

Muscat tops in quality life

Muscat has emerged as the top city in Asia for Quality of Life, according to the Numbeo Index for the 2023 mid-year. The Sultanate of Oman's capital scored 176.80 on the Quality of Life Index, above Abu Dhabi (173), Dubai (172.7), Tokyo (166.5), Doha (158.5), Bursa (156), Singapore (153.3) and Taiwan (149.9). Oman was rated very high in the safety index (80.17), moderate in the purchasing power index (79.20), and high in the healthcare (60.67) and climate (67.22) indexes. **DETAILS ON P2**



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OMAN COACH HOLDS FIRM ON TACTICS FOR PIVOTAL MATCH AGAINST THAILAND



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P19

FRUIT JUICE LINKED TO WEIGHT GAIN IN CHILDREN, ADULTS: STUDY



■ DUQM
ASYAD CONTAINER TERMINAL AT DUQM

Asyad Group, the integrated global logistics group of the Sultanate of Oman, kicked off operations at Asyad Container Terminal – Duqm that will be managed and operated by the group's ports and terminals arm, Asyad Ports. The latest addition to Asyad's asset lineup follows the Omani logistics giant's robust expansion plans that aim to offer more integrated logistics solutions, anticipate and proactively respond to new trends in global trade and handling, and meet the requirements of the world's biggest players in the container business.

DETAILS ON P13

■ KHASAB
OQ MANAGES RO 800M MUSANDAM PROJECTS



The OQ Group invests and manages three projects in the energy sector in Musandam Governorate, represented by the Musandam Gas Processing Plant and the management of marine fields in the Marine Concession Area 8, in addition to the Musandam Power Generation Station with a total value of about RO 800 million. The OQ Group owns the Musandam gas and product processing station in the offshore concession area 8, where gas is used to generate power for the governorate. OQ also manages and operates the offshore fields in the concession area, Block 8, which is owned by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals. OQ has been committed to improving work efficiency to raise production and reduce operational costs in the Block 8 concession area since it began managing oil and gas production operations in January 2019, which contains two offshore fields, Bukha and West Bukha, which produce oil and gas to supply the Musandam Power Station.

■ RO 3.2M WADI AFOUL BRIDGE IN RAKHYOUT OPENS



The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology officially opened the Wadi Afoul bridge in the Wilayat of Rakhyout in Dhofar Governorate. The project costs RO 3.2 million. The project involves the paving of 1,300 km and construction of a 300-metre concrete bridge with a height of 19 metres. This is in addition to excavation works, side protections and the construction of retaining walls. It is noteworthy that the project aims to safely connect the existing road through Wadi Afoul after it was damaged by recent floods. It is in line with the tourism and strategic trends undertaken by Dhofar Governorate. – **ONA**

Denial of Palestinian statehood ‘unacceptable,’ says UN chief

KAMPALA: The right of the Palestinian people to build their own state “must be recognised by all”, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Uganda on Saturday.

“The refusal to accept a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians, and the denial of the right to statehood for the Palestinian people, are unacceptable,” the UN leader insisted in the Ugandan capital Kampala.

Such a stance “would indefinitely prolong a conflict that has become a major threat to global peace and security; exacerbate polarisation; and embolden extremists everywhere,” Guterres warned.



A woman takes part in a rally in Madrid on Saturday in support of the people of Gaza. – **AFP**

“The right of the Palestinian people to build their own state must be recognised by all”

The ongoing bloodshed in the Palestinian Gaza territory was prompted by the October 7 at-

tack on Israel.

Israel's relentless bombardment and ground offensive since then have killed at least 24,927 people in Gaza, mostly women and children, according to the government's health ministry.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has deplored the “inhuman living conditions” in the small coastal territory, of 2.4 million inhabitants, many of whom have been displaced by the Israeli action.

On Monday, Guterres appealed for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza.

The United States has also recently reiterated its support for the creation of a Palestinian state. **SEE ALSO P5**

Smart radars to detect traffic violations

VINOD NAIR
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The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has confirmed that smart radars to detect traffic violations are currently in use on a trial basis.

These radars can detect the use of mobile phones, not fastening seatbelts, and changing lanes before the road signal, an ROP spokesman told the Observer.

He added that the radars have been applied in all the GCC countries.



Image only for illustrative purpose.

“So the first thing is, whenever someone wants to move or travel in any of the GCC countries, he or she needs to know the regulations and the rules of that country, especially the traffic rules,” he said.

Smart radars are important for reducing road accidents as it may be noted that collisions between vehicles and crashing against fixed objects are seen as the major cause of accidents in the Sultanate of Oman, according to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

There were 76,200 road accidents in 2022, including 60,900 minor ones.

As per the Traffic Law of 2018, penalties for commonly detected offences including not adhering to the correct path at traffic lights RO 15, one black point, and using mobile phones or other electronic devices while driving RO 15, two black points.

The ROP had earlier confirmed that there is a unified system that gathers all the fines in the GCC, which can be also accessed from

Smart radars are important for reducing accidents as it may be noted that collisions between vehicles and crashing against fixed objects are seen as the major cause of accidents

ROP OFFICIAL

the ROP application.

“If you feel that a fine is not correct or you did not commit the violation, you can either go to the ROP traffic department and lodge a complaint or you can go to the GCC country where the fine has been registered against you. The first step might take time to get a response,” according to the spokesman.

Payment for traffic violations in a GCC country can be made through the ROP portal also.

World's biggest iceberg ‘battered’ by waves

PARIS: It was impossible to see through the snow and fog on the Antarctic seas but expedition leader Ian Strachan knew his ship was approaching a true behemoth: the world's biggest iceberg lay somewhere ahead.

“Then the clouds lifted and we could see this expansive — almost abstract — white line that extended each way across the horizon,” he said.

As the ship got closer during its visit on Sunday, huge gaping crevasses and beautiful blue arches sculpted into the edge of the iceberg came into focus. Waves up to four metres high “smashed” and “battered” its wall, breaking off small chunks and collapsing some arches, Strachan said. He compared sailing along the endless jagged edge to looking at sheet music. “All the cracks and arches were different notes as the song played.”



View of an iceberg at the Gerlache Strait, which separates the Palmer Archipelago from the Antarctic Peninsula, in Antarctica. – **AFP**

The tooth-shaped iceberg named A23a is nearly 4,000 square km across, making it more than twice the size of Greater London. After three decades stuck to the Antarctic ocean floor, the iceberg is now heading north on what could be its final journey. It contains an estimated one trillion tonnes of fresh water that is likely to melt off into the ocean along way.

The iceberg, which is up to 400 metres thick in places, is currently drifting between Elephant Island and the South Orkney islands.

Strachan was speaking as his ship, run by the expeditions firm EYOS, was wrapping up a private tour of the Antarctic Peninsula. It had been planning to go to South Georgia island but due to a bird flu outbreak there, it visited A23a instead. It was not the first ship to witness the majesty of the iceberg. — **AFP**

→ **INSIDE**



ART & LIFE **SEE P20**



Eight-day winter forum in Masirah gets under way



MASIRAH: The Winter Forum 2024 got under way at the Marine Tourism Resort in the Wilayat of Masirah in Al Sharqiyah South Governorate and will last for eight days.

Shaikh Abdullah bin Abdullah Baowain, Wali of Masirah, head of the Organising Committee of the Masirah Winter Forum, said that the idea behind the Masirah Winter Forum came in conjunction with the active winter season witnessed by the Wilayat of Masirah to highlight the natural, touristic, heritage and cultural components that distinguish Masirah Island and is aimed at revitalising domestic, regional and international tourism.

The forum encompasses a slew of heritage, tourism and cultural activities and programmes that include the heritage tent which embodies traditional crafts such as textile, kohl, sandal and silverware.

The forum also includes productive families exhibition, women’s market and the government institutions tent (a group of government institutions and the Omani Women’s Association) which introduce services provided to the society as well as spaces dedicated to folk arts, marine arts and children’s games. — ONA



RO 3.2 MILLION WADI AFOUL BRIDGE OPENS FOR TRAFFIC



RAKHYOUT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology officially opened the Wadi Aful bridge in the Wilayat of Rakhyout in Dhofar Governorate. The project costs RO 3.2 million. The project involves the paving of 1,300 km and construction of a 300-metre concrete bridge with a height of 19 metres. This is in addition to excavation works, side protections and the construction of retaining walls. It is noteworthy that the project aims to safely connect the existing road through Wadi Aful after it was damaged by recent floods. It is in line with the tourism and strategic trends undertaken by Dhofar Governorate. — ONA

Muscat tops the Quality of Life Index in Asia; 17th globally

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The Sultanate’s capital scored 176.80 on the Quality of Life Index, above Abu Dhabi (173), Dubai (172.7), Tokyo (166.5), Doha (158.5), Bursa (156), Singapore (153.3) and Taiwan (149.9). Among other GCC countries, Jeddah scored 149.1, Riyadh 148.1 and Kuwait City 116.4.

Globally, the city is ranked 17 for quality of life. Oman was rated very high in the safety index (80.17), moderate in the purchasing power index (79.20), and high in the healthcare (60.67) and climate (67.22) indexes.

The Sultanate of Oman also scored well in the traffic commute time index with the average time taken to work being 22.17 minutes using a



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car. Quality of Life Index is an estimation of the overall quality of life in a city or country. It takes into account various factors that impact one’s quality of life, including purchasing power, pollution levels, housing affordability, cost of living, safety, healthcare quality, commute times and climate conditions.

The index is designed to provide a comparative measure, where a higher index value indicates a better quality of life.

The Quality of Life Index is based on data and user surveys collected by Numbeo. The surveys capture the perceptions and experiences of visitors to the website

regarding various aspects of quality of life. The index is calculated using an empirical formula that assigns weights to each factor based on its importance.

The specific formula used by Numbeo may vary and is subject to change. It combines the data collected for each factor to generate a numerical value that represents the quality of life in a particular location. The Quality of Life Index (higher is better) is an estimation of the overall quality of life by using an empirical formula that takes into account the following factors - Purchasing power index (higher is better), Safety index (higher is better), Climate index (higher is better), Pollution index (lower is better), house price to income ratio (lower is better), Cost of living index (lower is better), healthcare index (higher is better) and traffic commute time index (lower is better).

Boycott should not harm local businesses: OCCI chairman

KABEER YOUSUF
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Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), has reiterated Oman’s stand in Palestine issue describing that the Palestinian cause is the foremost cause for every Arab and Muslim.

He affirmed that Oman has been a steadfast supporter for the cause throughout history and will remain a lifetime supporter of the Palestinian cause. “However, we need to be clear on our boycott calls and we should know which brands and franchises are affected by the call,” he said in an interview to Oman TV.

Al Rawas people need to be clear on certain concepts when it comes to the franchises affected by the boycott calls,

“Big corporations are purely profit-oriented that do not provide any donations for political purposes. Each company has a sole agent

in some markets and those agents are the ones who take politically-driven actions. For example, franchises in Israel are supporting the Israeli forces,” clarified Al Rawas.

“Looking into the agents of the same commercial brands in the Arab countries, one can find them supporting the Palestinian cause even with much higher contributions. Giving an example, the agent of a boycotted brand has donated \$20,000 to the Israeli army. Meanwhile, the agents of the same brand in the Arab countries donated \$7 million to the Palestinian people which represented almost 50 times higher of what has been donated to the Israeli army,” he said, adding that boycotts shouldn’t be harming the local business houses.

Al Rawas pointed out that when we say a commercial brand supports the Israeli troops, we mean that agents are the ones providing the support in certain countries,



Some say they would support the Omani products only because of the boycott calls and here comes the question, what will you do when those boycott calls are over?

FAISAL BIN
ABDULLAH
AL RAWAS
Chairman of OCCI

not all franchises in all the markets. On boycott of Omani products, Al Rawas said; “The boycott represents a good opportunity for the Omani products. However, I don’t want this opportunity to be tied to a current situation but rather to be a deep-rooted culture. Some say they would support the Omani products only because of the boycott calls and here comes the question, what will you do when those boycott calls are over?”

Al Rawas said supporting Omani products should be similar in quality to the international brands if not better. He also stressed that any brand directly supporting the Israeli army should be immediately boycotted.

Al Rawas said agents of boycotted brands in the Arab countries never supported the Israeli army. He also highlighted that the Palestinian cause needed maximum support from everyone.

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Ministry to launch lab for differently-abled people

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@kabeeryousef

Ministry of Social Development will be organising the closing ceremony of the Laboratory for the Development of Services and Programmes for Persons with Disabilities on Wednesday.

The conclusion of the Labs for the differently abled people, held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, is usually organised to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.

The event is organised by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) in cooperation with Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, and in partnership

with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labour, private sector establishments, civil society institutions and personnel and organisations working in fields related to persons with disabilities, highlighting the all round support needed for the upliftment of the services to persons with disabilities.

“The lab’s theme focuses on the need for unity in action to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for persons with disabilities, and aims to align services and programmes for persons with disabilities with Oman Vision 2040,” a note from the ministry said.

Number of people with disabilities represents about



Number of people with disabilities represents about 2.3 per cent of the Omani population and is on an increasing mode.

2.3 per cent of the Omani population and is on an increasing mode. The Sultanate of Oman has been providing several services and facilities for people with disabilities and recently, the Ministry of Social Development has launched the guide of ‘Services and Facilities for Persons with Disabilities’, which elucidates all the services and facilities provided to them by various government and private agencies.

The Ministry of Social Development is on a mission to provide rehabilitation services sourced from private centres and providing it for free to people with disabilities. They include providing prosthetic devices, issuance of car parking permits

for people with disabilities and medical facilities for citizens and residents, besides allocating play corners for children with disabilities.

The people with disabilities, prosthetics and orthotics, can avail treatment and rehabilitation services from the Ministry of Health by the Hearing, Balance and Speech Unit at Al Nahdha Hospital for people with hearing disabilities, mental health services provided to people with disabilities at Al-Masara Hospital, and respiratory care services for them when required. This is in addition to the provision of assistive hearing devices ‘cochlear implants’, and the disbursement of auxiliary aids to the people with disabilities.



Al Sharqiyah North winter festival begins with desert marathon

BIDIYA: Over 700 runners from around the world are taking part in the three-day Oman Desert Marathon, which kicked off in Bidiya on Saturday. The ninth edition of the marathon is part of Al Sharqiyah North Governorate’s winter festival.

After flagging off the race, Mahmoud bin Yahya al Thuhli, Governor of Al Sharqiyah North, said: “The Al Sharqiyah North Winter 2024 activities come to promote and support the tourism, investment and entertainment aspects in the governorate through the events that last more than 20 days. It will also help to support SMEs and productive families in the wilayats.”

The marathon is divided into four stages and is 165 km long. It started from the village of Al Wasil in the Wilayat of Bidiya, passing through the vast sands of Al Sharqiyah. Participants from Morocco, Spain, France, Ukraine, Italy, Germany, Poland, Britain, Belgium and Switzerland are participating in it.

A giant rock in Dibba tells story of rich civilisation

TEXT & PHOTO BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

With its towering mountains, expansive plains, and rocky coasts, Wilayat of Dibba is characterised by stunning natural scenes. It is also a treasure trove of rock arts.

There are more than 200 rock paintings found in dozens of archaeological sites in Musandam Governorate. These sites provide real examples of cultural diversity as a unique cultural heritage. The ‘Rock of Al Deyooah’ bears a collection of drawings that express the presence of human life for thousands of years in these areas.

So far, there are no special studies for the giant rock, which is located in one of the villages in the Wilayat of Dibba. As soon as he approaches this rock, the visitor becomes aware of the type of drawings and engravings that adorn this rock.

The presence of rock art is not limited to this rock, but dozens of such inscriptions or drawings can be seen along the valleys and mountain ranges in Musandam Governorate. With every step a visitor takes throughout this governorate, s/he discovers a

number of archaeological sites dating back thousands of years.

Amirah al Shuhhiyyah said the history of archaeological research for desert art studies in the Sultanate of Oman dates back to the 1970s. Clarke and Jakli conducted a field survey of rock arts and documented a number of them in the Eastern Hajar Mountains. Preston subsequently recorded 47 rock art sites in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar. These studies focused on documenting rock art, classifying it, and analysing its themes. Ali al Shehri also documented rock art in Dhofar. The content and style of rock arts in this region differs from the north of Oman.

The archaeological mission to Musandam sent by the Royal Geographical Society and led by Beatrice de Cardii in 1971 was the first archaeological mission to the governorate. Although this mission’s primary goal was to investigate the geological, morphological, and hydrographic aspects of this region, it contributed to the exploration of more than 30 archaeological sites in several villages including Hessa, Qarn Sham, Wadi Qada, Mukhi, and Wadi Khasab.



‘Rock of Al Deyooah’ a Giant Art Rock in Dibba



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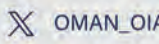
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To apply and view the detailed job description, please visit Jadara platform
jadarah.oia.gov.om

The last date for receiving the applications will be: 1 Feb 2024





TRUST DEFICIENCY IN ONLINE SHOPPING

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JAN 20

As the trend of online shopping gains popularity in Omani society, we embraced it for its time and saving benefits.

Given our significant presence on social media, we constantly come across various products. The allure of these items, coupled with the persuasive presentation by traders, entices us to make purchases from the comfort of our homes.

However, my perspective on Omani online traders changed when I shared my concerns with a colleague.

To my surprise, many of my colleagues had faced similar experiences. While it may have been my over-enthusiasm to order the wrong dress size from the website, mistakes do happen. I attempted to contact the seller to exchange the dress for the correct size but received no response despite reaching out through various channels.

The same situation resonated with Balqees al Oraimi, who shared a very similar experience. She recounted ordering an abaya from an Omani seller who blocked her on WhatsApp after receiving payment. Balqees confronted the seller from a different number, posing as a new customer, and only then, did the seller apologise and fulfil the order.

CONSUMERS SHARE
EXPERIENCES OF
UNRESPONSIVE
SELLERS, SIZE
MISMATCHES, AND
EVEN FRAUDULENT
BEHAVIOUR OVER
ONLINE SHOPPING
IN OMAN AND
EMPHASISE THE
VALUE OF PHYSICAL
SHOPPING FOR
BETTER
DECISION-MAKING
AND AVOIDING
UNNECESSARY
EXPENSES

In light of these trust issues, another consumer, Huwaida al Shaikhani expressed her scepticism towards online traders from the onset of online shopping trends. She prefers to pay upon the product's arrival to mitigate any fraud risk. As confidence in these online traders diminishes, Huwaida opts for more cautious payment methods to safeguard their transactions.

Afrah al Balushi is another consumer who firmly stands by her decision to abstain from online shopping. She declares having never engaged in it and does not intend to succumb to this convenience.

In her view, while online shopping saves time and effort, it often leads to unnecessary expenditures on items one may not genuinely need. Afrah believes that physically going to a shop allows for better decision-making when one can feel the product physically. Additionally, she emphasises the psychological impact of spending physical cash, asserting that individuals who make cash transactions tend to spend less compared to those using credit cards.

Expressing scepticism about trusting online traders, Afrah acknowledges that there are always inventive ways for scammers to deceive people. Despite considering herself vigilant, she remains cautious to avoid becoming a victim of fraud, recognising the continuous efforts of scammers to find new ways to exploit unsuspecting individuals.



Fighting rages across Gaza where death toll surges

GAZA: Fighting raged on Saturday across the Gaza Strip, whose health ministry reported a surging death toll.

It came even as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Joe Biden discussed the post-war future of Gaza although the humanitarian situation remains dire.

Gaza's health ministry reported at least 165 people killed over the previous 24 hours -- by far the largest such toll it has issued in days, and more than double the previous day's figure.

A correspondent reported gunfire, air strikes and tank shelling into the morning, particularly in southern Gaza's Khan Yunis city.

Israel is pressing its push southwards against Palestinian groups, after the army in early January said the command structure in northern Gaza had been dismantled, leaving only



Israeli soldiers operate in the Gaza Strip. – Reuters

isolated fighters.

But the Palestinian armed wing of Hamas reported fierce combat with Israeli troops in north Gaza on Saturday.

The military said troops backed by air and naval support were striking infrastructure throughout the Gaza Strip, including the

north.

Israel has vowed to destroy the Palestinian groups. Its relentless bombardment and ground offensive have killed at least 24,927 people, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's health ministry.

The United States provides



Displaced Palestinian children walk on a hill facing their makeshift camp in Rafah, on the southern Gaza Strip. – AFP

Israel with billions of dollars in military aid but has urged it to take more care to protect civilians.

Biden said it was still possible Netanyahu could agree to some form of Palestinian state, after the two leaders spoke for the first time in nearly a month.

Netanyahu had said that Israel

“must have security control over the entire territory west of the Jordan River”, which “contradicts the idea of (Palestinian) sovereignty”.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said that Israel could not achieve “genuine security” without a “pathway to a

Palestinian state” — a goal sought by Palestinians for decades.

The United Nations estimates the war has displaced 1.7 million people, about one million of whom are crowded into the Rafah area in Gaza's far south, near Egypt.

UN agencies have warned better aid access — including through Israel's Ashdod port — is needed urgently as famine and disease loom.

Bread is a staple food for Palestinians but aid agencies said only 15 bakeries were operational across Gaza, the UN humanitarian agency OCHA reported.

The availability of water for drinking and domestic use “is shrinking every day”, OCHA added.

Nearly 20,000 babies have been born in conditions “beyond belief” in Gaza since the start of the Israeli offensive, the UN children's agency UNICEF said. — AFP

Palestinians mourn teenager killed in West Bank

RAMALLAH: Palestinians gathered on Saturday to mourn the death of a teenager killed by Israeli fire in the occupied West Bank, where violence has surged since war erupted in Gaza.

In a case that has drawn concern from the White House, seventeen-year-old Tawfiq Ajaq was shot dead on Friday in the town of Al-Mazraa Al-Sharqiya, east of Ramallah, the Palestinian news agency Wafa and relatives of the young man said.

Ajaq was a US citizen, according to his father and a local official in the area, Hassan Zebein.

“He is a soldier of Palestine,” women at the funeral chanted in English.

Friends and relatives gathered at a small morgue in Silwad, where the body had been kept overnight, greeting each other in Arabic as well as English spoken with an American accent. The body was draped in a Palestinian flag and adorned with flowers before mourners carried it away. The White House said it was “seriously concerned” about reports that a Palestinian teenager with US citizenship had been killed by Israeli fire in the occupied West Bank.

– AFP



Mourners react during the funeral of American-Palestinian Tawfiq Ajaq, 17, who was killed by the Israeli security forces, near Ramallah in the occupied West Bank. – Reuters



US President Joe Biden hosts a meeting with mayors in the East Room at the White House in Washington, US. – Reuters

US Democrats push Biden over civilian toll in Mideast war

WASHINGTON: Dozens of President Joe Biden's fellow Democrats signed a letter urging his administration to reaffirm that the US strongly opposes “the forced and permanent displacement” of Palestinians from Gaza.

The letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, led by US Representatives Ayanna Pressley and Jamie Raskin, was signed by 60 Democratic House of Representatives members, reflecting concern, especially on the left, over the steep toll on Palestinian civilians of Israel's campaign in Gaza. “We urge you to continue to reiterate the United

States’ firm commitment to this position and ask that you provide clarification regarding certain provisions of the administration's supplemental humanitarian and security funding request,” the letter said.

A State Department spokesperson said the department does not typically comment on congressional correspondence. But on the broader issue of displacement, the spokesperson said in an email, “We have been clear. There must be no enduring forced displacement of Palestinians, whether inside of Gaza or outside.” — Reuters

Israel drops leaflets seeking its captives

GAZA: Israel pounded targets across the Gaza Strip on Saturday while its planes dropped leaflets on the southern area of Rafah urging Palestinians seeking refuge there to help locate captives held in Gaza, residents said.

Palestinian fighters battled tanks trying to push back into the eastern suburbs of the Jabalia area in northern Gaza, where Israel had started pulling out troops and shifting to smaller-scale operations, residents and militants said.

The Israeli military said aircraft struck squads trying to plant explosives near troops and fire missiles at tanks in northern Gaza and said it was striking targets throughout Gaza.

In the southern area of Khan Younis, where Israel says it has expanded its operations, witnesses said tanks shelled areas around Nasser Hospital overnight, describing the bombardment as the most intense in many days.

Nasser is now Gaza's largest functioning hospital. Israel says Palestinian fighters operate



A person places posters on a vehicle as supporters and family members of captives camp outside the residence of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Caesarea, Israel. – Reuters

from in and around hospitals, including Nasser, which Palestinian groups and medical staff deny.

The Israeli military said that in Khan Younis, it raided a military compound, neutralised ready-to-use rocket launchers and found explosives stashed underground while an aircraft struck two gunmen there.

It did not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants in its daily toll.

In more than 100 days of war,

Israel's air, land and sea offensive has laid much of Gaza to waste, displacing most of the 2.3 million population, many forced to move repeatedly and seek refuge in tents that do little to protect them from the elements and disease, according to the United Nations.

In Rafah, where over a million Palestinians are taking shelter, Israel dropped leaflets showing photos of 33 captives, their names written in Arabic, urging the displaced to make contact.

— Reuters

وزارة الصحة

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last Date for Collection of Tender Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Wednesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) Per set
MOH/DGKH/176/2024	Supply of Biomedical Spare Parts at Directorate General of Khoula Hospital	21/January/2024	07/February/2024	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board	• SME: 10.000 • LO: 25.000

• Tenders should be submitted online on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

• Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

• For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200, Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

جامعة الشرقية

A' SHARQIYAH UNIVERSITY

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

A'Sharqiyah University (ASU) is a private higher education institution located in Ibra, North of A'Sharqiyah Governorate of the Sultanate of Oman, about 150 km from Muscat. It was established in 2009 by Ministerial Decision (78/2009) issued by the Ministry of Higher Education.

Tender details:
ASU's Tender Committee is pleased to invite experienced companies to participate in the tender for Providing Equipment for Electrical lab:

Tender No.	Description	Document Collection Deadline	Site Visit Date	Bids Submission Deadline	Document Fees
ASU/05/2024	Providing Equipment for Electrical lab at A'Sharqiyah University in Ibra	28/01/2024	31/01/2024 at 10:00 am	15/02/2024	100 OMR

• The specialized companies of the above assignment can obtain the tender document from the Procurement and Contracts Department at A'Sharqiyah University, Ibra, during the working days (Sunday to Thursday) from 9:00 am to 03:00 pm.

• Bids must be submitted in closed sealed envelopes with red wax, addressed to (Tender Committee, A'Sharqiyah University - Ibra), bearing the tender subject with its reference number with no indication to the name of bidders.

• The bid submission should include the following:

- Separate sealed envelope contains technical proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
- Separate sealed envelope contains commercial proposal (1 original copy + 2 copies).
- Separate sealed envelope contains tender bond.

• ASU general terms and conditions of tenders shall apply on all submitted bids. http://www.asu.edu.om/downloads/purchase_terms_conditions.pdf

• ASU is not bound to accept the lowest bid.

• For more details, please don't hesitate to contact us at: yousuf.alsaadi@asu.edu.om , (+968) 25401116.



Japan’s Moon Sniper’s power running low

TOKYO: Japan on Saturday became the fifth nation to achieve a soft lunar landing, but said its “Moon Sniper” spacecraft was running out of power due to a solar battery problem.

After a nail-biting 20-minute descent, space agency JAXA said its Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) had touched down and communication had been established.

But without the solar cells functioning, JAXA official Hitoshi Kuninaka said the craft — dubbed the “Moon Sniper” for its precision technology — would only have power for “several hours”.

SLIM is one of several new lunar missions launched by governments and private firms, 50 years after the first human

After a nail-biting 20-minute descent, space agency JAXA said its Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) had touched down and communication had been established

Moon landing.

As mission control prioritised gathering data while they could, Kuninaka suggested that the batteries might work again once the angle of the sun changed.

“It’s possible that it is not facing in the originally planned direction,” he told an early-hours news conference.



Hitoshi Kuninaka (top 2nd R), director general of the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and Institute of Space and Astronautical Science (ISAS) speaks during a press conference in Sagami-hara, Kanagawa. — AFP

“If the descent was not successful, it would have crashed at a very high speed. If that were the case, all functionality of the probe would be lost,” he said.

“But data is being sent to Earth.”

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida

called the landing “very welcome news” but said he was aware that more “detailed analysis” on the solar cells was needed.

Nasa chief Bill Nelson tweeted his “congratulations (to Japan) on being the historic fifth country to land successfully on the Moon”.

“We value our partnership in the cosmos and continued collaboration,” he added.

JAXA hopes to analyse data acquired during the landing, which will help determine whether the craft achieved the aim of landing within 100 metres of its intended landing spot.

SLIM was aiming for a crater where the Moon’s mantle, the usually deep inner layer beneath its crust, is believed to be exposed on the surface.

Two probes detached

successfully, JAXA said — one with a transmitter and another designed to trundle around the lunar surface beaming images to Earth.

This shape-shifting mini-rover, slightly bigger than a tennis ball, was co-developed by the firm behind the Transformer toys.

While the accuracy of the touchdown needs to be verified, Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics astronomer Jonathan McDowell said: “I think the mission is a big success.”

In April, Japanese startup ispace tried in vain to become the first private company to land on the Moon, losing communication with its craft after what it described as a “hard landing”. — AFP



Security forces face opposition demonstrators throwing stones at them in Moroni, following the announcement of the presidential election results. — AFP file photo

Comoros opposition candidate seeks annulment of vote

MORONI: An opposition candidate in the Comoros on Saturday filed a suit seeking the annulment of the Indian Ocean market’s recent vote in which the president was controversially re-elected, sparking deadly protests.

The opposition had urged people across the island chain to block roads to denounce President Azali Assoumani’s “electoral masquerade”, but the protest call went unheeded.

Police and soldiers were deployed around the medina market area on key junctions, some of them hooded or wearing surgical masks to hide their identities.

Assoumani’s victory is expected to be confirmed by the supreme court at the weekend after the electoral commission declared he had won more than 60 per cent of the ballots in

Sunday’s first-round vote.

Speaking outside the supreme court Daoudou Abdallah Mohamed, a former interior minister and a candidate from the Orange opposition party, said the election commission had “published fabricated results”.

“I have proof of ballot box stuffing,” he said. “My plea is for the results to be annulled and for new elections to be held.”

The Comoros capital Moroni had been paralysed by two days of running street-battles between stone-throwing youths and armed soldiers after the vote. The government spokesman welcomed the move.

“One cannot transform the street into a court,” spokesman Houmed Msaidie said. “If the court says we haven’t won, then we haven’t.” — AFP

Congolese President Tshisekedi sworn in for second term

KINSHASA: Democratic Republic of Congo’s President Felix Tshisekedi was sworn in for a second five-year term on Saturday after a landslide victory his opponents have refused to recognise due to widespread irregularities in the December general election.

With tensions simmering in the vast nation’s volatile eastern provinces, the 60-year-old president known as “Fatshi” picked Kinshasa’s 80,000-capacity Martyrs sports stadium for the ceremony.

The stands were packed well before midday with singing and dancing in full flow awaiting the arrival of what the authorities said would be some 20 invited heads of African states.

Tshisekedi’s first swearing-in, in January 2019, after controversially defeating Joseph Kabila, took place in the gardens of the Palace of Nations, a solemn venue that has traditionally staged important official events.

Tshisekedi is the son of the late historic opposition figure Etienne Tshisekedi.

He became president promising to improve living conditions in the DRC -- which boasts mineral riches but has a largely impoverished population of 100 million -- and put an end to 25 years of bloodshed in the east.

He has not kept those promises but this time around he campaigned strongly on his first-term achievements such as free



A general view of the stadium ahead of the inauguration of the President of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Felix Tshisekedi, at Stade de Martyrs in Kinshasa. — AFP

primary medication, asking for another mandate to “consolidate” the progress.

More than 40 million people were registered to vote on December 20 for a president, as well as national and regional lawmakers and municipal councillors.

In the general election, the vote has been annulled for 82 candidates -- including three government ministers and four provincial governors.

Polling was officially extended

by a day to account for multiple logistical snarls and continued for days afterwards in remote areas.

In the end, Tshisekedi officially triumphed with 73.47 per cent of the vote.

There was a lull in fighting in the east during the elections but violence has since resumed between the army and M23 rebels, backed by neighbouring Rwanda.

Since mid-December troops from the 10-nation Southern African Development

Community (SADC) have been discreetly arriving in the DRC.

They are taking over from an East African peacekeeping force whose mandate was ended by the DRC government, which alleged it colluded with the rebels instead of fighting them.

The electoral commission has repeatedly rejected allegations of fraud.

Police dispersed a small protest in Kinshasa against the provisional results of the legislative election. — Agencies

SHORT TAKES

BEIJING

Fire in China school dorm kills 13 boys

A fire in a central China school dormitory killed 13 students and injured another, prompting the authorities to call for screening fire risks in crowded places, state media said on Saturday.

The fire killed third graders in a boys’ dormitory of Yingcai School in Henan Province, according to China Newsweek, a weekly magazine published by China News Service. Firefighters quickly extinguished the blaze in a village in Nanyang city, and the head of the school was taken into



custody, state media reported.

China’s Ministry of Emergency Management called for screening to avoid “hidden fire risks in densely populated places”

— Reuters

TEHRAN

Iran launches satellite in new aerospace milestone

Iran has launched a research satellite on Saturday, a minister said, putting it into a higher orbit in a new milestone for its aerospace programme.

The Islamic republic says its satellite and rocket launches are only for civil or defence purposes.

“The Soraya satellite of the Iranian Space Organisation... was successfully launched with the Ghaem-100 satellite carrier of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps,” the official IRNA



news agency said.

“This is the first time that Iran has successfully placed a satellite in orbits higher than 500 kilometres,” IRNA said.

— AFP

HANOI

Vietnam jails 100 over police station attacks

Vietnam has jailed nearly 100 people on terrorism charges over shooting attacks last year on police headquarters in the country’s Central Highlands that left nine people dead, state media said on Saturday.

Attackers on motorbikes stormed police and political offices in Dak Lak province in June last year in a rare incident of violent unrest in communist-ruled Vietnam.

At the end of a five-day trial at a prison where the accused



have been held, 10 defendants were sentenced to life in prison while 90 others were given sentences ranging from nine months to 20 years. — AFP



In brief

BOBIGNY



FRENCH POLICE OFFICERS GIVEN SUSPENDED JAIL TERMS

Three French police officers were handed suspended jail sentences for using excessive force during the 2017 arrest of a young Black man, sparking protests outside the courtroom calling for police officers to serve time in prison.

The arrest of Theodore Luhaka in the Paris suburb of Aulnay-sous-Bois following an ID check in 2017, when he was 22, was one of several cases in recent years that has brought the French police under scrutiny for racism and violent misconduct, leading to street protests.

The judges ruled that the injury caused to Luhaka could not be considered a permanent disability. — Reuters

WELLINGTON



THOUSANDS OF MAORI DISCUSS GOVERNMENT PLANS

More than 10,000 New Zealand Maori congregated in the central North Island on Saturday to discuss how to respond to government plans that are seen by many Indigenous groups as undermining their rights and status. Maori King Tuheitia, who hosted the event, told attendees their voices matter but it was not just talk, a solution that was needed.

“But turning up today, we’ve sent a strong message that has been heard around the world. People are watching us,” he said.

New Zealand’s centre-right coalition which took office in October is planning to undo policies of previous governments. — Reuters

SEOUL



POLICE CHIEF INDICTED OVER HALLOWEEN CRUSH

South Korean prosecutors have indicted the head of the Seoul Metropolitan Police Agency, charging him with contributing through negligence to the Halloween crowd crush in Seoul in 2022 that killed nearly 160 people.

The indictment of Seoul police chief Kim Kwang-ho came more than a year after the crowd crush in October 2022, which killed 159 people on a Halloween weekend in the entertainment district of Itaewon in capital Seoul. Kim is the highest-ranking police official charged in connection with the crowd crush.

— Reuters

4 astronauts, including Turkiye’s first, arrive at ISS for a 2-week stay

WASHINGTON: A four-man crew including Turkiye’s first astronaut arrived at the International Space Station (ISS) early on Saturday for a two-week stay in the latest such mission arranged entirely at commercial expense by Texas-based start-up company Axiom Space.

The rendezvous came about 37 hours after the Axiom quartet’s Thursday evening liftoff in a rocketship from Nasa’s Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida.

Both the Crew Dragon vessel and the Falcon 9 rocket that carried it to orbit were supplied, launched and operated by Elon Musk’s SpaceX under contract with Axiom, as they were in the first two Axiom missions to the ISS since 2022.

Once the astronauts reach the space station, they fall under the responsibility of Nasa’s mission control operation in Houston.

The Crew Dragon autonomously docked with the ISS at 5:42 am EDT as the two space vehicles were flying roughly 400 km over the South Pacific, a live Nasa webcast showed.

Both were soaring in tandem around the globe at the hypersonic speed of about 28,200 km/h as they joined

together in orbit.

With coupling achieved, it was expected to take about two hours for the sealed passageway between the space station and crew capsule to be pressurised and checked for leaks before hatches can be opened, allowing the newly arrived astronauts to move aboard the orbiting laboratory.

Plans call for the Axiom-3 crew to spend roughly 14 days in microgravity conducting more than 30 scientific experiments, many of them focused on the effects of spaceflight on human health and disease.

The multinational team was led by Michael López-Alegría, 65, a Spanish-born retired Nasa astronaut and Axiom executive making his sixth flight to the space station. He also commanded Axiom’s debut mission — the first all-private voyage to the ISS — in April 2022.

His second-in-command for Ax-3 is Italian Air Force Colonel Walter Villadei, 49. Rounding out the team are Swedish aviator Marcus Wandt, 43, representing the European Space Agency, and Alper Gezeravci, 44, a Turkish Air Force veteran and fighter pilot, making his nation’s first human spaceflight. — Reuters



The Axiom Mission 3 launches to the International Space Station, at Cape Canaveral, Florida, US. — Reuters file photo



A man installs a Ukrainian flag on a memorial for Ukrainian soldiers in Kramatorsk district. — AFP

European Union to step ammunition production amid Ukraine warnings

KYIV: The European Union said it will drastically increase ammunition production this year in response to Ukraine’s growing pleas for support in its war against Russia, which summoned the French ambassador to protest at the country’s “growing involvement” in the conflict.

Ukraine meanwhile called on western nations to stop Russia sourcing key parts for its own weapons production for the war that will soon be two years old and has left tens of thousands dead.

The EU will be able to churn out at least 1.3 million rounds of ammunition by the end of this year, EU internal market commissioner Thierry Breton said on a visit to Estonia.

“We are at a crucial moment for our collective security in Europe, and in the war of aggression run by Russia in Ukraine, Europe must and will continue to support Ukraine with all its means,” Breton told reporters.

Breton said that by March or April the 27 EU nations would reach a production capacity target for one million ammunition shells each year.

“We will continue to enhance

We will continue to enhance our production capacity, probably around 1.3 to 1.4 million... at the end of this year and continue to increase significantly next year

THIERRY BRETON

EU internal market commissioner

our production capacity, probably around 1.3 to 1.4 million... at the end of this year and continue to increase significantly next year,” he added.

Ukraine said that it faced a “pressing” need for ammunition and Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba on Friday made a call for greater efforts to stop Russia sourcing weapons parts for its offensive.

“The West must get serious about strangling Russia’s ability

to produce weapons,” Kuleba said in a social media post.

“According to some data, up to 95 per cent of the foreign-produced critical components found in Russian weapons destroyed in Ukraine come from Western countries,” he added.

Kuleba did not provide evidence for the claim, but Kyiv regularly disassembles Russian missiles and drones that fall on its territory to analyse their components.

On the battle front, Ukraine staged an attack that sparked a huge inferno at an oil depot in western Russia, a Ukrainian security services source said.

The strike was the second on a Russian oil depot in two days, after Kyiv claimed to have hit an oil storage facility in the northern Leningrad region.

Kyiv has targeted Russian oil and gas infrastructure throughout the almost two-year conflict, attacks they argue are fair retaliation for strikes on Ukrainian territory.

Russia stepped up diplomatic pressure, summoning France’s ambassador in Moscow and to make a formal complaint over his country’s “growing involvement” in the conflict. — AFP

Thousands rally against far-right in Frankfurt

FRANKFURT: Tens of thousands of people came out onto the streets of Frankfurt on Saturday to protest against the hard-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) against the background of growing support for the party.

Police put the numbers at around 35,000 shortly after the protest under the slogan “Defend Democracy” got underway in the centre of Germany’s financial capital. A police spokesman described the atmosphere as peaceful. Frankfurt Mayor Mike Josef was expected to address the rally. The protests, which have been running for days, have also drawn support from Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

A similar protest in Limburg to the north-west of Frankfurt drew 2,800 earlier on Saturday, considerably more than had been expected.



Tens of thousands attend a protest against the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, right-wing extremism and for the protection of democracy in Frankfurt, Germany. — Reuters

The countrywide protests were sparked by a report from the news outlet Correctiv which revealed that AfD politicians held a meeting with far-right extremists in November in Potsdam. Members of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the largest opposition party, also attended.

At the Potsdam meeting, far-right extremists discussed topics like “remigration,” a term frequently used in far-right circles as a euphemism for the expulsion of immigrants and minorities.

In remarks on Friday, Scholz termed remigration “an attack on our democracy.” He welcomed the protests planned for the weekend. “I say it in absolutely clarity and severity: Right-wing extremists are attacking our democracy,” he said. — dpa

Self-care is not being selfish



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

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

RECENTLY, I attended a webinar about self-care and how to look after yourself while you are busy looking after others.

The content was meant for people providing therapy such as psychologists, psychiatrists, or mental health counsellors but can apply to any profession that involves dealing with people.

It was interesting to listen to the speaker explaining how people providing care sometimes forget that they need to care for themselves or fail to develop healthy ways of ‘shedding off’ the trauma that one carries on from listening to other people’s problems. It is no wonder that some health care professionals develop symptoms of psychological burnout or unhealthy coping skills such as drinking, drug addiction.

Although other factors may contribute to the above behaviour, it is worth considering unaddressed secondary trauma that arises from caring for others. It was interesting to learn that many therapists are in denial when it comes to self-care.

A recent survey showed many participants believe self-care is not necessary or needed, that their work

is more important than their self-care, that doing self-care means they have a weakness, and that the harder they work the better they are.

No wonder that another survey showed 60 per cent of the participants reported being seriously depressed, feeling emotionally distant from their loved ones, and losing trust.

Such negative feelings were linked to an increase in work absences and early retirement.

I remember a colleague telling me that he often felt physically tired after seeing many patients in his afternoon clinic and it took him longer to fall asleep, after reducing the number of his patients his symptoms disappeared.

The speaker concluded his talk by sharing a few simple and easy-to-follow tips like having a shower once back from work and changing into new clothes, stretching exercises between sessions, and observing caffeine intake.

I can specifically relate to the last one since I love coffee and I may take one or more cups during my afternoon private clinic to stay awake, especially after a long busy day at the university.

Other tips included taking regular holidays even

ACCORDING TO A RECENT SURVEY, THERAPISTS BELIEVE THAT SELF-CARE IS NOT NEEDED AND THEIR WORK IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN SELF-CARE, AND THAT DOING SELF-CARE MEANS THEY HAVE A WEAKNESS

if you are unable to travel abroad.

A day trip to the beach or a walk-in nature is enough to restore your energy. The speaker also highlighted the importance of peer supervision where therapists meet in a group or one-on-one to discuss their encounters with clients and focus on emotions triggered by some clients and work together to address them.

I quite enjoyed the webinar, and I surely learned a few tips to share with colleagues.

In my opinion, other professionals such as teachers, police officers and people working in the court need to learn about self-care since they tend to interact with people from different backgrounds, listen to their suffering and naturally feel empathy and compassion towards them.

Some of the experiences they come across may be hard to handle and eventually affect them psychologically if not addressed well.

People need to be reminded that it is better to care for yourself and it is not considered selfish.

Learning to relax after work is essential so you can charge your batteries and return with more focus and enthusiasm.

Election wave, AI disinformation raise stakes in 2024

WITH elections due in countries representing half the world’s population and new technologies turbo-charging disinformation, 2024 will be a major stress test for politics in the age of AI. 2024 has been labelled a “make-or-break” year for democracy, with crucial votes due in more than 60 countries, including India, South Africa, Pakistan, Britain, Indonesia and the United States, as well as the European Union. The first major test of how to survive an onslaught of AI-powered disinformation has already taken place.

How things pan out in other countries remains to be seen, however. Generative AI is threatening to exacerbate deepening trends of polarisation and a loss of trust in the mainstream media.

Already last year, fake images of Donald Trump being arrested or Joe Biden announcing a general mobilisation to support Ukraine have shown how far the technology has progressed.

The last, easy tells for fakery — notably, AI’s struggles with details such as fingers — are rapidly disappearing, blunting detection mechanisms.

And the stakes are high.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked disinformation as its number one threat over the next two years. Undermining the legitimacy of elections could lead to internal conflicts and terrorism, and even “state collapse” in extreme cases, it warned. AI-powered disinformation is being deployed by groups linked in particular to Russia, China and Iran, seeking to “shape and disrupt” elections in rival countries, said analysis group Recorded Future.

The EU elections in June will likely be hit by campaigns aimed at undermining the cohesion of the bloc and its support for Ukraine, said Julien Nocetti, a Russia specialist for the French Institute of International Relations.

It would not be the first time.

The “Doppelganger operation” launched in early 2022 used clones of well-known media and public institutions to spread pro-Russian talking points, particularly about Ukraine.

French authorities and Meta — owner of Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram — linked it to the Kremlin. Paradoxically, repressive regimes could also use the threat of disinformation to justify greater censorship and other rights violations, the WEF said.

States hope to fight back with legislation, but they are working at a glacial pace compared to the exponential progress in AI. The forthcoming Digital India Act and the EU’s Digital Services Act will require platforms to target disinformation and remove illegal content. Experts are sceptical, however, about their enforcement capabilities. — AFP



Christopher F Schuetze

German lawmakers agree to ease path to citizenship with shorter waiting period

Lawmakers in Berlin approved legislation allowing shorter waiting periods before naturalisation and the possibility of dual citizenship, ushering in changes that proponents say will draw more skilled workers to the country and that opponents warn will lessen the value of German citizenship.

“Our reform is a commitment to a modern Germany,” Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said in a statement. “We are creating a modern immigration law that does justice to our diverse society,” she added, noting that it was high time for such a change.

The changes, which were passed on Friday by the Bundestag, Germany’s parliament, with a solid majority, will reduce to five years from eight the number of years that a resident has to wait before applying for citizenship. That waiting period can be reduced to three years for exemplary cases of integration or service to the German state.

They will also allow dual citizenship, which currently is not widely allowed.

Roughly 14 per cent of the people living in Germany are not citizens. Acknowledging their work in helping to build the German economy in the 1960s and ’70s, the changes include a stipulation that allows older applicants who came to Germany on guest worker programmes to obtain citizenship without having to take a written exam.

Until a previous change that became law in 2000, German citizenship had only been bestowed on those who could prove their German lineage or who had been born to German parents. But since then, the country has become more welcoming to immigrants, with 1 in 4 Germans having at least one grandparent who was born outside of Germany.

Businesses have long complained of a dearth of skilled workers. The German Economic Institute calculated that roughly 630,000 jobs went unfilled in 2022 because not enough qualified people applied.

The government hopes that the new legislation, scheduled to go into effect in April, will help attract more qualified workers to Germany. The legislation must still be approved by the Council of



Hamburg’s Mayor Peter Tschentscher during a citizenship ceremony in the large ballroom at City Hall in Hamburg.

States and be signed by the president.

But not everyone agrees that lowering the threshold for citizenship is good for German society.

“Express naturalisation with low requirements does not promote integration, but makes it more difficult,” said Alexander Dobrindt, a politician with the conservative CSU party.

THE CHANGES WILL REDUCE TO FIVE YEARS FROM EIGHT THE NUMBER OF YEARS THAT A RESIDENT HAS TO WAIT BEFORE APPLYING FOR CITIZENSHIP

Members of the conservative opposition and the far-right Alternative for Germany party, or AfD, voted against the changes, arguing that making citizenship easier to obtain would lessen incentives for foreigners to integrate into German society.

The legislation comes as Germany’s government grapples with multiple crises, internal bickering and record-low approval ratings. Passage of the law represents a rare success for Chancellor Olaf Scholz’s three-party coalition.

The citizenship change passed on Friday is one of the few high-profile proposals announced by the government in 2021, when it formed, to make it

into law. The changes were passed during a week when many Germans were taking to the streets to protest the AfD after it was revealed that party insiders had secretly met to discuss mass deportations.

“Germany is dependent on immigration of people who want to work here,” Stephan Thomae, a parliamentary leader of the liberal Free Democrats, said after Friday’s vote. “That is why we are enabling faster naturalisation for those who make an effort, are well integrated and can stand on their own two feet economically.”

Thomae’s party had insisted that those who are granted citizenship under the new law not be dependent on social services, which has been a concern of many who see immigrants as a drain on Germany’s social welfare system.

Another stipulation is that applicants for citizenship must undergo a criminal record check that ensures that they have not been accused of antisemitism, a point with particular resonance after the October 7 attacks on Israel by Hamas. Antisemitic incidents rose in Germany after the attacks, and immigrants have been blamed for some of them.

Lawmakers considered adding a stipulation that would have required new citizens to sign a statement confirming Germany’s special relationship with Israel and Israel’s right to exist, but they ultimately left it out. — New York Times

Gen Z — A real life comedy of errors

Generation Z, I believe, is the most combative, aggressive, impatient, of all generations, their inflexibility and ability to escalate even the most simple debates, the hallmark of their time. I want to say they are simply robust and resilient, but they would not be truly descriptive, as most are parasites.

Generally accepted to be products of the late 20th century, and the early 21st, they are the first truly digital generation, and what have they done with that gift, that power? While we can accept theorist August Comte's view that generational change is the engine behind social change," this generation has bent, to breaking point, the traditional societal and family units with their aggressive pursuit of gender issues.

They have destroyed our rights to privacy, with their determination that anyone and everyone is 'fair game,' and their images can be broadcast and distributed without our permission.

Worse, they take offence so easily that you can't have a decent discussion without tears, tantrums, or a walkout. But, worst of all, there is no negotiation, no dialogue or conciliation. It's their way, or the highway.

They perpetuate their version of the blame game with outstanding vigour, blaming their forebears for all the wars, conflicts, environmental, conservation, and global-warming, as if they can just do that, and not take any responsibility at all.

The Gen Zeder, buys, sells, dates, reads, learns, and communicates online, all day, half the night, and then wonders why they don't have the energy for work, school, or play. Between Snapchat, Instagram, X, Tick Tock, Facebook and K Pop, they occupy, and fund media giants, living off the news feeds, apps, and entertainment designed purely to make their Internet 'bigger than Gene Autrey's saddlebags,' to use a pre-Internet catchphrase. J M Finn writes that 'Gen Z are more driven by jobs and money, than love.' Interesting



Ray Petersen
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The writer is a media consultant

that, jobs, not work, and money, not pay... and they make so much noise about love, well I never.

What ego, but at least they are consistent as Max Brooks writes, "Gen Zed, they are cleaning up their own mess," and even more, Sushmita Shekar, an urban designer posits that her (Z) generation is the only one that can function between tech and real life, because we are completely comfortable with it! And they are so certain of their own infallibility. Mia Travulto, CEO of SecondLylf, an online shopping site, says "Gen Zed holds the power to shift fashion trends with a burst of artistic expression and a new ethical consciousness." Yes, and they have reinvented the wheel too I suppose?

The complexity of the gender debate is enough to drive us to drink! We are born either males or females, and what we become is a matter of individual choice, but it's never going to change what you are. It can only change who you are! And the reality is that saying you identify as something, is the same as pretending to be something isn't it? I'm all for falling in love, for finding love, and I want everyone to be happy and in love, but surely it's a private thing, and not for the broadsheets, is it?

Gen Zed are idealistic, progressive, dreamers, who demand accountability, from earlier generations, but don't really deliver it themselves. The poor hard done by tweenies.

Don't they realise that every generation has fears for the next, and the next? I fear for the world my granddaughter will grow up in, but I can't make it all better, and neither can anyone else.

Do your best. Vote, don't complain! And for goodness sake, exercise a little tolerance and respect. You'll be a lot better for it, and so will we.

My generation saw electricity and running water as necessities, those before prioritised shelter and fire, this mob want 4G and WiFi as necessities. I wonder which generations really understand where they have come from, and where they are going?

TO EXPERIENCE
THE REAL
FEELING AND
MEANING OF
GRATITUDE,
YOU NEED TO
REALISE THE
IMPACT THAT
"THANK YOU"
MAKES WHEN
ADDRESSED TO
YOU?

IN SEARCH OF A SIGNAL!



Displaced Palestinians using eSIM cards attempt to get a signal in order to contact their relatives on a hill in Rafah, on the southern Gaza Strip on the border with Egypt, amid continuing battles. Power cuts have become a fact of life in war-torn Gaza. But thanks to embedded SIM cards, Palestinians can still access the Internet and stay in touch with loved ones abroad. — AFP

Nikki Haley aims to upend Republican race against Trump

NIKKI HALEY and her allies are flooding New Hampshire with campaign workers and sharpening their attacks on frontrunner Donald Trump as they angle for an upset in next week's Republican presidential primary.

AFP Action, a political advocacy group backed by conservative billionaire Charles Koch, is sending up to 100 additional employees to knock on doors in the final sprint ahead of Tuesday's vote. SFA, another deep-pocketed PAC supporting Haley, released a new ad this week featuring New Hampshire residents calling Trump a bully and a liar. And Haley, who served as United Nations ambassador under Trump, has reworked her stump speech after her third-place finish in Iowa to go harder after the former president, though she still avoids some topics, like Trump's attempts to overturn his 2020 election loss to President Joe Biden.

At a packed event centre in Hollis, New Hampshire, last Thursday, she took a dig at Trump's age, described him as an irresponsible spender and accused him of being "vindictive" and "too focused on investigations to keep us from going to war."

The all-out effort is a sign of the stakes for Haley: She is under intense



GRAM SLATTERY

An author is Washington-based Reuters correspondent covering campaigns and Congress

NIKKI HALEY
TOOK A DIG AT
TRUMP'S AGE,
DESCRIBED
HIM AS AN
IRRESPONSIBLE
SPENDER AND
ACCUSED
HIM OF BEING
'VINDICTIVE'

pressure to win the second contest of the Republican primary race or risk closing her already-narrow path to the nomination. Three major donors said they feared funding for her campaign will dry up if she comes up short in New Hampshire, where polling averages show she trails Trump by about 14 percentage points. Trump trounced Haley and Republican Governor Ron DeSantis in Monday's Iowa caucuses.

"If Trump wins the first two states, it's hard to see how he's not the nominee," said Alex Conant, a veteran Republican operative. "I'm sure Haley will claim success if she is a very close second, but where does she go from there?"

New Hampshire has a high concentration of white-collar, college-educated professionals, a demographic group that is notably cool on Trump. The state also holds a semi-open primary allowing voters unaffiliated with either party to cast a ballot, many of whom are centrist leaning.

"Where Donald Trump under-performs is in white-collar suburbs," said Greg Moore, an AFP regional director. "And New Hampshire is loaded with them."

Moore said AFP Action had swelled its ranks in the state in recent weeks from seven paid employees to 60 and would now bring in up to 100 more workers from other parts of the country to encourage Haley supporters to go to the polls or persuade those on the fence. The scripts that door knockers typically use, provided to Reuters, argue that Haley would have a better chance than Trump of beating Biden in November. Haley and her outside super PACs are also leaning hard on New Hampshire's Republican

Governor Chris Sununu, who endorsed Haley in December and is among the country's most popular governors.

In Haley's campaign swing through New Hampshire this week, the two stuck together like glue, with the governor typically warming up the crowd and then speaking to reporters, a function Haley herself has largely eschewed. Haley has begun framing the primary race as a two-person battle between her and Trump, with DeSantis trailing in a distant third at 5 per cent in New Hampshire.

In the upscale suburb of Hollis, Haley, the daughter of two immigrants from India, presented herself as a "new generational conservative leader" who is less divisive than both Trump and Biden. She took brief swipes at the age of both men — Trump is 77, Biden is 81 and Haley turns 52 on Monday — and said she was more electable than Trump in a general election.

"When you think of more of the same, more of the same is the fact that over 70 per cent of Americans don't want a Trump-Biden rematch," she said to applause from a crowd that was roughly the same size as a Trump event in Portsmouth the night before.

Haley brought up Trump 11 times in her speech, a sharp increase from an event in Iowa in late December when she mentioned him only three times, once in a complimentary fashion.

"She really made a pivot towards Trump and made an even stronger case against him because, increasingly, it is a binary choice for voters," said one campaign official, who requested anonymity to discuss internal strategy.



A young diner holds up an "I Pick Nikki" sticker during Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley's campaign in Amherst, New Hampshire, US. — Reuters

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GERMANY AND GREAT BRITAIN SEAL OLYMPIC SPOTS

Action from Great Britain vs New Zealand match.

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 20

Germany and Great Britain booked the tickets for Paris Olympics 2024 after moving into the final of the FIH Men's Olympic Qualifier at Hockey Oman Stadium in Al Amerat on Saturday.

Germany eased past Pakistan 4-0 in the first semifinal while Great Britain saw off New Zealand 3-1 in the second semifinal. Pakistan and New Zealand will meet in the third-place play-off on Sunday (6 pm) to decide the third spot from the Qualifier. The final is also slated for Sunday at 8.30 pm.

World champions Germany made a flawless display of hockey against Pakistan who with their high efforts could not breach the German defence.

In the second semifinal, it was a tough contest between World No 4 Great Britain and New Zealand.

Great Britain struck first when Phil Roper scored after a nice move in the 18th minute. Star player Sam Ward made it 2-0 in the next minute for Britain from a penalty corner.

New Zealand pushed hard for a goal and Kane Russell found the target in the 26th minute from a penalty corner. At the half-time Team GB led 2-1.

Ward netted his second goal in the additional time of third quarter (45+) to give a 3-1 cushion to Britain.

MINIMUM MISTAKES

Player of the match Niklas Wellen said it was a great effort from the Germans to qualify for the Paris Games 2024.

"The match was a really good one for us. We managed to reduce our mistakes to a minimum and credit to the boys for booking the ticket to Paris," Wellen told the Observer.

"Pakistan were tough opponents and



Action from Germany vs Pakistan match.

we didn't give them space in our area and our defence worked really well in the match," he added.

Germany captain Mats Grambusch said it was a great moment to seal the Olympic spot.

"We had worked hard for it and the semifinal against Pakistan was the culminating moment for getting the

reward," Grambusch said.

The German captain praised the facilities at the Hockey Oman Stadium and said he wanted to explore Oman. "Oman is a beautiful country with nice and welcoming people."

The match started with German pressure on the Pakistan penalty area and they earned the first penalty corner in the 11th minute. Tom Grambusch struck the opening goal for the World No 5 team.

Germany got another penalty corner in the 13th minute but missed the target. Their third penalty corner after three minutes was well defended by Pakistan.

Niklas Wellen then increased the lead with a brilliant field goal from a tough angle as Germany moved up 2-0 at the start of second quarter. Pakistan made some attacks but could not make an impact at the German D.

At half-time Germany led 2-0.

The third quarter started with Pakistan

making all-round efforts to score a goal. Their best chance came in the 35th minute but the shot went just wide of the German post.

Next minute, Pakistan followed up the earlier move with a penetrating attack but was saved by a timely reflex by German goalkeeper Alexander Stadler.

Germany came back strong in the 39th minute with another precision strike, this time by Justus Weigand as they went up 3-0.

Niklas Wellen hit his second goal when he was on target from a penalty corner as a moment of defensive lapse cost Pakistan to concede the fourth goal.

Further efforts by Pakistan in the last quarter didn't see the results as Germany happily settled for a 4-0 result and a ticket to the Paris Olympics.

In the placement matches for fifth to eighth positions, Malaysia thumped Chile 5-0 while Canada beat China 3-1.

Former coaches urge Oman team to focus on attacks

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 20

On the eve of Oman's crucial face-off with Thailand, former football coaches urged the national team to strengthen its attacking tactics.

Abdulaziz al Riyami, the former national coach, said that the Oman team needed to boost their strikers in the forward line. "The coaching staff of the national team need to work very hard on developing the forward line of the team. Our game against Thailand is a very critical match and the Red Warriors need to snatch the first win in the group stage. Any other result other than victory may put Oman in the danger zone."

The experienced national coach who led many teams including Bahla, Nizwa and other teams, said the focus on attacking



Mohammed Khamis al Orami

will give better chances to score. "Oman team could not win against Saudi due to some mistakes in the substitutions. I hope head coach Branko Ivankovic will boost the forward line of the team."

Another former coach Mohammed al Orami said the match against Thailand will not be easy. "Thailand managed to register a win in the previous



Abdulaziz al Riyami

game against Kyrgyzstan. The East Asian teams are very quick and they are developing a lot especially in recent years. Hence, it is very crucial for our coaching staff to concentrate on all three lines: defence, middle line and the attacking area. The players are required to enter the match with full focus and they should not lose any scoring attempts. Snatching

a goal from any suitable chance is much required. The centre of the field led by the experienced player Harib al Saadi needs to be monitored very well and provide the required assistance to the players in the attacking side. The team must fully utilise the experience of Harib al Saadi, Salah al Yahyai and Jameel al Yahmadi in this game. We should avoid the mistake of the previous match," he said

Al Orami, who hails from Sur, affirmed that the team should be always looking for a goal whether they are ahead in the tally or behind.

"The team should press Thais hard and the defenders should be strong enough to break all their scoring attempts. Oman players need to monitor the centre of the field," he said.





Egypt's Salah to miss two Nations Cup games due to hamstring strain

ABIDJAN: Mohamed Salah will miss two Africa Cup of Nations games for Egypt after suffering a hamstring muscle strain during Thursday's 2-2 draw with Ghana, the Egyptian Football Association (EFA) said on Friday.

"The X-rays that Salah underwent confirmed his hamstring injury and he will miss the team's next two matches in the Africa Cup of Nations against Cape Verde and the round of 16 if (Egypt) qualify," the EFA said in a brief statement.

Salah pulled up with a hamstring strain before halftime in Thursday's Group B game against Ghana in Abidjan.

Earlier on Friday, Egypt doctor Mohamed Abu El-Ela said Salah had initially wanted to continue playing in the key game but when the pain became more acute he asked to be taken off.

Salah's manager at Liverpool, Jurgen Klopp, suggested earlier in the day that the injury might be serious, given that the forward was rarely injured or left the field for his club.

"I spoke with him last night and how it was. They are doing

further assessments now and then we will know more," Klopp told reporters.

"At that moment he was shocked and couldn't see why he was hit by something so intense. You have these hamstring injuries in a different way. He felt it and we know how rarely Mo goes off, or needs to go off, so it is definitely something but I don't have any more information right now."

The 31-year-old Salah has missed just 10 league games in six-plus seasons for Liverpool.

Klopp said he was uncertain whether Liverpool's medical staff would travel to the Ivory Coast to assess the extent of Salah's injury.

"We will see. It depends on the diagnostics," he said. "We will have ultrasound and MRI and then we will know what it is and we will see and make plans but it's too early (at the moment)," he said.

Losing Salah, who is on the cusp of 100 caps for his country, would be a major blow to seven-time cup winners Egypt, who have made a sluggish start to their campaign in the Ivory Coast. — **Reuters**

Teenager Noskova stuns top seed Swiatek in Australian Open

MELBOURNE: Top seed Iga Swiatek tumbled out of the Australian Open on Saturday, losing 3-6 6-3 6-4 to Czech teenager Linda Noskova in the third round as her bid for a maiden title at Melbourne Park and fifth Grand Slam trophy fell apart.

The Pole, more accustomed to breezing past opponents with the odd "bagel" thrown in, had struggled in Melbourne, enduring a first-set tiebreak in her opener against Sofia Kenin before fighting back from the brink to oust Danielle Collins.

Things were looking up for her after a strong opening set but Noskova dug deep to become the first teenager to defeat the top-ranked player at the Australian Open since Amelie Mauresmo toppled Lindsay Davenport in 1999.

"I'm speechless, I knew it was going to be an amazing match with the world number one and such a player, but I didn't really think it would end up like this," said Noskova.

The emotional 19-year-old crouched to the floor and put her hands over her face when the big moment came and buried her head in her towel later and cried.

"I'm just really glad to get through this round," she added.

Noskova had emerged as a tricky third-round opponent for Swiatek with three top-10 wins under her belt, but the Pole had looked in no mood to be dragged into another fight as she broke in the sixth game and held to love in the next to take charge.

The 22-year-old Swiatek barely let the intensity drop after taking the opening set as she forced the Melbourne Park debutant into some uncomfortable positions in the second by working the angles and launching big forehands.

But Noskova held firm, responding with explosive hitting of her own and breaking en route to levelling up the contest.

"I felt like I had everything under control until she broke me in the second set," Swiatek said. "I had couple of chances to break her in second set and I didn't use them. That's a shame."

"She was proactive. I wanted to do that later in the next games.



Czech Republic's Linda Noskova celebrates after winning her third round match against Poland's Iga Swiatek. — **Reuters**



Poland's Iga Swiatek in action during her third round match against Czech Republic's Linda Noskova. — **Reuters**

Sometimes I was rushing it. I wasn't playing with my intuition and naturally.

"I guess I'll have to work on stuff to feel more comfortable next year." World number 50 Noskova heaped the pressure on the four-times major champion to take a 2-1 lead in the decider.

Swiatek looked to have composed herself during a brief pause in play as doctors attended

to a sick supporter in the crowd and broke back, but Noskova did not relent and got her nose in front again to close out the match on serve and complete a huge upset.

"I was shaking a little," Noskova said about serving for the victory. "I didn't hit two first serves which was not the best start for me but I pulled out an ace." Swiatek said she had been

more stressed at Melbourne Park than in other tournaments, especially in the first two rounds.

"Some things just didn't work as they did before, even though I was working the same way," she added. "I feel like I did really everything I could in pre-season to improve some stuff that I wanted to. "Then I came here and I wasn't playing natural anymore."

— **Reuters**

Senegal steam into last 16 with 3-1 win over Cameroon

YAMOUSSOUKRO: Ismaila Sarr scored one goal and laid on another as defending champions Senegal beat Cameroon 3-1 on Friday and booked their place in the round of 16 at the Africa Cup of Nations, leaving their opponents in some peril.

Sarr opened the scoring in the first half of the Group C clash in Yamoussoukro after a mistake by Manchester United goalkeeper Andre Onana, who was playing his first game of the tournament after a late arrival in the Ivory Coast.

Habib Diallo added the second goal from Sarr's cross before Jean-Charles Castelletto scored a late consolation for Cameroon. Sadio Mane completed the scoring for Senegal in injury time.

The Lions of Teranga advance to the knockout rounds with a



Senegal's forward #18 Ismaila Sarr fights for the ball with Cameroon's defender #5 Nhouhou Tolo during the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) 2024 group C football match between Senegal and Cameroon at the Stade Charles Konan Banny in Yamoussoukro on January 19. — **AFP**

final group game against Guinea to spare. Cameroon must play Gambia in their last match. Both of those are on Tuesday.

Senegal head the pool with six points from their two games, while Cameroon and Guinea have a point each and Gambia are yet to break their duck. The latter two sides meet at the same venue later on Friday.

Cameroon barely tested Senegal keeper Edouard Mendy until the final 10 minutes when they could have earned a point after a limp performance that followed a 1-1 draw with Guinea in their opener — alarming form for coach Rigobert Song.

He selected Onana after the keeper missed the Guinea game in order to play for Manchester United against Tottenham Hotspur in the Premier League,

and will be frustrated by the manner of the first goal conceded.

Sarr netted on 16 minutes after Onana attempted to punch clear a cross but did not get the height or distance he needed and the ball fell to the winger, whose deflected shot went into the bottom corner.

That goal seemed to spark Cameroon into life and they found a way back into the contest with a goal from a corner as Castelletto headed in Olivier Ntcham's cross.

It should have been 2-2 following a horrific miss at the back post from Georges-Kevin Nkoudou, who headed wide with the goalmouth gaping.

Senegal went up the other end and sealed the three points when Mane netted their third goal.

— **Reuters**



South Korea salvage late draw with Jordan

On the other hand, Branko denied receiving official offers from Iranian clubs on the sidelines of the tournament. He cleared saying, "It is not true about the existence of official negotiations between me and an Iranian club official. On the contrary, I am a



On the other hand, Masatada Ishii, head coach of the Thailand team, said “Oman is a distinguished team in the midfield and has a strong offensive line as well, but whatever it is, we are fully prepared to fight, regardless of

Iranian referee Moaz Fanadifar will officiate the match while Saeed Qassemi will be the first assistant. Ali Reza Eldrum is the second assistant and the fourth referee will be Ali Reza Faghani. Muhammad Abdullah Hassan from UAE, the umpire, will be the VAR referee.

The Koreans had enjoyed almos



Bahrain took all three points from a nervy encounter with Malaysia to boost their qualification hopes when Ali Madan scored a 95th-minute winner. Madan used the outside of his boot to shoot from the edge of the box, with his strike going through a crowd of defenders and beating the keeper to spark wild celebrations in the dugout while some of his team mates collapsed on the pitch in relief.

— AFP

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Asyad Container Terminal launched at Duqm Port

DUQM: Asyad Group, the integrated global logistics group of the Sultanate of Oman, kicked off operations at Asyad Container Terminal – Duqm that will be managed and operated by the group's ports and terminals arm, Asyad Ports.

The latest addition to Asyad's asset lineup follows the Omani logistics giant's robust expansion plans that aim to offer more integrated logistics solutions, anticipate and proactively respond to new trends in global trade and handling, and meet the requirements of the world's biggest players in the container business.

Asyad Container Terminal is also set to promote Port of Duqm and the Special Economic Zone at Duqm as a global container handling destination and a centre for integrated logistics.

This expansion is aligned with Asyad's established strategy to increase the competitiveness of its services and the throughput of its ports.

Operating and managing the state-of-the-art container terminal further highlights

Asyad's advanced capabilities, know-how and competencies, being the national operator responsible for undertaking the management and operations of



The new berth can handle up to three containerships at a time.

ports and terminals.

Specifically, securing this high-profile project reflects customers' and stakeholders' confidence in Asyad Ports efficiency, expertise, and quality of service.

Since its inception, Asyad Ports has proven its proficiency in operating and managing several local ports and terminals, consistently posting profit since the first year of operations.

In terms of technical capabilities, Asyad Container Terminal is equipped with four remotely operated 65-ton twin

lift STS cranes and twelve 50-ton RTG cranes. In addition to their 71-metre outreach and 18-metre backreach, the cranes have been fitted with a host of fifth-gen technologies, optic fibre data transfer systems for remote operation and smart driving systems.

Additionally, the terminal boasts a cutting-edge yard control system and an automatic landing system, all designed to improve overall handling and productivity. The terminal also consists of three berths capable of berthing and

handling three ships at a time, with a quay length of over 1,000 metres, a storage capacity of 26,000 TEU and over 600 reefer containers.

To test the terminal's readiness in the pilot stage, the loads of two very large container ships inbound from Asia and Europe were reshipped on different lines.

All berthing and handling operations were completed smoothly, a testament to the terminal's readiness and technical ability to accommodate ships of all sizes and purposes and meet the

growing local, regional, and global import and export demand.

Aligned with Asyad Group's strategy, operating the container terminal is yet another step to enhance integration across logistics solutions and keep pace with the rapidly evolving trade and economic landscapes in Oman, while catering for the growing maritime traffic and FDI flows.

This engagement also aims to support several projects related to food security, green hydrogen, oil and gas, which ultimately supports local players and SMEs operating in different facets of logistics, from land transport and storage to other container-related activities.

Highlighting the role of the new terminal in Oman's drive to economic diversification, Eng Ahmed Ali Akaak, Acting CEO of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, stated that this venture will unlock great investment opportunities by connecting the Special Economic Zone at Duqm with global shipping lines, capitalising on the direct access to key global markets and Duqm's strategic location at the crossroads of major international shipping lanes.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Abri, CEO of Asyad Ports, explained: "Operating Asyad

Container Terminal is a significant milestone in our journey to develop and expand our portfolio and commercial operations. It clearly signals the level of efficiency of Asyad Ports' solutions as well as the strong confidence afforded to us by our global customers. Over the past two years, Asyad Ports has proven its ability to manage and operate several terminals for general cargo, bulk, and Ro-Ro."

"The state-of-the-art terminal will leverage its location at the 18-metre deep Duqm Port to accommodate vessels of all sizes and offer loading, unloading and transshipment services, container packing and unloading, and other added value services," Al Abri added.

"Inaugurating the new terminal was the result of coordinating with Asyad's strategic partners in both the public and private sectors."

Asyad Ports' CEO also underscored Asyad's endeavours to promote food security in Oman with Asyad Container Terminal acting as an enabler of the Sultanate of Oman fishing industry and meeting its demand through cold chain solutions tailored for importing and exporting fish and seafood products. — ONA

Oman-India Investment Forum discusses bilateral economic opportunities

MUSCAT: The Oman-India Investment Forum, organised by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) here on Saturday, discussed investment opportunities available in promising economic sectors of the two friendly countries.

Deliberations during the forum, which witnessed the presence of a number of investors and business owners from both sides, focused on prospects in the energy, mining, food security, manufacturing industries, transportation, logistics, tourism and digital economy sectors.

Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Board of Directors of OCCI, said the aim of the forum was to boost economic ties commensurate with the strength of bilateral relations enjoyed by the two countries.

He welcomed the initiation of efforts by Oman and India to finalise a comprehensive economic partnership that recognises the important role



Officials and business representatives from Oman and India attended the forum at JW Marriott Hotel on Saturday.

that the private sectors of the two countries in driving trade and economic cooperation.

Representatives at the forum reviewed opportunities in energy, infrastructure, technology, health care and tourism. They underlined the need for supporting a conducive environment for communication and building relationships between government officials, business leaders and investors.

Dr Abdullah bin Masoud al Harthy, a member of the Board of Directors of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said the forum focused

on exchanging knowledge and discussing trade policies, and what is related to customs tariffs, and measures to facilitate cross-border trade with the aim of creating a conducive environment for further communication and building relationships.

The forum witnessed the presentation of several working papers that dealt with "Oman Vision 2040", introducing its objectives and the promising investment opportunities it provides in a number of sectors, the features and incentives of investment in Oman. — ONA



مجلس التجارة والصناعة
Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Tender

Oman chamber of commerce and industry would like to announce the following public tenders:

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Fees (irrevocable)	Specialized companies	Deadline for Obtaining Documents	Deadline for Tender submission
1/2024	The 13th session of Arab - Russian Business Council - and the Fifth International Exhibition (Arabia-Expo)	100 /- R.O for all companies. 25/- R.O for companied holding Riyada	Companies specialized in Organizing Exhibitions and Events	4 February 2024	Before 12 pm 12 February 2024
2/2024	Analysing the current Landscape of Business Finance in the Sultanate of Oman	100 /- R.O for all companies. 25/- R.O for companied holding Riyada	Companies specialized in consulting and economic studies		

Companies may obtain the tender documents from the Administration Department at the Second Floor of the chamber's Headquarters in Ruwi, during the official working hours against the payment of tender fees.

Tender Terms:

- Provide valued CR,OCCI membership and taxation certificate .
- Interested companies should enclose their bids a 1% Bank guarantee/ certified cheque of proposal value issued by one of the banks operating in Oman valid for 120 days from the deadline of submitting the bids addressed in the name of **Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry**. The bids without this temporary guarantee will not be considered.
- The bids should be submitted in red waxed envelopes addressed to - Head of main tendering Committee, OCCI, written outside the Number and title of the Tender. No indication about the bidder is allowed on the envelope.
- Offers should be deposited in the tender box kept at the Administration Department in the Second floor of OCCI Head office.
- OCCI is not bound to accept the lowest or any other bids. It has the right to accept or reject any bids without showing reasons.
- Interested companies should submit the Tenders before 12 pm on 12 Feb 2024

For any inquiries please contact call : **24763881**
Email : **Shahla.zadjali@omanchamber.om**



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JAC Motors unveils JS6 SUV in Oman



MUSCAT: Jianghuai Automobile Company (JAC Motors) from China introduces its latest innovation to the roads of Oman — the JS6 mid-size SUV. This remarkable vehicle, set to redefine the driving experience, arrives in collaboration with Towell Auto Centre (TAC), an esteemed name in Oman’s automotive industry since 1972, and a trusted member of the W J Towell Group.

“As we proudly unveil the JAC JS6 SUV, it stands as a testament to JAC’s commitment to excellence in innovation and craftsmanship.

This vehicle is not merely a showcase of advanced features and exceptional build quality, but also an embodiment of our dedication to redefining the automotive landscape in Oman,” stated Riyadh Ali Sultan, General Manager of Towell Auto Centre.

“The JS6, with its blend of cutting-edge technology, comfort, and striking design aesthetics, is specifically tailored to meet the sophisticated demands of our Omani customers.”

The JS6 encapsulates the epitome of sophistication, marrying a stylish design, cutting-edge technology, and advanced safety features. JAC Motors’ unwavering commitment to innovation and quality finds its culmination in this exceptional SUV.

Under the hood lies the impressive 1.5 Turbo Engine, delivering a commanding 280 Nm of torque between 2000 - 4500 rpm. Accelerating from 0-100 km/h in a mere 9.8 seconds, with a brisk 30-60 km/h acceleration in just 2.8 seconds, the JS6 ensures responsive, agile, and efficient performance across Oman’s diverse terrains.

Step inside to discover its capacious interior offering a voluminous 670 litres trunk capacity, catering to both your daily errands and extended adventures.

The avant-garde 24.6-inch Dual Screen navigation system is a technological marvel, accompanied by 360 Panoramic Images that enhance visibility. Embrace the scenic beauty with the Panoramic Sunroof while ensuring seamless connectivity with Wireless Charging—an amenity crafted for modern-day convenience.

Safety remains paramount with the JS6, attaining a stellar C-NCAP 5 Star Rating. Equipped with the Bosch 9.3 ESP System, it assures stability and control on every journey.

Further enhancing safety are features like the Tailgate Escape System for emergencies, ACC Adaptive Cruise Control, AEB, LDW, FCW, BSM, and HMA—transforming the JS6 into a vigilant and secure travel companion.

Towell Auto Centre (TAC) stands as the exclusive distributor for JAC Motors in Oman, ensuring exceptional after-sales service, providing genuine parts for all JAC models, and offering innovative customer solutions.

Explore the JS6 and other awe-inspiring JAC vehicles at Towell Auto Centre’s JAC showrooms dotted across Oman, providing access to JAC’s distinguished lineup.

For comprehensive information on showrooms and servicing centres, visit JAC Oman’s website. Keep pace with the latest offers and updates by following @JAComan on social media.

OQ invests and manages projects worth RO 800 million in Musandam

MUSCAT: The number of projects invested in and managed by OQ Group in the energy sector in the Governorate of Musandam is 3 projects. These include the Musandam gas processing plant, the management of offshore fields in Block 8 concession area, in addition to the Musandam power generation station, with a total value of approximately RO 800 million.

OQ Group owns the Musandam gas processing and product plant in Block 8 concession area, where gas is used to generate energy for the governorate. OQ also manages and operates offshore fields in the concession area of Block 8, owned by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

OQ is committed to improving work efficiency to increase production and reduce operating costs in Block 8 concession area since it started managing oil and gas production operations in January 2019, which includes two offshore fields, Bakha and West Bakha, which produce oil and gas to supply the Musandam power station.

The group also manages and operates the Musandam power generation station, with a production capacity of about 120 megawatts per hour, supplying the governorate with electrical power.

On the other hand, OQ, in



The Dibba Archaeological Centre project in Musandam.

cooperation with the Office of the Governor of Musandam, implements several social investment projects in the governorate since 2020, with an estimated value of about RO 4 million.

These projects focus on urban, environmental, and tourism aspects as a realisation of its social responsibility and service to local communities.

OQ collaborates with relevant

government entities in the governorate to implement projects including the Dibba Archaeological Centre project in cooperation with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the Dibba waterfront project, the Bassa Beach project with the Omran Group, the Madha state park development project, and the waterfront development project in Bukha, the Musandam Science and Innovation Centre with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, a group of oil and gas companies operating in the Sultanate of Oman, and Oman Sail.

— ONA

New guide on ‘Doing Business in Oman’ launched

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 20

A new comprehensive guide on ‘Doing Business in Oman’, compiled by well-known multidisciplinary practice Crowe Oman, was launched here on Saturday, against the backdrop of the Oman India Investor Forum held at the JW Marriott Hotel Muscat.

His Highness Firas bin Fatik al Said presided over the publication’s unveiling, in the presence of Shaikh Faisal bin Abdullah al Rawas, Chairman of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI). Also in attendance were former Indian Union Minister Suresh Prabhu and Indian Ambassador Amit Narang.

In opening remarks, Davis Kallukaran, Managing Partner – Crowe Oman, said the guide was an initiative of the Foreign Investment Committee of OCCI. “The last two years have seen



Dignitaries at the launch of the new guide on ‘Doing Business in Oman’.

tremendous momentum in the diversification of the economy. Oman is committed to Net-Zero carbon emissions by 2050.

To achieve this, RO 190 billion has been targeted to be spent over the next 25 years,” Kallukaran said.

“Currently 67% of Oman’s revenue comes from oil and gas, 11% comes from customs duty, excise tax, income tax and VAT. The rest 22% is contributed by other sectors.

Oman Vision 2040 is very

relevant in this context. It focuses on the sectors other than oil and gas.

Agriculture & fisheries, transport & logistics, energy & mining, tourism and manufacturing have been identified as the core industries to spearhead the acceleration of the economy,” he added.

The new guide does a deep dive into Oman’s economic, business, regulatory, banking, labour and taxation environment, while providing an overview of free trade agreements and free zones.

It sheds light on Oman’s business friendly investment environment, reflected in the minimum capital requirement, 100% foreign ownership, no personal income tax, no currency exchange controls, no restriction on repatriation of profits, no taxes on dividends, and so on.

The India Oman Investment Forum has been jointly organised by OCCI and the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India Muscat Chapter.

Toyota’s Popular Corolla now with exclusive benefits

MUSCAT: Toyota fans looking forward to owning a Corolla can now enjoy exclusive benefits. Service 5 years/50,000 kms (whichever is earlier) and 1 year insurance. (Terms & conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details.)

The Corolla is a reliable vehicle that has been constantly making a mark as a dependable and reliable partner for long. The Corolla is equipped with a perfect combination of power, fuel-efficiency, space and safety features. Allowing owners to make the most of every journey.

Powering the Corolla is a

2.0-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine which produces 168 hp and 20.39 kg-m of torque. For more immersive driving experiences, the engine is paired to a Direct Shift CVT transmission.

Customers looking for a more fuel-efficient option can choose the 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine Corolla that produces 121 hp and 15.7 kg-m of torque.

This is paired with a CVT transmission.

The Corolla’s interior adopts a simple yet appealing style, with impressive space and integrated functional parts that combine to create a refined elegance. The ergonomically designed seats



feature new cushion material, while the armrest and ample legroom offer superior comfort for the rear-seat passengers.

Making every drive a delightful experience are a range of features,

which vary based on the trim level. Occupants also benefit from AC vents for the rear seat, a moonroof, 4.2-inch multi-information display (MID), 8-inch display audio, cruise control, six-speaker

sound system, and 60:40 split-folding rear seats.

As with any other Toyota model, safety remains a top priority for the Corolla, which includes a comprehensive array of features to protect its occupants, such as four SRS airbags, Vehicle Stability Control (VSC), Anti-lock Braking System (ABS), Brake Assist, Electronic Brakeforce Distribution (EBD), Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), among many others.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO Conformity Certificate applicable to the model/grade.

Parameters such as vehicle weight, dimensions & fuel economy could vary from the GSO Conformity Certificate due to fitment of dealer installed accessories. Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications.

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Saudi trade delegation to visit Al Sharqiyah North Governorate



Tourists ride camels in desert in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate.

IBRA: The Al Sharqiyah North branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) will host on Sunday, January 21, 2024, a governmental and commercial delegation from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, headed by the First Deputy of the Board of Directors of the Riyadh Chamber of Commerce.

The 60-member delegation will include representatives of Saudi government agencies, chairpersons of boards of directors, and executive directors of companies.

According to Hamad bin Ali al Hajri, a board member from OCCI's Al Sharqiyah North branch, the visitors will study investment opportunities and trade ties linked to the governorate.

A number of papers will also highlight investment opportunities in desert tourism, legislation and laws in desert tourism, the reality of desert tourism and its cultural and social dimensions.

Salah bin Salem al Hajri, Chairman of the Tourism Committee in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, said the Oman Desert Tourism Forum will work to highlight the tourism components, the cultural and historical heritage, the diversity of tourism patterns enjoyed by the desert of the Sultanate of Oman, and its importance as a tourist attraction for tourists locally and from various countries of the world.

During the forum, specific initiatives will be announced, in cooperation with other bodies, to prepare for the launch of specialised training courses in local journalists focused on tourism coverage.

— ONA

Array of social projects eligible for sustainable finance in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 20

Food security projects, affordable housing and emergency response programmes are among numerous “social expenditures” identified by the Omani government that are eligible for funding assistance under a new ‘Sustainable Finance Framework’ unveiled by the Ministry of Finance recently.

The framework — the first of its kind in the Gulf region — classifies eligible “social expenditures” into seven broad categories, funding towards which will come from a pool of sustainable finance, raised through the issuance of, for example, Green Bonds, Social and Sustainability Bonds, Loans and sukuk.

Funding assistance for eligible initiatives will come in the form of subsidies, grants, loans, support schemes, incentive mechanisms, investments expenditures, operating expenditures, tax expenditures and intervention expenditures.

These are targeted at initiatives that are aligned with Oman's commitments to Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) and social welfare programme. Separately, the Framework also seeks to support dozens of ‘green’ initiatives and Transition and Climate Adaptation goals.

Eligible for ‘sustainable finance’ are numerous initiatives distributed across the following seven categories of ‘social expenditures’ in the Sultanate of Oman:

Affordable Basic Infrastructure: Included in this category are expenditures that improve the reliability of electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure to ensure the long term resilience of infrastructure in rural areas and coastal areas; Expenditures to protect the security of clean drinking water



Smallholder farmers are among those eligible for sustainable finance under the new framework unveiled by the Ministry of Finance last week.

supplies, and support the long term resilience of water and sanitation infrastructure; and Electricity and water subsidies for low-income households which meet the eligibility criteria of the National Subsidy System (NSS).

Education Access: This category covers expenditures to improve access to public, free, subsidised or nonprofit educational facilities (schools and universities); Construction and upgrade of schools, universities, vocational training facilities or housing for teachers to provide essential access to public education for the population; Provision of education materials and equipment.

Healthcare Access: Covered in this sector are expenditures to improve access to public, free, subsidised or nonprofit healthcare facilities. It includes the construction and upgrade of public hospitals, healthcare centres, elderly care centres, rehabilitation centres for disabled persons; the production of medical supplies, medical equipment, medicines and vaccines to treat and prevent the spread of infectious diseases or

health disasters; and projects related to emergency response to a crisis which may be a natural disaster or health disaster.

Affordable Housing: It covers multiple initiatives aimed at ensuring access to safe and affordable housing, including condominiums programme for creation of housing complexes for low-income families; Housing assistance programme which provides grants to build or renovate an existing house for low-income families; and Housing loan programme with interest-free housing loans for low-income citizens.

Employment Generation, MSME support: Included in this category are expenditures related to supporting Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) or unemployed persons; Government schemes to support unemployed persons who are out of work involuntarily such as temporary financial assistance and programmes aimed at supporting reemployment under the National Employment Programme; and Government schemes related to training and

reskilling for unemployed youths under the National Employment Programme.

Socioeconomic Advancement and Empowerment: Initiatives aimed at empowering the most vulnerable groups are covered in this category. They include — Projects to reduce discrimination, improve equality for women and improve their access to job opportunities; Projects to promote training and capacity building for sustainable fishing practices; and Financial support programmes targeted at: Low-income families, orphans and widows, people with disabilities, children, and the elderly.

Food Security: Covered in this sector are expenditures related to the development of fish markets for small-scale fisheries; Technical and financial assistance for smallholder farmers on sustainable agriculture practices (such as the provision of subsidised or free climate resilient seed varieties better suited for Oman's climate to combat desertification, salinity, and droughts; and modern irrigation techniques to conserve water such as drip irrigation).

The Sustainable City — Yiti demystifies strategies to achieve net zero emissions by 2040

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 20

The Sustainable City — Yiti has shed light on its sustainable strategies, set to make it the region's first net zero emissions community by 2040. Located just outside of Muscat, the ambitious project spans one million square metres and has an aspiration to become the largest operational sustainable community in the world.

It will reduce the per capita emissions footprint of its residents by 78% compared to conventional housing. This includes relying on 100% renewable energy, 100% water recycling, 100% waste diversion from landfill, and up to 80% self-sufficiency in food caloric requirements.

Slated for completion in 2026, the infrastructure of The Sustainable City — Yiti has reached 75% completion.

The Sustainable City — Yiti follows a resilient and replicable working model that provides



a map for a low-emissions future powered by intelligent technology and integrates three pillars of sustainability: social, environmental and economic.

The world-class mixed-use development promises a high standard of living throughout the 300 villas/townhouses and 1,225 plaza apartments, integrating best practices in design, construction, technology, and maintenance. To meet sustainability targets, the development seeks to cut down on emissions across the six pillars of environmental sustainability: food, energy, water,

products, mobility, and waste. This multipronged approach is breaking new grounds for Oman, emphasising the Oman Vision 2040 and making sustainable living accessible to everyone.

Food
The Sustainable City — Yiti aims to achieve 80% food security through nutritious food production and robust agriculture systems. Date palms and other productive trees will be planted. Additionally, it will house four biodomes for indoor vertical farming, whilst the Sustainable District will dedicate

small plots for community gardening, supporting well-being and social sustainability. The development will also be home to SEE Lab, which will be a food hub producing vegetables, herbs, milk, eggs, and fish. Both SEE Lab and the biodomes will be digitally integrated with the latest food production technologies to ensure efficient seasonal harvesting, whilst food delivery and transportation to residents will be through electric vehicles to minimise associated greenhouse gas emissions.

Energy
The Sustainable City — Yiti is set to deploy rooftop solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on all the villas and parking areas which will offset up to 100% of the operational energy demand on the residential villas and townhouses. The villas, townhouses and plaza apartments reduce energy consumption through ‘demand side management’, including passive and active design. Residential units avoid the sun

and maximise shading. They are also equipped with highly insulated UV reflective walls, roofs, and windows which reduce air-conditioning loads and electrical consumption.

Additionally, all residential units will be equipped with energy-efficient appliances to minimise resource consumption and associated costs. As a result, residents of The Sustainable City — Yiti, will enjoy a considerable drop in their utility bills — up to 100% on electricity and 50% on water — compared to conventional households.

Water
Residential units will be equipped with low-flow water fixtures and appliances to reduce total water consumption and footprint. The Sustainable City — Yiti is also equipped with a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) where all wastewater will be reused in landscape irrigation using a smart irrigation system to maximise efficiency, and for the District Cooling Plant to reduce water loss

Salalah forum to discuss facilitating Omani-Yemeni investment

SALALAH: The Omani-Yemeni Forum for Facilitating Investment, organised by the branch of the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in Dhofar Governorate, will discuss ways to enhance trade and economic relations between Oman and Yemen, as well as leveraging investment opportunities available in various fields.

The forum will be held on January 24 and 25 at the Sultan Qaboos Youth Complex for Culture and Entertainment in Salalah, and targets entrepreneurs, investors, and owners of SMEs in the two countries.

Naif bin Hamed Fadel, Head of OCCI branch in Dhofar Governorate, said the forum aims to enhance economic partnership and cooperation between the Omani and Yemeni sides by providing integrated service, industrial, and tourist projects, in addition to facilitating opportunities for Yemeni companies and businessmen to familiarise themselves with the investment incentives and advantages in Oman, exchange experiences and information, promote innovation and new developmental ideas, and strategic initiatives of economic feasibility.

Navigating the future of money : Insights from CRYPTO2030 in Davos



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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The first edition of CRYPTO2030, held in the picturesque town of Davos, Switzerland, proved to be a melting pot of ideas and innovations shaping the future of finance. One of the most anticipated panels, “Stablecoins vs CBDC:

Co-existing in a Cashless Society,” moderated by Mattia L. Rattaggi, brought together a diverse group of experts to delve into the evolving landscape of digital currencies. A key topic of discussion revolved around the intricacies of Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) and their potential role in modern economies. The notion of CBDCs, as explained by Morten Bech of the BIS Innovation Hub Switzerland, hinges on striking a balance between privacy and regulatory compliance. The proposed model where the spender remains anonymous, while the receiver’s identity is disclosed, underscores a nuanced approach to privacy, aiming to preserve individual confidentiality while curtailing illicit activities like tax evasion. According to a recent

United Nations report, USDT (Tether), the 3rd most traded cryptocurrency, is increasingly being utilised for illegal activities such as fraud and money laundering. The report, released by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), highlights the growing concern over the use of digital assets in facilitating criminal activities, especially in East and Southeast Asia. This revelation comes amidst heightened legal and regulatory focus on the role of cryptocurrencies in unlawful financial practices. Contrasting CBDCs, the panel also explored the multifaceted world of stablecoins. These digital tokens, pegged to stable assets, present a fascinating dichotomy. While some, like Yves Longchamp of AMINA Bank, view fiat-pegged stablecoins as

less intriguing, others, including Dr. Mattia L. Rattaggi, find the concept of stablecoins backed by diverse assets like precious metals more captivating. This perspective highlights the evolving nature of stablecoins, transcending traditional fiat currencies while acknowledging their enduring influence. In a recent campaign speech in New Hampshire, former US President and current Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump made a firm commitment against the introduction of a Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC). Trump expressed concerns that a CBDC would empower the federal government with unprecedented control over financial transactions. He emphasised his dedication to shielding citizens from what he perceives as potential

governmental overreach, asserting that under his presidency, he would prevent the establishment of a CBDC. Trump’s stance is based on the belief that such a digital currency could enable the government to exert complete authority over individual finances, potentially leading to scenarios where citizens could lose their money without awareness. A striking point made by Johnna Powell of DTCC emphasised the crucial role of education in the digital currency space. The distinction between algorithmic and asset-backed stablecoins remains opaque to many, underscoring the need for comprehensive and accessible information to demystify these concepts for the broader public. Furthermore, the panel shed light on the corporate dimension of stablecoins, as noted by

Kumardev Chatterjee of Blue Hat Founders. The idea that companies might issue bonds in the form of stablecoins points to a future where traditional financial instruments and digital currencies converge, potentially revolutionising how corporate finance operates. In summary, CRYPTO2030 provided a platform for thought leaders to dissect and discuss the intricate dynamics of stablecoins and CBDCs. The insights shared by the panelists reflect a financial ecosystem at the cusp of transformation, grappling with questions of privacy, regulatory frameworks, and the very nature of money itself. As the world moves inexorably towards a cashless society, events like CRYPTO2030 offer valuable glimpses into the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in this digital frontier.

Economic self-reliance is a dangerous delusion

Over the past three years, Covid-19 and the war in Ukraine exposed the vulnerabilities stemming from deep global economic integration. Now, governments and companies around the world have given high priority to shortening supply chains, rebuilding domestic production capacity, and diversifying suppliers. But these responses are motivated not only by pragmatic risk-management considerations but also by the goal of economic self-reliance, an aspiration that threatens to derail any stable restructuring of the global economy.

In his 2022 State of the Union address, US President Joe Biden promised to create an economy in which “everything from the deck of an aircraft carrier to the steel on highway guardrails is made in America from beginning to end. All of it.” These commitments were then crystallised in the CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, which offered sweeping subsidies and tax breaks to incentivise domestic manufacturing. The Biden administration has also seized on the concept of “friend-shoring,” which represents a kind of regional self-reliance based on national-security and normative arguments. In response, French President Emmanuel Macron has proposed that the European Union pursue its own “Made in Europe” strategy. But inward-looking shifts in production have not been confined to advanced economies. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also vowed to create a “self-reliant India,” and even before the pandemic broke out, China’s quest for self-reliance was well underway, with President Xi Jinping reviving in 2018 Mao Zedong’s slogan of “regeneration through one’s own efforts.” Self-reliance is different from protectionism. The nominal goal



EDOARDO CAMPANELLA

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is not to protect specific firms or sectors, or to undercut others, but to build domestic resilience in a less secure world. As an inward-looking strategy of preservation, rather than an outward-looking programme of punishment, it appears benign, even sensible. But this is an illusion. Even if self-reliance is an understandable response to a world that is moving away from economic openness, it risks fuelling even greater systemic instability. Today’s autarkic tendencies are a symptom of the fading Pax Americana. The intensifying US-China rivalry and the widening divide between democratic and authoritarian regimes have increasingly impaired America’s ability to keep the global market economy open. According to one theory of international relations, a trusted and committed hegemon that enforces global rules and provides global public goods is a prerequisite to keeping international markets open. When the predominant power no longer has the means or will to play this role, markets suddenly become inaccessible. The hegemon will use protectionism to contain rising challengers and preserve its own global status while reducing its



In his 2022 State of the Union address, US President Joe Biden promised to create an economy in which “everything from the deck of an aircraft carrier to the steel on highway guardrails is made in America from beginning to end. All of it.”

FOLLOWING THE PANDEMIC AND GLOBALLY DISRUPTIVE CONFLICTS LIKE RUSSIA’S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE, IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT MANY COUNTRIES WOULD PURSUE POLICIES TO STRENGTHEN DOMESTIC ECONOMIC RESILIENCE. BUT SELF-RELIANCE STRATEGIES TEND TO LEAD TO SYSTEMIC INSTABILITY AND FUEL INTERNATIONAL TENSIONS – OR WORSE. international commitments. In response, new challengers, like China today, will undermine the international system by challenging its legitimacy. Signs of America’s diminished commitment to the global liberal order have been multiplying. During Donald Trump’s presidency, the United States openly rejected the principles and sense of purpose that had animated its international engagement for the preceding seven decades. And though Biden declared early in his presidency that “America is back,” his administration has only marginally repaired the damage that was done over the preceding four years. The US is still using trade as a weapon against China and pursuing an exclusionary industrial policy. At the same time, China, along with other emerging economies, has been building a parallel international system centred around its own institutions and partnerships. The world thus finds itself in an increasingly unstable equilibrium. While the international economic order still exists in a formal sense, it no longer delivers stability in practice. Countries are left with no choice but to build up their own domestic capabilities and regional groupings. As the world divides along democratic and authoritarian lines, international exchange will be based more on political discrimination than on comparative advantage. Historically, leading intellectual exponents of self-sufficiency – from Englebert Kaempfer, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Johann Fichte to Mohandas Gandhi and John Maynard Keynes – mistakenly assumed that such strategies

contributed to international peace by insulating countries from foreign influences that encouraged war. But the inward-looking nature of self-reliance inevitably clashes with the desire for larger economic areas or unavailable goods. More than a century ago, European empires tried to achieve exclusive control over economically valuable regions, contributing to the great-power tensions that fuelled wars throughout the nineteenth century, before erupting decisively in Sarajevo in 1914. Similarly, during the interwar years, Imperial Japan tried to reduce its dependence on the US for key commodities by expanding its footprint in Asia; but that duly brought it into direct confrontation with Western powers in the region. Today, tensions over the status of Taiwan, a critical link in the global semiconductor supply chain, epitomise this risk. If the fragmentation of the global economy continues, great-power tensions will likely intensify, increasing the likelihood of a clash. Alternatively, the US could come to terms with the erosion of its hegemonic position. While it still exercises substantial influence, it could take the lead in restructuring global governance to make it more inclusive and consensual. That is what the world needs to re-establish trust among countries and encourage economic openness. Mutual reliance among countries should be the goal. To prevent the global economy’s costly fragmentation into separate blocs, we need less authoritarian-versus-democratic rhetoric, greater efforts to separate economic issues from concerns about values, and a renewed diplomatic focus on the global commons. Self-reliance strategies invariably lead to systemic chaos, as key goods and markets become inaccessible. Attempts to build domestic capabilities in exclusionary ways have never brought the national resilience or international peace that advocates of self-reliance promised. On the contrary, such policies have usually been harbingers of conflict.

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Sultanate of Oman strengthens business legislation and competition frameworks: Report

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 20

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN ESCWA) has recently released a comprehensive report examining the business legislative frameworks of the Arab region.

The report provides an in-depth analysis of the five key legislative fields that influence the business environment in the 22 countries in the Arab region, specifically competition, consumer protection, anti-corruption, foreign direct investment (FDI) and corporate law.

Analysing the data specifically for the Sultanate of Oman, in 2020, the country had a score of 4.2, indicating a moderately favourable business environment. However, by 2023, the score increased to 4.74, showcasing a notable improvement in the legislative framework.

In terms of competition laws, the report highlights that Oman has made significant amendments

to its competition law through Ministerial Decision 18/2021.

These amendments aim to address issues related to cartels, economic concentration and exemptions. The amendments also empower the judicial enforcement officers to investigate competition-related matters and grant third parties the right to present complaints.

Regarding anti-dominance and monopolisation laws, the report points out that Oman's Law 67/2014 and executive regulations 18/2021 define and set criteria to identify activities that indicate an abuse of dominance.

The report emphasises that exceptions can be granted under specific conditions, such as supporting the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Additionally, the report highlights the measures in place to ensure additional protections against monopolies and abuse of dominance, including the referral of infringements to the judiciary.



The report sheds light on the improvements made in defining and explaining cartels and anti-competitive agreements in Oman. It outlines the mechanisms established to identify and address cartels, such as adopting unified behaviour or creating economic connections between businesses in the market.

However, the report suggests

that further clarification and examples of different types of agreements would enhance the effectiveness of these measures. In terms of competition enforcement practices, the report emphasises the role of the judicial enforcement officers in conducting investigations and guarantees the right of third parties to present complaints.

Notably, the report highlights the importance of preserving confidential information, data and documents during investigations to encourage cooperation from private businesses.

The report also explores Oman's international trade agreements, particularly in relation to conflicts between internal subsidisation policies and the provisions of trade agreements.

It concludes that no conflicts exist based on the provisions of the trade agreement between the Gulf Cooperation Council and Singapore. However, the report points out that exemptions in trade deals related to areas such as debt and government bonds continue to be a matter of concern.

Regarding the merger regulatory regime, the report outlines various changes and improvements introduced to address economic concentration practices. It emphasises the requirement for parties accomplishing an economic concentration to notify the

Competition Centre, which will render a resolution within 90 days.

The report also highlights the adoption of clear criteria for assessing economic concentration, considering factors such as innovation, investment, prices and consumer impact. Lastly, the report touches upon labour protection within Oman's business legislative frameworks. It highlights the changes made in relation to employee contracts during mergers and acquisitions, ensuring their protection.

The report also mentions provisions related to non-compete clauses, specifying the time, place and type of work for employees.

As Oman strengthens its business legislation and competition frameworks with these amendments, it is anticipated that fair competition will be promoted, anti-competitive practices will be effectively addressed, and the business environment will encourage economic growth and investment opportunities.

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MUSIC
Street entertainer Yon Xian sings on a street at the Xinyi district in Taipei. — AFP



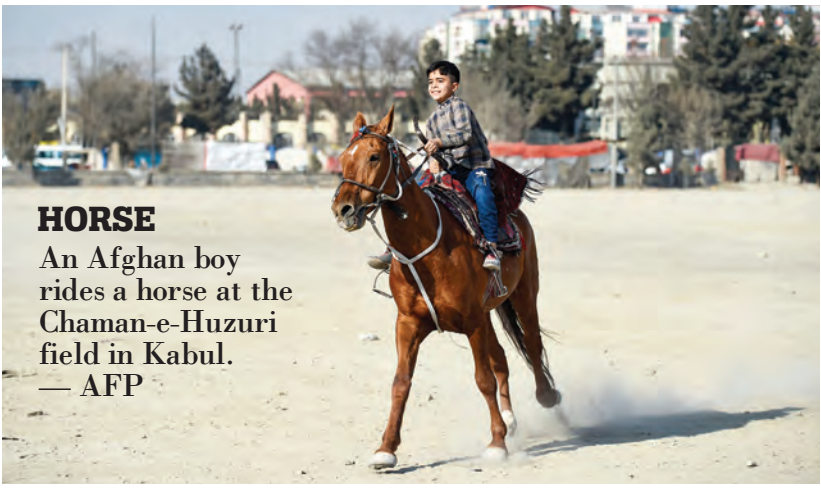
LIFESTYLE
Afghan children ride a bicycle at the Chaman-e-Huzuri field in Kabul. — AFP



CULTURE
Women dressed in traditional folk costumes participate at the Epiphany day celebrations in the village of Bitushe, some 50 km south-west of Gostivar, North Macedonia, on Saturday. - AFP



SNOWMEN
A man walks past snowmen in Berlin's Tiergarten park after snowfall in the capital. — AFP



HORSE
An Afghan boy rides a horse at the Chaman-e-Huzuri field in Kabul. — AFP

art & life

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MELINDA WENNER MOYER

Whether you're drinking from a trendy tumbler or a plain old glass, there is no "one-size-fits-all" answer to how much water you should drink in a day. The closest thing the United States has to a water consumption recommendation comes from the National Academy of Medicine, which, in 2004, reported that healthy men usually stay adequately hydrated when they drink at least three litres (nearly 13 cups) of water per day, and that women are typically hydrated when they drink at least 2.2 litres (just over nine cups) per day, not including the water they consume via food.

But these guidelines should not be taken as gospel, experts said.

"Most people, even if they stay below that recommendation, will be just fine," said Dr Siddharth P Shah, a nephrologist at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania who specialises in hydration and electrolyte balance.

When should I drink water, and how much? Water is, of course, crucial for our survival. It helps us eliminate waste, maintain blood pressure, regulate body temperature and more.

Some people need more water than others. People who are especially active — who have physically demanding jobs or who exercise a lot — lose more water through sweat and will need to compensate by drinking additional water, said Dr George Chiampas, an emergency medicine specialist at Northwestern Medicine and the chief medical officer for the US Soccer Federation.

People may also need to drink more if they live in hot climates, have larger bodies or lots of muscle mass, have loose stools, are pregnant or breastfeeding, or have had kidney stones or recurrent urinary tract infections, experts said.

Over the course of life, a person's water needs change, too. Typically, with age, people lose muscle and gain fat, Shah said. Because fat contains less water than muscle, people generally need to consume less water with age to maintain healthy tissues.

Yet some older adults still do not consume as much water as they need, Shah said, because the bodies of older people — particularly, research suggests those over age 60 — are not as good at detecting thirst. The level of dehy-



HOW MUCH WATER DO I NEED TO DRINK?

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dration "that would make you thirsty at the age of 40 might not make you as thirsty at the age of 80," he explained.

If you do feel thirsty, you're probably dehydrated and should drink water, said Dr Alysia Robichau, a family and sports medicine physician at Houston Methodist.

There can be more subtle signs of dehydration, too, such as feeling constantly cold or having dry skin, Robichau said. People who are acutely or chronically dehydrated may also have headaches or dry eyes, she added.

Because people go without water while they sleep, "most people wake up and they're already dehydrated," Chiampas said. It's generally a good idea, he said, to start the day with a glass.

It's perfectly fine to add flavours to your water or to drink carbonated water, Robichau said — but she warned that coffee and other caffeinated beverages may not be as hydrating as uncaffeinated drinks. Drinking a caffeinated beverage, especially if you don't drink them regularly, can reduce the ability of the kidneys to absorb water, leading you to lose additional water through urine. Alcoholic beverages are dehydrating, too.

Keep in mind that you can also get water from food. Some fruits and vegetables, such as watermelon and celery, are mostly water, Shah said. The National Academy of Medicine estimated that people get, on average, 20 per cent of their water through food.

Most people are unlikely to drink too much water, but it is possible, especially among endurance athletes who drink lots of water quickly, Chiampas said. Doing so can disrupt the body's balance of sodium and potassium and lead to potentially fatal water intoxication.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises not to drink more than 48 ounces of water per hour. Keep in mind, too, that there is probably no health benefit to guzzling tonnes of water.

"There are a lot of excessively large water bottles being carried around by people these days," Shah said. "But the overwhelming majority of people do not need to drink an excess of water."

— The New York Times

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AROUND THE WORLD



Gucci's reboot brings back old-school cool

THE HEADLINE WAS Gucci. The headline was always going to be Gucci, in the same way the Ever Given was destined to dominate the news cycle when the mammoth vessel, one of the largest container ships ever built, got stuck in the Suez Canal in 2021.

Gucci is, in a way, the Ever Given of the personal luxury goods trade. With more than 500 stores worldwide and an estimated market value in 2022 of \$35.3 billion, it is that skyscraper-size tanker, caught sideways. The entire fashion business took a hit during the pandemic and then bounced back, or seemed to, with a surprising resilience. Then it encountered something that in its way was as unexpected as that grounding of a nautical behemoth thrown off course by fluke winds.

In Gucci's case it was the fickleness of shifting taste. When Alessandro Michele, the former creative director of the brand — founded in Florence in 1921 as a leather goods manufacturer catering to a sophisticated carriage trade, and now owned by luxury goods giant Kering — said in an interview in 2020 that “maybe one day I will not be relevant,” he was sending a signal, to both his bosses and the culture at large.

Michele was a creative savant and lucky, as he has said, to have survived a quarter-century in the business largely by following his instincts (or his “stomach” as he said.) He knew. The instincts that helped elevate him from journey-

man accessories designer to star were already giving him the itch to move on. This was largely because society was about to do the same.

The gender play Michele pioneered — pussy bows and rhinestones and tiger prints and babydoll dresses on guys — and that for a brief, giddy and obscenely profitable moment drove Gucci's valuation to great heights, were absorbed by the culture with alacrity. Harry Styles in a dress on Vogue's November 2020 cover looked groundbreaking for about a minute. Harry Styles in a dress now would hardly rate a second glance.

And the not-so-dirty secret at every luxury goods house is that overall sales are driven not by apparel at all, but by leather goods, and not even costly handbags, at that. It would surprise people to learn how much profit there is in a logo key chain.

Gucci had to right the ship and return it to the mainstream. In attempting to do so, it hired as its new creative director Sabato De Sarno, a man so pragmatic by nature that interviewing him is less like consulting an ancient Greek sibyl, as was the case with Michele, than it is talking to the director of engineering at a boatyard.

“I love fashion, but I don't love the idea of fashion,” De Sarno said one afternoon before his show on Thursday. “I want to make things to use and wear, and not just things for shows or red carpet or editori-

als.”

Seen through that lens, he is as much a man of his moment as Michele was of his. Virtually every fashion house showing in Milan this week made clear its understanding that consumers, particularly young consumers, are through with the hype. Pragmatism was the subtext of the best collections, and those were provided by labels as unlike as Prada, Tod's, Neil Barrett and Brunello Cucinelli. At each of those houses there was an emphasis on craftsmanship, which nowhere is as refined as it is in Italy.

The cliché on the Little Italy T-shirts turns out to be true: Italians Do It Better. Yes, there was the Renaissance. But for present purposes it is the marriage of craft, industrial design and high aesthetic values, which began here in the early 20th century, when the novel idea of providing luxury goods for the masses arose.

Those early designers and, eventually, scores of others put centuries-old artistic traditions to industrial use. It is premature to associate what De Sarno is doing with the work of giants like architect and designer Gio Ponti. Yet the impetus is there, and the collection De Sarno presented — a follow-up to a heavily-criticised teaser he presented during the womenswear shows in September — made a strong case for him as a plausible successor to industrial innovators who refuted narrative, and focused instead on materiality and

craft.

The knock on the De Sarno Gucci show was that it was commercial, as though there was something wrong with drilling down into the Gucci archives and sampling what he uncovered. There were versions of the original snaffle-bit loafer, interpreted variously as soft and lug soles or else studded brothel creepers; enlarged versions of the celebrated Jackie bag that Samuel Beckett, of all people, once slung over his shoulder; versions of the elegantly tailored outerwear Gucci was renowned for, although rendered in “Through the Looking Glass” volumes.

There were also versions of GG monogram suits in which the logo receded to become a kind of human gift-wrapping, and of previous designers' faux-fur topcoats that made reference to De Sarno's own love of cozy and protective garb. (He said he has 240 coats in his personal collection; coats are his security blanket.)

“I opened the show with the same coat, the same silhouette, the same bag” as he showed during womenswear, De Sarno told Vogue.com, as though he were flipping his critics the bird.

“I don't care about the Instagram moment,” he added in conversation with this reporter, using saltier language. The Instagram moment, we all know, cannot be avoided. But it is not what floats Sabato De Sarno's boat. — **NYT**

HEALTH

Fruit juice linked to weight gain in children, adults: Study



NEW RESEARCH SUGGESTS a daily glass of 100 per cent fruit juice is linked to slight weight gain in both children and adults.

While the study doesn't establish causation, the analysis highlights an association between juice consumption and increased weight.

Nutrition expert Dr Walter Willett warns of the ease of overdosing on calories, emphasising that juice lacks the fibre found in whole fruits.

Excessive sugar intake from juice may lead to insulin resistance, metabolic issues, and chronic conditions. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends avoiding juice for infants under one, limiting intake for older children, and advocating whole fruits and vegetables.

Experts stress that juice should not replace water for thirst, serving as an occasional sweet treat rather than a daily health staple. — **ONA**



Strawberry Festival a big boost for agricultural tourism



RUQAYA AL KINDI

It is in the heart of Yiti village located in Muscat, the 'Strawberry Festival' gives you and your children an opportunity to experience the atmosphere of a traditional Omani farm, and at the same time a look at the modern agriculture techniques represented by hydroponics.

"Yiti village is famous as a beach tourism destination, but there is a beautiful agricultural side which not many people know about it," Sultan al Habsi, founder of the Yiti Farm Project, said.

"When I combined agriculture, tourism and modern science, the result is the Yiti Farm project, which adopts the idea of agri-tourism based on hydroponic system."

He said: "The Strawberry Festival is an event in which is launched with new activities on the farm, and is considered the second stage of the farm's complete readiness."

Visiting a farm is literally an escape from the hustle and bustle of the city to rural life, which is why the festival is considered a must-visit destination for everyone. As Sultan pointed out, the Strawberry Festival welcomes everyone without exception including families, individuals, residents and foreign tourists.

He added, "The Yiti Farm project is located in the heart of a traditional Omani farm filled with palm trees and relies on traditional irrigation system which is aflaj and ponds. At the same time, my project will take you inside greenhouses, which contain modern agricultural systems that have many features like optimising water consumption among others."

Visitors will enjoy unique events at the festival. The visitor can self-harvest the farm's high-quality crops, such as Dutch lettuce, Swiss chard in three colours, kale, Italian basil, Greek basil, Saudi mint, cherry tomatoes, strawberries, and also the distinctive Omani zatar.

Sultan said that because of the symbolism of strawberries for children, he decided to organise the activity of harvesting and watching



the strawberry bushes at the peak of their growth, and for the same reason he decided that this fruit would take the name of the festival.

Lot of fun awaits the festival's visitors. Next to the turtle ponds, visitors can have a cup of tea with mint or basil or Omani zatar, while children have an opportunity to feed the hedgehog and learn about the importance of this animal to farms.

For fishing enthusiasts, they will be able to engage in the activity of catching Tilapia fish (locally called Balti), which is a freshwater fish that is characterised by its relatively large size.

Sultan's family raises Tilapia in the existing farm pond without using any modern technology. "The old irrigation system based on the falaj system makes the pond water renewed twice a day and thus provides suitable environment for fish," he said.

Those interested in high-quality organic products will be very happy at the festival as well. "I have designated a corner for farm products

and seedlings, where visitors will be able to buy natural products free of any artificial additives. Our products include green and red basil pesto, kale pesto, strawberry jam, and dried tomatoes with olive oil and honey. We are also distributing souvenirs with the farm's logo to children," he added.

There are many challenges to cultivate strawberries. Strawberry plants can be affected by any lack of nutrients or changes in air temperature and humidity. It is also an attractive plant for some pests, the most important of which are spiders.



He added: "I succeeded in controlling heat and humidity and reducing pests with covered greenhouses operated with automatic sensors that maintain appropriate atmosphere inside. My reliance on hydroponics method, as well, enabled me to address the challenge of lack of elements, as this technique ensures provision of all necessary elements better than traditional agriculture."

AMBITIOUS PLANS

Sultan has ambitious aspirations and plans for the future of Yiti Farm. "The final stage of developing the

farm project is the inauguration of a wooden hut with a hall for multiple uses, such as organising programmes for students from schools, colleges and universities. The hall will also be available to anyone who wishes to hold a special programme in any field in a unique and distinctive atmosphere," he said.

He added that the hut also will include a shop for farm products and an upper balcony to relax and enjoy with fresh snacks. Providing an overnight stay in the hut will be an exciting experience for nature lovers too.