provide sewage services in the regional governorates.

The project comes as a completion of the sewage project and rehabilitation of the existing sewage network.

He pointed out that the project includes the construction of a sewage network with a total length of 40 km, with diameters ranging from 150 to 1000 mm, and air discharge systems in the coastal areas with a total length of 3 km, pumping lines with a total length of 3 km, and improving the efficiency of the pumping stations in Al-Hijrah, Al-Hambar 6, and Al-Hambar C-1, as well as the construction of a lift station in Ghail Al-

Shbool and the completion of construction works at the pumping stations in Al-Tareef and Al-Hambar-1, and the air discharge stations in Al-Hazira and Al-Shizaw, in addition to completing the construction works.

Al Farsi said that the total cost of the project is RO 11.572 million, including all its facilities and components.

He confirmed that with the cooperation of the residents and residents' understanding of the importance of implementing this vital project, and their positive response to the implementing company and their appreciation of the construction operations accompanying the project, all of this will contribute to the success of the project in order to provide a better service to the community.

— ONA

Chery Tiggo 8 series receives 5-star safety rating in ANCAP

MUSCAT: Recently, ANCAP (Australian New Car Assessment Programme) has released the results of the first official test result under the 2023 new standards, and the Chery Tiggo 7 Pro has achieved the highest level of "Five-Star Safety Rating".

As an authoritative vehicle safety assessment organisation in Australia and New Zealand, ANCAP (Australian New Car Assessment Programme) refers to and aligns with the ENCAP (European New Car Assessment Programme), making it one of the most authoritative and stringent standards for evaluating the overall safety performance of new cars.

Since January 1st, 2023, ANCAP has further upgraded its testing standards, requiring vehicles to achieve the highest safety standards in all test modules, including adult occupant protection, child safety protection, pedestrian or cyclist and motorcycle user protection, and safety assistance, to obtain ANCAP five-star safety rating.

The Chery Tiggo 7 Pro's

CHERY TIGGO 7 PRO



attainment of this rating fully confirms Chery's steadfast commitment to product safety.

The Chery Tiggo 8 series, like the Tiggo 7 Pro, are developed on Chery's professional SUV platform — the T1X platform — with equally excellent safety performance as the Tiggo 7 Pro.

The T1X platform, based on precise positioning for mainstream consumer groups, integrates Chery's deep technological reserves accumulated in the positive development process.

It incorporates five core advantage modules: an integrated high-efficiency engine, a high-safety body structure, a first-class

suspension system, an electric power steering system, and an in-vehicle connectivity system.

Through platform and modular operations, as well as complete vehicle testing and other validation development processes, the T1X platform produces genuinely high-quality and high-safety vehicles.

The T1X platform endows the Chery Tiggo 8 series with a high-strength integrated body, featuring a seven-horizontal and seven-vertical ladder-type frame, a four-large-ring and sixteen-small-ring circular body skeleton, and a reinforced ultra-safe body structure with bamboo-joint

construction.

Multiple pieces of high-strength hot-formed steel from Benteler and galvanised steel plates covering the complete vehicle further enhance the safety factor of the body.

The Tiggo 8 series highlights its advanced level of intelligence in active safety configurations. It is equipped with several L2-level intelligent driving assistance systems, including the AEB (Automatic Emergency Braking), ACC (Adaptive Cruise Control), LKA (Lane Keeping Assistance), and a 360-degree bird's-eye view panoramic ultra-clear rear view camera.

In Oman, Chery vehicles are distributed by Saud Bahwan Group. For the latest press releases, test Drive requests and more, please visit www.chery.om, www.youtube.com/@OmanChery, www.facebook.com/CheryAutoOman, and www.instagram.com/cheryoman. For any further details & to ascertain the availability of stocks, please visit the Chery Showroom at Wattayah.

Hotel revenues in Oman reach RO 204.18 million



MUSCAT: Hotel revenues classified as 3 to 5 stars in the Sultanate of Oman reached approximately RO 204.187 million by end of November 2023, compared to RO 161.262,000 million by end of November 2022, with an increase of 26.6% according to statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total number of hotel guests also increased by 30.3% to reach 1,883,993 guests by the end of November 2023, compared to 1,446,189 guests in the same period of 2022, while the occupancy rate increased by 9%.

The statistics showed that the number of Omani guests reached 716,585, an increase of 11.3%, while the number of Gulf guests also increased by 27.9% to reach 185,671.

THE TOTAL NUMBER OF HOTEL GUESTS ALSO INCREASED BY 30.3% TO REACH 1,883,993 GUESTS BY THE END OF NOVEMBER 2023, COMPARED TO 1,446,189 GUESTS IN THE SAME PERIOD OF 2022, WHILE THE OCCUPANCY RATE INCREASED BY 9%.

The number of European guests increased by 47.1% to reach 447,033.

The statistics indicate that the number of American guests reached 52,021, while the number of African guests reached 10,588, with a growth rate of 35.6%.

The number of Asian guests increased by 41.8% to reach 270,320, and the number of Oceanian guests reached 40,188, with an increase of 165.4%.

— ONA



MSX rings bell to inaugurate liquidity provider service



MUSCAT: Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) celebrates today, with the ringing of the bell to inaugurate the liquidity provider service, under the auspices of Abdullah bin Salem al Salmi, the CEO of the Capital Market Authority.

Omantel has appointed United Securities Company as the liquidity provider for its shares, while Bank Sohar International has appointed Osool Capital as the liquidity provider for its listed bank shares on Muscat Stock Exchange.

Mustafa bin Ahmed Salman (pictured), Chairman of United Securities LLC, explained that the liquidity provider is essentially a trader who trades in large quantities of shares to help ensure that market participants can continuously buy and sell assets when they wish to do so.

Liquidity providers perform important functions in the market, such as encouraging price stability, reducing volatility, and minimising the spread between supply and demand, making trading more cost-effective.

He said in a statement to the Oman News Agency (ONA) that all these factors make the stock exchange more attractive and consequently attract investors. He pointed out that with the entry of liquidity providers into MSX, the exchange will witness an increase in volumes and a gradual improvement in prices to their fair levels.

The accumulation and growth of these volumes will help MSX raise its evaluation to the level of emerging markets, and in the event of entering this category, a group of international investments will enter the market automatically.

He added that liquidity provisioning operations for shares of any company fall within the standards, frameworks, governance, and control that impose strict conditions on the operations of the company operating as a liquidity provider, where the company commits to placing a large number of orders on the company to create market depth and provide different types of demand at various levels.

He pointed out that the active trading of the company's shares enables the required mechanics to reach the fair price of the company's shares, in addition to providing comfort to investors by having the possibility of entering and exiting the investment at their convenience. — **ONA**

Seven project categories eligible for green finance in Oman



Offshore wind projects are among scores of green schemes that will qualify for sustainable finance under a new framework unveiled by the Ministry of Finance last week (Picture courtesy: IEA)

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 13

Projects ranging from rail electrification and energy storage systems to offshore wind farms and waste-to-energy schemes are among dozens of initiatives that will qualify for green finance under the Sustainable Finance Framework launched by the Sultanate of Oman last week.

The framework, the first of its kind in the Gulf region, represents a landmark effort by the Omani government to unlock sustainable funding sources, notably in the form of green bonds and sukuk, to help meet the sizable financing requirements of the country as it transitions towards a low-carbon future.

According to the Ministry of Finance, which is overseeing the implementation of the Sustainable Finance Framework, eligible green projects and initiatives fall broadly in the following seven categories:

Renewable Energy: Falling in this category are — Solar PV and Concentrated Solar Power projects (with a minimum of 85% power generation derived from solar sources); Onshore and offshore wind projects; Transmission, distribution and storage infrastructure, equipment, component, and technology associated with renewable energy facilities with lifecycle GHG emissions intensity below 100gCO₂e/kWh; and

Green hydrogen / green ammonia projects with life-cycle GHG emissions of lower than 3tCO₂e/tH₂, and limited to the production and storage of hydrogen using electrolysis powered entirely with 100% renewable energy.

Clean Transportation: Low emission transportation and related infrastructure, encompassing Electrified railway for passenger and freight and related infrastructure; Zero tailpipe emissions passenger and freight vehicles and related infrastructure such as electric vehicle charging stations; Public transportation with zero tailpipe emissions; Infrastructure dedicated to the provision of shore-side electrical power to vessels at berth (not for the transport or storage of fossil fuels); and Non-motorised forms of transportation such as pedestrian walkways and cycling lanes.

Water Management: New or existing infrastructure to improve water usage efficiency, promote water recycling and reuse, such as Centralised wastewater collection and treatment systems; Projects to improve water usage efficiency such as water pressure management systems, pump and pipe systems; Water collection systems to enhance water recycling and reuse; and Rainwater drainage systems to manage surface water run-off.

Pollution Prevention and Control: Waste collection,

waste processing, waste recycling projects and facilities in accordance with waste segregated at source and in line with the Oman national waste management hierarchy; Waste-to-energy plants for the generation of electricity and/or heat; and Composting infrastructure and facilities.

Energy Efficiency: Projects to support the construction, operation, maintenance and upgrade of smart power grids, power storage systems, smart metering systems and other smart electricity systems that manage the intermittency of renewables for direct connections of renewable energy capacities; Renovation and installation of energy-efficient technologies and products that improve the operational energy efficiency by at least 30% in the building sector; Improve power usage effectiveness (PUE) of existing data centres by deploying energy saving measures such as a deep cooling system in which deep ocean water is used to cool computing equipment.

Environmentally Sustainable Management: Conservation and restoration of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and habitats such as mangroves with an aim of enhancing the biodiversity of marine organisms; and Development of fisheries and aquaculture certified by key international institutions.

Climate Change Adaptation: Projects to increase the resilience

and adaptive capabilities of Oman across all sectors, including Early warning systems for natural disaster and monitoring of radiation; Flood prevention schemes; Crop preservation activities (from drought or flood); Coastal zone management, and Rehabilitation of streams.

However, excluded from the scope of green financing are the following projects and initiatives: Fossil fuel related activities, including the exploration, production or transportation of fossil fuel; Generation of nuclear power; Rail infrastructure dedicated for the transportation of fossil fuels; Renewable energy projects generating energy from biomass using feedstock originating from protected areas; Waste incineration activities including waste to energy facilities that incinerate recyclable or reusable materials or that divert waste from other usage; Landfill projects; and Vehicles with tailpipe emissions above 50 g CO₂e/km.

Also eligible for sustainable finance are numerous other 'Social' projects, initiatives and activities distributed under the following categories: Affordable Basic Infrastructure; Access to Essential Services — Education and Healthcare; Affordable Housing; Employment Generation (via SME financing); Socioeconomic Advancement and Empowerment; and Food Security.

Total credit balance granted by Omani banking sector reaches RO 30.9 billion

MUSCAT: Data issued by the Central Bank of Oman indicate that the total credit balance granted by the Omani banking sector increased by 5.8% at the end of November 2023, reaching RO 30.9 billion.

As for credit granted to the private sector, it recorded a growth of 4.8%, reaching RO 25.5 billion at the end of November 2023.

Data related to its distribution among various sectors indicates that non-financial companies accounted for the largest share, reaching 45.2% at the end of November 2023.

This was followed by the individual sector with a percentage of 45.1%. The remaining percentage was distributed among the financial companies sector with 5.9% and other sectors with 3.8%. Total deposits in the banking sector recorded a growth of 9.9%, reaching RO 28.4 billion at the end of November 2023.

Within this total, private sector deposits in the banking system witnessed an increase of 9.2%, reaching RO 18.9 billion at the end of November 2023.

When looking at the distribution of the total deposit base for the private sector among various sectors, the figures indicate that the individual sector accounted for the largest share, approximately 49.7%, followed by non-financial companies and financial companies sectors with shares of 34.1% and 13.4% respectively.

The remaining percentage of 2.8% was distributed among other sectors. — **ONA**

German delegation to explore investment opportunities in Oman

MUSCAT: The first executive plan for Oman Vision 2040 (the tenth five-year plan 2021-2025) has approved several strategic programmes that embody the concept of economic diplomacy, including the programme 'Increasing the Contribution of Foreign Trade in Economic Activity,' which aims to activate the role of embassies and commercial representation offices in marketing for the Sultanate of Oman and attracting investments.

Maitha bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Federal Republic of Germany, explained that the visit of Dr Robert Habek, Deputy Chancellor and Minister of Economic Affairs and Climate Action of Germany, and the



Maitha bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the Federal Republic of Germany.

accompanying trade delegation, comes according to the plan of the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Berlin and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to learn about the available investment opportunities in various targeted



economic sectors in Oman Vision 2040, expressing her hope that such visits would result in signing agreements and contracts that would stimulate the Omani economy.

She said in a statement to the Omani News Agency (ONA) that

the visit of the official and the accompanying trade delegation aims to seek new markets and enter into special trade partnerships in the sectors of renewable energy, gas, logistics, and food security.

She pointed out that most of the topics discussed during the

meeting with Omani officials revolved around the investment climate in the Sultanate of Oman and the provided incentives, as well as the search for new markets for gas and the possibility of importing Omani gas in larger quantities, especially with the gas crisis and its rising prices in Europe in general and Germany in particular, due to the Russian-Ukrainian situation.

She also mentioned that a German company signed an agreement two months ago with the Oman LNG to supply gas to Germany.

She emphasised that the role of the Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman in Berlin is to build bridges of communication between all sectors and provide Omani and

German investors with all the information related to investment and available investment opportunities in both countries.

She confirmed that she has noticed an increase in the number of Omani investors and Omani companies going to Germany in recent times to participate in conferences and exhibitions.

Regarding the tourism sector, Maitha bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah explained that the Sultanate of Oman will be the official partner of the largest travel and tourism exhibition in the world in Berlin for this year 2024, scheduled to be held in early March, with an expected participation of 64 companies representing the travel and tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman. — **ONA**

When usability affects business



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The author is member of
the International Press
Association

I HOPE THAT TECH
VISIONARIES SMARTER
THAN ME ARE NOW
ENVISIONING A FUTURE
WHERE ALL THIS
AUTHENTICATION NEED
IS BALANCED AROUND
THE RISKS ASSOCIATED
WITH A SECURITY
BREACH

Today's column is going to be unusual. There will be no business data quoted, only anecdotes aimed at illustrating how, in some cases, technology has grown to be a hurdle rather than a simplification.

Let me start with a question for the readers: Have you ever had a bad tech day? One of those days when nothing seems to work: the WiFi connection is lost, internet banking is down, and the 25th OTP of the day is not reaching your phone.

Those days when technology seems to have gone on strike against us. I just had a few recently, mostly because I relocated and had many new services to activate. That gave me a picture of how intertwined and convoluted technology has become.

Let me start with yesterday evening. I had an excellent meal at a Thai restaurant in my neighbourhood. After I paid—effortlessly with Apple Pay and face recognition—I noticed a QR Code on the counter. It was the Google Reviews counter stand.

I almost never leave reviews unless asked. But in this case, I decided to support the business by sharing a 5-star review. So, I opened the QR Code scanner, and that's when technology went on strike.

No, not the scanner—that worked fine. Not even the internet connection. In a few seconds,

I was already on the review page. Only when I clicked the 5th star did the problems start.

You see, to leave a review, I need to be logged in as a user, right? Here's the first objection I have, frankly. I'm just praising a business; why do I need to authenticate? I hear you. It's because otherwise, anyone could praise their own business all day by tapping 5 stars.

Or worse, a competitor could tap 1 star to damage the reputation. I get it. But I have just completed a transaction and paid with a digital card; my transaction is already authenticated.

If only Apple Pay could share the transaction details with Google Reviews. But no, they don't communicate.

Therefore, it opens up the

paradoxical scenario where I could leave a review on Google without proving that I have ever dined at that establishment. It makes no business sense to me, but let's play along for a minute.

Google then asks me to choose which account I want to use to log in. Given the nature of my job, I keep multiple accounts.

So, I pick a personal one, just for this one restaurant review. But Google tells me that my session has been terminated and I need to re-authenticate. "It's okay," I think. "This will only take a

few seconds thanks to face recognition." But first, I'm asked to enter the password. So, I open my password manager and pick the password for that account. But that's not enough.

Now Google wants to make sure it's really me who wants to give a 5-star review. Not paying for the meal, which I could settle in a few seconds with face recognition. Google now prompts me to authenticate further with 2-Factor Authentication (2FA).

And so, Google sends me a One-Time Password (OTP). Apparently, my 20-digit highly secure password that I entered

through face recognition isn't enough.

Now I need to use a 6-digit password sent via SMS to my Singapore number, which I don't have with me because I'm in the UAE using another SIM card.

You can sense my frustration. So, I abandoned the review for the Thai restaurant, thus effectively damaging the business.

This was just the tip of the iceberg. Over the past few weeks, I had to download countless apps and create countless accounts for pretty much anything I bought.

New WiFi Router? Download the app, create an account, store it in the password manager. New digital padlock for my door? Same: new app, new account.

I understand that a new bank account and new insurance will need a new app and a new account, but, I kid you not, my new robot vacuum cleaner also asked for a new app and a new account.

Some of these rabbit holes are so deep they are beyond my understanding. I bought a new television. To get it to work, I needed to first log in to my WiFi, which I had just set up with a

new username and password, then create a new account for the television manufacturer.

Then, to watch YouTube, I needed to triple authenticate with a QR Code, password, and OTP, and to watch the TV of the service provider, I had—of course—to create an account and authenticate.

I consider myself tech-savvy and well-versed in cybersecurity matters, but I can't help but think that things are now worse than 10 years ago. Why so? Well, because there is no distinction between sensitive and trivial.

I can spend thousands of dollars in 5 seconds just by looking at my phone through face recognition. But I have to triple authenticate to praise a restaurant or to vacuum clean my floor.

I hope that tech visionaries smarter than me are now envisioning a future where all this authentication need is balanced around the risks associated with a security breach.

But most importantly, I'm concerned about the elderly. I'm sure that if my mother ever read this column, she would have no clue what I'm talking about.

The global economy has yet to turn the corner



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THE WORLD BANK'S
LATEST FORECAST FINDS
THAT MOST ECONOMIES
WILL GROW MUCH
MORE SLOWLY IN 2024
AND 2025 THAN THEY
DID IN THE DECADE
BEFORE COVID-19,
IMPLYING THAT
PROGRESS TOWARD
MANY DEVELOPMENT
GOALS WILL BE AT RISK.
FORTUNATELY, WITH THE
RIGHT POLICIES, THERE
IS STILL TIME TO TURN
THE TIDE

As 2024 begins, the outlook for the global economy seems to be improving. Major economies are emerging mostly unscathed from the fastest rise in interest rates in 40 years, without the usual scars of financial crashes or high unemployment.

Countries rarely succeed in taming steep inflation rates without triggering a recession.

Yet, a "soft landing" is now becoming more likely. Not surprisingly, financial markets are in a celebratory mood. But caution is in order.

The World Bank's latest Global Economic Prospects indicates that most economies, developed as well as developing, will grow much more slowly in 2024 and 2025 than they did in the decade before Covid-19.

Global growth is expected to decelerate for a third year in a row, to 2.4 per cent, before ticking up to 2.7 per cent in 2025. Per capita investment growth in 2023 and 2024 is expected to average just 3.7 per cent, barely half the average of the previous two decades.

The 2020s are shaping up to be an era of wasted opportunity. The end of 2024 will mark the halfway point of what was supposed to be a transformative decade for development, when extreme poverty was to be eliminated, major communicable diseases eradicated and greenhouse-gas emissions nearly halved.

What looms instead is a wretched milestone: the weakest global growth performance of any half-decade since 1990, with average per capita incomes in a quarter of all developing countries set to be lower at the end of 2024 than they were on the eve of Covid-19 pandemic.

Feeble economic growth threatens to undercut many global imperatives and make it harder for developing economies to generate the investment needed to tackle climate change,

improve health and education, and achieve other key priorities.

It would leave the poorest economies stuck with paralysing debt burdens. It would prolong the misery of the nearly one in three people in developing countries who suffer food insecurity. And it would amount to a historic failure: a lost decade not just for a few countries, but for the world.

It is still possible to turn the tide. Our analysis suggests that most developing economies' performance in the second half of the 2020s can be at least no worse than in the pre-Covid decade if they do two things.

First, they must focus their policies on generating a broadly beneficial investment boom, one that drives productivity growth, rising incomes, a reduction in poverty, higher revenues and many other good things.

Second, they must avoid the kinds of fiscal policies that often derail economic progress and contribute to instability.

The evidence from advanced and developing economies since World War II shows that the right mix of policies can increase investment even when the global

economy is not strong.

Countries around the world have managed to generate nearly 200 windfall-producing investment booms, defined as episodes in which per capita investment growth accelerated to 4 per cent or more and stayed there for more than six years.

Both public and private investment jumped during these episodes. The secret sauce was a comprehensive policy package that consolidated government finances, expanded trade and financial flows, strengthened fiscal and financial institutions, and improved the investment climate for private enterprise.

If each developing economy that engineered such an investment boom in the 2000s and 2010s repeated the feat in the 2020s, developing economies would move one-third of the way closer to their full economic potential.

And if all developing economies repeated their best ten-year performance in improving health, education, and labour-force participation, that would close most of the remaining gap. Developing economies' potential growth

in the 2020s would be closer to what it was during the 2010s.

There is also an additional option available to the two-thirds of developing economies that rely on commodity exports. They can do better simply by applying the Hippocratic principle to fiscal policy: First, do no harm. These economies are already prone to debilitating boom-and-bust cycles (because commodity prices can rise or fall suddenly), and their fiscal policies usually make matters worse.

When commodity-price increases boost growth by one percentage point, for example, governments increase spending in ways that boost growth by an additional 0.2 percentage points.

In general, in good times, fiscal policy tends to overheat the economy. In bad times, it deepens the slump.

This "pro-cyclicality" is 30 per cent stronger in commodity-exporting developing economies than it is in other developing economies. Fiscal policies also tend to be 40 per cent more volatile in these economies than in other developing economies.

The result is a chronic drag on their growth prospects.

This drag can be reduced by, among other things, establishing fiscal frameworks to discipline government spending, adopting flexible exchange-rate systems and avoiding restrictions on international movements of capital.

If these policy measures were instituted as a package, commodity-exporting developing economies would achieve an increase in per capita GDP growth of one percentage point every 4-5 years.

So far, the 2020s have been a period of broken promises. Governments have fallen short of the "unprecedented" goals they promised to meet by 2030: "to end poverty and hunger everywhere; to combat inequalities within and among countries; ... and to ensure the lasting protection of the planet and its natural resources".

But 2030 is still over a half-decade away. That is long enough for emerging markets and developing economies to regain lost ground. Governments acting immediately to implement the necessary policies would create cause for everyone to celebrate.

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FASHION
A reproduction of an ivory wedding dress, as worn by Princess Margaret, used in the filming of the Netflix series 'The Crown', London. — AFP



FILM
An employee poses inside a reproduction of the Gold State Coach, during a photocall for an exhibition of props for items used in the filming of the Netflix series 'The Crown', at Bonhams auctioneers in London. — AFP

art & life

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Is It Too Late to Get a Flu Shot?

IN THE UNITED STATES, annual flu vaccine campaigns begin in early September, before temperatures start to cool down and the cycle of people catching and spreading virus commences.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that most people get vaccinated as soon as updated shots become available for the season. And in an ideal world everyone would be vaccinated by the end of October.

But what if you missed the pop-up vaccine clinic at work and put off going to a pharmacy or doctor's office for your shots?

Experts, including those at the CDC, say it's better to get the vaccine late than to skip it. Flu season runs from October to May, with a peak usually occurring in February. Getting vaccinated at any time during the season can keep you from falling ill and missing work or school.

Vaccine effectiveness can vary a lot depending on the season. But even when the vaccine fails at preventing

infection, it can still reduce the severity of symptoms and lower your chances of hospitalisation, said Dr Sean Liu, an assistant professor of infectious disease at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. In vulnerable groups, like pregnant women, older adults and very young children, the vaccine can also save lives, Liu said. A 2022 study in children, for example, found that the flu vaccine reduced children's risk of severe life-threatening influenza by 75%.

When more people get vaccinated, it reduces everyone's risk of exposure. "By getting vaccinated against the flu you are not only helping protect yourself, you are indirectly helping to protect those people in the community who are at higher risk of getting sick," Liu said.

Scientific evidence from decades of flu vaccine monitoring in the United States shows that the vaccines have an excellent safety profile and minimal side effects. Most of these side effects, such as muscle aches, head-



aches and a general feeling of malaise, are signs that your body is learning how to fight influenza based on pieces of the virus in the vaccine.

For those who fear needles or want to avoid injection site soreness, there's an option to get FluMist, a vaccine that is sprayed into the nose and is

appropriate for those 2 through 49 years old. But the spray is available at fewer pharmacies compared with the availability of shots.

It takes about two weeks after vaccination for your immune system to make enough antibodies to protect against the flu. "It's not like a light switch," said Dr William Schaffner, a professor of preventive medicine at the Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.

Additionally, children 6 months through 8 years who are getting vaccinated for the first time need two doses, spaced about a month apart, to get the full antibody protection. Ideally you would plan to get your vaccines with enough time before flu activity increases and in advance of any big travel plans or family gatherings, Schaffner said.

While you should probably wait a few weeks to get vaccinated if you are actively sniffing and feverish, there is still a benefit to getting vaccinated after you've recovered from the flu.

"Having flu more than once in a season is not unheard-of," Schaffner said. That's because there are often several strains of influenza virus circulating every season, and infection with one doesn't necessarily protect you from another.

Flu vaccines, however, are designed to protect against four different strains of influenza that scientists expect to be dominant each season. (You may see the word "quadrivalent" on immunisation posters and in vaccine brand names.)

And unless you have a positive test confirming that you had the flu, it's also possible to confuse it with symptoms of the common cold, RSV, Covid or several other respiratory viruses circulating around the same time, Schaffner said.

Most pharmacies, primary care doctors, urgent care centres and county health departments carry flu vaccines well into spring. You can use the CDC's vaccines.gov database to find a location near you. — **NYT**

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INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



AROUND THE WORLD



'The Trees Saved Me'

THE STORY OF the Forest of Immortal Stories begins not so long ago, in 2019, when Elena-Mirela Cojocaru, beloved wife of Ion Cojocaru, mayor of the hamlet of Nucsoara, died after a struggle with cancer. Ion Cojocaru himself soon fell ill with a heart ailment; as a remedy, his doctor told him to walk in the countryside, 6,000 or more steps a day.

Nucsoara and its 1,222 inhabitants reside on the forested slopes of the Carpathian Mountains in Romania. The Carpathians are a land of fog, fictional vampires and real-life wolves, as well as several thousand brown bears and roughly two-thirds of the remaining virgin forest in Europe.

Ion Cojocaru had grown up in Nucsoara, but only as he walked the hills and the ancient pastures did he notice the trees: beeches, phantasmagorically gnarled giants, some as old as 500 years. Their beauty and strength revived him, and he felt as if they had adopted him. "The trees saved me," he said recently.

Some ancient beeches resemble upturned brooms, hundreds of small branches rising abruptly from a thick trunk no taller than a person. The shapes embody human history. Until the region was declared protected, generations of villagers gathered firewood from the trees, pruning, or pollarding, the branches above arm's reach.

Where the trees were pruned, new shoots appeared, branched, grew and were trimmed again, year after year for centuries. The practice allowed the trees to continue bearing beech nuts, which the villagers fed to their pigs to fatten them up in autumn.

"The mightiness of these trees is mind-blowing," said Christoph Promberger, executive director of Foundation Conservation Carpathia, a nonprofit organisation that is working to create a national park in the region. Five thousand solitary secular beeches still grow around Nucsoara, the highest concentration in

Europe. But logging and changing uses of the land pose a threat. Bark beetles are moving in, too.

Cojocaru and the nonprofit began discussing a plan to protect the beeches and perhaps draw ecotourism to Nucsoara. Two thousand five hundred forty-four trees were identified — he chose 2,544 because it is the height in meters of Moldoveanu Peak, the highest mountain in Romania and a day's hike from Nucsoara. Each was given a number plate, photographed through the seasons and marked on a map with its GPS coordinates. The trees are offered for adoption on a website — although as Cojocaru insists, the tree adopts the person, not the other way around.

At one point a team from Forest Design, a forestry company in Brasov, came with hand-held scanners that use lidar, a laser technology, and generated 3D images of many of the ancient trees, inside and out. Digitally captured, each tree appears as fully individual as a fingerprint, and scientists can precisely track how it grows and changes. "We wanted to see how the trees evolve and move in time," said Sergiu Florea of Forest Design.

So began the Forest of Immortal Stories. For a modest fee, people can attach their own stories to a tree. When visited in person, the tree reads the narrative back through a QR code. No. 44 is Ana Maria Branza, a Romanian fencing champion who won her first national title at age 15. No. 2,224 is a daughter's expression of gratitude on behalf of her mother, who, in 1944 at age 16, "found refuge from the Nazis hidden among the ancient trees." No. 22 is a gift from one friend to another, a snippet of a poem by Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz: "Give some tree the gift of green again. Let one bird sing."

No. 2,544 adopted Ion Cojocaru. "I get a feeling of reciprocity," Cojocaru said of the trees. "I learn from them. I get a sense that they are old men who are very wise and want me to do good." — **NYT**

Prince's 'Purple Rain' Is Being Developed as a Stage Musical



"PURPLE RAIN," Prince's breakout rise-of-a-rock-star film, is being adapted into a stage musical featuring some of the pop musician's best-loved songs.

Orin Wolf, the producer who previously shepherded the Tony-winning adaptation of "The Band's Visit" to the stage, and who is currently backing the theatrical adaptation of another music industry movie, "Buena Vista Social Club," announced Monday that he is developing the musical, based on the 1984 film.

The stage adaptation will feature a book by playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant winner whose family drama, "Appropriate," is now running on Broadway. The director is Lileana Blain-Cruz, whose revival of Thornton Wilder's "The Skin of Our Teeth" (with new material contributed by Jacobs-Jenkins) had a short run on Broadway in 2022.

"Purple Rain" is about an ambitious musician, called the Kid, facing strife with his parents, his love interest and his fellow musicians. The film won an Academy Award for best original song score.

Wolf did not announce any other details, including when or where there might be an initial production (most musicals have runs either off-Broadway or outside New York before braving the high costs and intense glare of Broadway). Prince died in 2016; representatives of the rights-holders to his music were quoted in a news release describing themselves as supportive of the production. — **NYT**

Gemstones in Oman



BALQEES AL ORAIMI

Gemstones are one of the most precious and beautiful materials used in manufacturing jewellery. These stones are distinguished by their beauty and natural shine and add a touch of luxury and elegance to ornaments. Gemstones have been used in jewellery since ancient times when they were considered a symbol of wealth, power and beauty.

Historical books are full of the geological diversity of the Sultanate of Oman. The books of the Assyrian civilisations in particular and the Sumerian civilisations mentioned this.

The Omanis are also interested in precious and semi-precious stones, as Muttrah Souq is famous for trading in various types of natural and artificial, local and imported, especially onyx, malachite, and turquoise. Some Omanis adorn themselves with silver rings that are decorated with various types of agate found in Oman, including citrine, carnelian, jasper, and bloodstone.

Oman's rocks contain an abundance of semi-precious stones, such as coarse crystalline and milky quartz, and fine quartz, which includes Chalcedonian, agate of all kinds, chrysoprase, carnelian, citrine, serpentine, jasper, the majority of green metamorphic rocks, and some gabbro, granite, and marble rocks.

These stones are used for decoration, sculpture, and the formation of rosaries, beads, and various antiques. Tejarah

contributes many programmes on the possibility of manufacturing rosaries and necklaces from these stones. It also holds educational courses on metal incubators and the possibility of using them in the jewellery industry. Crystalline quartz minerals, which form in the form of clusters and geodes, are among the most important semi-precious stones.

Zaki bin Hamad al Farsi, founder of the Zanakite Jewellery Shop says, "Oman is full of good things and minerals, and people have become passionate about owning these stones and adornment with them, and with the spread of



such businesses on social media, it has become easy to buy and acquire these stones. He would like government agencies to support more and pay attention to such trade and encourage Omani youth to practice this craft."

Quartz is considered one of the most important and widespread minerals in the Sultanate of Oman. It is the main mineral in the eastern sands, the acidic and metamorphic igneous rocks in Al Sharqiyah South and Dhofar, in Saih Hattat in Muscat, and the silicate clusters in Marmul and Thamrait. Also, found in the flint layers spread throughout all geological units from ancient to modern in the form of veins and layers of different thickness and purity.

Turquoise is considered one of the most famous gemstones in Oman, which has been extracted and traded in the region for thousands of years. The mining and extraction of gemstones are also regulated by the government to ensure sustainability and fair business practices.

The government is making efforts to monitor and ensure the quality of gemstones displayed in jewellery stores. It is also providing the service of examining and analysing gemstones to ensure that the required global standards are maintained.

Officials said the devices designated for identifying and examining various gemstones contributed to raising the level of performance, achieving accuracy in the results, and reducing the degree of risk to which the consumer and merchant alike are exposed.

