

47 dead, 150 hurt in Pakistan blast

Police officers were among at least 47 killed and 150 wounded in a blast at a mosque inside a highly sensitive Pakistan police headquarters on Monday, prompting the government to put the country on high alert. The attack happened during afternoon worship in the provincial capital of Peshawar, close to former tribal areas along the Afghan border where militancy has been steadily rising. A frantic rescue mission was under way at the mosque, the officials said. **DETAILS ON P6**



P10

TALYA WINS U11 GIRLS TITLE AT WTT YOUTH CONTENDER



P13

OMAN'S OIL ACTIVITIES INCREASE 73.6 PER CENT TO REACH RO 12.5 BILLION



P20

MUSCAT NIGHT'S "BRIDE SHOW" HELPS EASE BURDEN OF WEDDING PREPARATIONS



MUSCAT

FORUM ON ARAB RESEARCHERS BEGINS

More than 150 female researchers specialised in different fields participate in the 9th session of the Arab Forum on Research and Sustainable Development, which began on Monday. Titled 'Arab Female Researchers Act on Realising Sustainable Development', the forum is hosted by Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in conjunction with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation. The two-day forum seeks to enhance the contribution of institutions, authorities, universities, scholarly research centres, researchers and innovators in Arab development affairs. It includes eight sessions in which 39 working papers will be submitted. **DETAILS ON P2**

OMAN LNG SIGNS DEAL WITH TURKISH FIRM

Oman LNG on Monday signed a binding term-sheet agreement with Turkish BOTAS Petroleum Pipeline Corporation (BOTAS) to supply 1 million metric tonnes per annum (mtpa) of LNG, starting in 2025. This agreement helps to strengthen Oman LNG's partnership with international firms in the energy and LNG industry. The signed term-sheet agreement will see Oman LNG supplying BOTAS with a total volume of 1 million metric tonnes per annum of LNG based on a 10-year contract, starting from 2025; helping to emphasise Oman LNG's role in leveraging the Sultanate of Oman's reputation. **DETAILS ON P13**

INSIDE



I ACTED PRETTY DECISIVELY, SAYS UK'S SUNAK **P6**



NATO TANKS WILL CHANGE THE UKRAINE WAR **P9**

Royal Decree ratifies Oman's joining of Treaty of Amity

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued Royal Decree No 7/2023 ratifying the Sultanate of Oman's joining the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast

Asia, signed in Denpasar on February 24, 1976, and its amendment protocols, signed in Manila on December 15, 1987, in Manila on July 25, 1998 and in Vietnam on July 23, 2010.

Article (1) ratifies the Sultanate of Oman's joining the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and its aforesaid amendment protocols, in accordance with

the version attached to this Decree.

Article (2) instructs the departments concerned to deposit the document of Oman's joining the above-mentioned

convention in accordance with its provisions.

Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. — ONA



KNOCKOUT STAGE FOR BHA BEGINS

The final stage of Bilarab Bin Haitham Award (BHA) for Architectural Design kicked off in the Wilayat of Sur on Monday – in its Second Cycle. The ceremony was graced by HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, who viewed some of the projects qualified for the last round. He listened to the discussions of the jury and comments on improving the projects before final submission. HH Sayyid Bilarab also toured an exhibition comprising entries of top 10 qualifiers and wished the participants success in the final round. **DETAILS ON P2**

Oman asserts efforts to fight human trafficking

MAI AL ABRI
MUSCAT, JAN 30

The Sultanate of Oman is asserting its efforts through global collaboration to prepare a national cadre to combat human trafficking.

Besides working on legal codes to handle the issue, the authorities are raising public awareness to make the masses understand the problem and report it to competent authorities for follow-up and action. Several facts came for review at the annual conference on 'Combating Trafficking in Persons: Challenges, Opportunities and Roles of the National Authorities', which started on Monday under the auspices of Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Foreign Ministry's Under-Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs, Chairman of the National Committee to Combat Human Trafficking.

The three-day symposium affirms the unity of all national organisations in the fight against human trafficking and the importance the Sultanate of Oman

In 2020, the ROP issued amendments to some provisions of the executive regulations of the Foreigners Law, which stipulated that it is permissible to transfer the residency of a foreigner from one employer to another

SHAIKH KHALFAN AL HARTHY
Under-Secretary

places on raising public awareness and developing expertise through global collaboration to prepare national cadre to combat human trafficking.

According to Al Harthy, "In May 2020, the Royal Oman Police issued amendments to some provisions of the executive regulations of the Foreigners Law, which stipulated

that it is permissible to transfer the residency of a foreigner from one employer to another," and Oman has recently acceded to the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. This treaty grants economic, social, and cultural rights to non-self-governing individuals. This is regarded as a significant advancement for workers' rights in the Sultanate of Oman.

CHILD PROTECTION

The Sultanate of Oman has also attached great importance to protecting children, women and male victims, as it has a designated protection house — Dar Al Wafaq — which provides psychological, social, health, and legal services.

Nasser al Riyami, a consultant at the Public Prosecution, in his report highlighted that there are standard methods for human trafficking, including sex trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage, domestic slavery, and illegal child recruiting.

97% increase in voluntary blood donors

DEMAND FOR DONATIONS CONSTANTLY ON THE RISE

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

In line with the growing demand and need for blood donations, the Central Blood Bank in Bausher of the Ministry of Health saw an increase of 21 per cent in the number of blood units collected in 2022.

The number of Omani blood donors increased by 77 per cent, that of voluntary blood donors by 97 per cent, while the percentage of new donors who donated for the first time was 49 per cent. More than 78,000 different blood components were distributed to health institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Health, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, Sultan Qaboos Integrated Center for Cancer Treatment and Research, Armed Forces Hospital, and Royal Oman Police Hospital, in addition to private health institutions.

Dr Zainab bint Salem al Araiimi, Director of the Blood



Banks Services Department, said: The daily demand for blood components is constantly on the rise to 140 to 160 units at the Central Blood Bank. The Central Blood Bank has seen a depletion in the stock of some blood groups, platelets, and other components due to low number of donors at times in 2022. According to Dr Zainab, the increase in the number of collected units does not mean the number of available blood units is sufficient because the demand is constantly increasing.

TURN TO P2



EMPTY QUARTER FESTIVAL DAZZLES

The second edition of the Empty Quarter Festival, organised by the Directorate-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar, continued for the sixth day. The festival will run until February 3. The festival comes as part of efforts made by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to develop the tourism sector in Dhofar Governorate. **SEE P2**



Knockout stage for BHA begins in Sur

SUR: The final stage of Bilarab Bin Haitham Award (BHA) for Architectural Design kicked off in the Wilayat of Sur on Monday in its Second Cycle. The ceremony was graced by HH Sayyid Bilarab bin Haitham al Said, who viewed some of the projects that qualified to the last round. He listened to the discussions of the jury and comments on improving the projects before final submission.

HH Sayyid Bilarab also toured an exhibition comprising entries of top ten qualifiers, whom he praised and advised to consult the comments of the jury. He wished the participants success

in the final round.

The qualifiers expressed their thanks and appreciation to HH Sayyid Bilarab for supporting youth and encouraging them to showcase their talents in architectural design.

The qualifying projects were distributed to adjudication over three days. Three projects were presented to the jury in the first day.

The participants will have an opportunity to submit the final version of their projects by mid-February. The names of the top three winners will be announced during the final ceremony.

— ONA

Oman asserts efforts to fight human trafficking



FROM PAGE 1

In addition, the custom of remarrying a widow to the sibling of the deceased husband, exchange in marriage - sexual jihad, organ trade, using people for medical experimentation, and exploitation of children in armed conflicts, are some human trafficking practices that people are unaware of.

Some cases of human trafficking noticed in Oman are development of websites displaying young women engaging in immoral behaviour in exchange for money. The authorities keep an eye on some women who travel as tourists. They arrive at airports without credit cards or enough cash to live a respectable life. Instead, they are given meagre money, around RO 300, from some groups abroad.

Al Riyami also noted specific indicators of domestic workers who are victims of human trafficking. They include missing family dinners, never leaving the

house for social events, sleeping in an inappropriate or shared area, the sponsor reporting the worker missing while they are still working in their homes, and being fed leftovers. They experience harassment, abuse, or insult.

“While the signs of victims of forced labour include long working hours, intimidation/ threats/abuse, not being given the option to choose a place to live, being given leftovers, living in large groups in the same room, not having their wages paid, not dressing in clean clothes, and not being allowed to leave the worksite unless accompanied by their sponsor,” Al Riyami pointed out.

Dr Muhannad al Dowykat highlighted non-commercial exploitation like early marriage (children), forced marriage, temporary marriage, and marriage for giving birth. The forms of child trafficking include prostitution, begging, domestic services, organ removal, sexual tourism and pornography.

Role of women researchers hailed in education research, innovation

AFRAH AL BALUSHI
@Afrahalbalushia

More than 150 women researchers specialised in different fields participated in the 9th session of the Arab Forum on Research and Sustainable Development, which began here on Monday.

Titled ‘Arab Female Researchers Act on Realising Sustainable Development’, the forum is hosted by Oman, represented by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation in conjunction with the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO).

The two-day forum seeks to enhance the contribution of institutions, authorities, universities, scholarly research centres, researchers and innovators in Arab development affairs. It includes eight sessions in which 39 working papers will be submitted.

The opening ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, in the presence of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, Chairperson of the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science.

Amna bint Salim al Balushiyah, Secretary of the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science, who delivered Oman’s speech, said that the forum provides fertile ground for assembling Arab experts, researchers, specialists, institutions and companies



alongside their regional and international counterparts.

Prof Dr Mohammed Sanad Abu Darwish, Director of Science and Scholarly Research, ALECSO, commended the efforts made by Oman in serving education, science and culture, not only locally, but also in the Arab world and the world at large. Abu Darwish was acting on behalf of Prof Dr Mohamed Ould Omar, Director-General of ALECSO.

Abu Darwish said the forum was first launched by ALECSO in 2013, constitutes a mechanism of response to many demands for upgrading the sectors of science and scholarly research in the Arab world, notably through decisions of Arab summits seeking the development of higher education, research and innovation.

Speaking to ONA, women

researchers underscored the significance of this forum. Asma Al Janahi, member of Dubai Press Club, said that the forum acts as a bridge of communication between education and research sectors and other institutions related to sustainable development. She said that the forum highlights the efforts of Arab female researchers to serve humanity in all fields.

Sally Hassan Hattab, coordinator of science and scholarly research projects at ALECSO, pointed out that the forum will address the role of Arab women researchers in energy and engineering areas. It will underline researchers’ contributions to entrepreneurship and sustainable development, as well as success stories achieved by female entrepreneurs in various Arab countries.

Tasneem Mohammed al Daoudi, an Omani innovator in the environmental field, said the forum represents a lively interactive platform for highlighting the achievements of Arab female researchers. It sheds light on the real experiences and challenges the researchers face while developing scholarly research.

Eng Amal Daghlis, President of the Association of Business and Professional Women Club in Jordan, said that the forum is one of the most prominent events in the Arab world in supporting Arab women and highlighting their efforts in scholarly research and innovation. She stressed that such forums represent an opportunity to support researchers and innovators, and instill confidence in them.

97pc rise in voluntary blood donors

FROM PAGE 1

The Central Blood Bank urged the community to continue donating blood to maintain a safe stock of blood units as health services continue to be expanded in the country.

The Central Blood Bank in Bausher had earlier said that there is a daily need for more than 15 platelet donors.

“Generally, blood banks face difficulty in providing negative blood types. If your blood type is negative, do not delay your bid, and remember that there are those who are in dire need of your blood donation,” according to the central blood bank said.

A platelet can only be kept alive for five days; the



Department of Blood Bank Services, DBBS said several many cancer patients require daily platelet transfusions for seven days.

Platelets are tiny blood cells that help your body form clots to stop bleeding. If one of your blood vessels gets damaged, it sends signals to the platelets. The platelets then rush to the site of damage and form a plug (clot) to fix the damage.

The process of spreading across the surface of a damaged

blood vessel to stop bleeding is called adhesion. This is because when platelets get to the site of the injury, they grow sticky tentacles that help them stick (adhere) to one another.

They also send out chemical signals to attract more platelets. The additional platelets pile onto the clot in a process called aggregation. A normal platelet count is 150,000 to 450,000 platelets per microliter of blood.

The risk for bleeding develops if a platelet count falls below 10,000 to 20,000.

When the platelet count is less than 50,000, bleeding is likely to be more serious if you’re cut or bruised. Some people make too many platelets. They can have platelet counts from 500,000 to more than one million.

Labour Ministry, OQ sign MoU



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Labour on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with OQ, a global integrated energy group, to devise a three-year plan for the exchange of expertise and services in administrative fields.

The MoU explores solutions for the development of human resources. It was signed by Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, Labour Ministry’s Under-Secretary for Human Resources Development, and Ashraf bin Hamad al Maamari, CEO of Human Resources, Technology and Work Culture at OQ group.

Al Busaidy said that the MoU will bolster administrative performance and optimise the use of human resources at OQ through the implementation of specific training programmes.

On his turn, Al Maamari pointed out that the efforts exerted by the Labour Ministry in the field of human resources development will contribute to the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

— ONA

Empty Quarter Festival continues to dazzle visitors

SALALAH: The second edition of the Empty Quarter Festival, organised by the Directorate-General of Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar, continued for the sixth day on Monday. The festival will run until February 3.

The festival comes as part of efforts made by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to develop the tourism sector in Dhofar Governorate, promote the governorate as a sustained all-



year-round tourism destination, highlight the most prominent winter tourism potentials and attract investors to the tourism



sector in Dhofar.

In comments to ONA, Haitham bin Ali Tabook, Head of the Marketing and Media Committee

of the Empty Quarter Festival, said that every day the festival presents a number of heritage, tourism, entertaining and sports activities, sand challenge contests for four-wheel drive vehicles, sand bikes, GPS coordinates, marketing exhibitions and concerts.

The open Empty Quarter Shooting Competition this year will be divided into two contests for individuals and teams by using traditional Saktoun rifle.

The competition will be held on February 1-3 in Halouf and Masaheela areas, he said.

Services, varied events and public facilities are all available at the main venue which has been expanded and rehabilitated this year and car parks were built, the official said expressing his hope that the next version will see a significant transformation after the completion of all public services and infrastructure in the region.



Al Dakhiliyah Municipal Council holds review meeting



NIZWA: The Municipal Council of the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah on Monday held a meeting under the chairmanship of Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah and Chairman of the council. The meeting discussed the purviews of the council in accordance with the Municipal Councils Law and the specialisations of the council's standing committees and their role in developing the governorate. The meeting also covered a range of topics, including recommendations and decisions, among other topics. Moreover, comments of several government officials were reviewed on different matters related to the governorate. — ONA

Second session of 'Shababeek Independent Film Festival' concludes today

MUSCAT: The activities of the 'Shababeek Independent Film Festival' began on Sunday at the Omani Film and Theatre Association, in its second session, under the slogan 'Start Your Story'. The festival aims to encourage film-makers to make their films according to their own ideas, visions and available capabilities. The 3-day festival concludes today. The opening ceremony included the screening of the movie 'The Hole' by director Ali Bazzi from Lebanon, the documentary film entitled 'The Maker of Dreams' by director Abdullah Mansour Bagharf from Algeria, and the cartoon movie 'Offline' by director Nihad Rahmani from Tunisia, in addition to a critical session for the presented films presented by Dr Hessa Al Mulla. On the second day, Monday, the festival's activities continued with the screening of a group of independent films, namely 'Dreams Without a Ceiling' by director Mohamed Allal from Algeria, 'Ghat Men' by Mohamed Ismail from Egypt, 'Cages' by Hussein Al Akeli from Iraq, and 'Walls' by Hisham Abdel Khalek from Egypt, 'Circle' by Mohammed al Ajmi from the Sultanate of Oman, 'Bridge' by Shawky Boukaf from Algeria, 'Our Roots' by Mustafa Al Badan from Palestine, and 'Until My Last Heartbeat' by Rasha Hashem from Yemen. The movie 'Shireen' directed by Zaid Shukr from Iraq, and 'Shoemaker of Paradise' directed by Haider Hussein Talib from Iraq, was also screened and dialogue session was held along with journalist Dr Hessa Al Mulla from Kuwait. — ONA

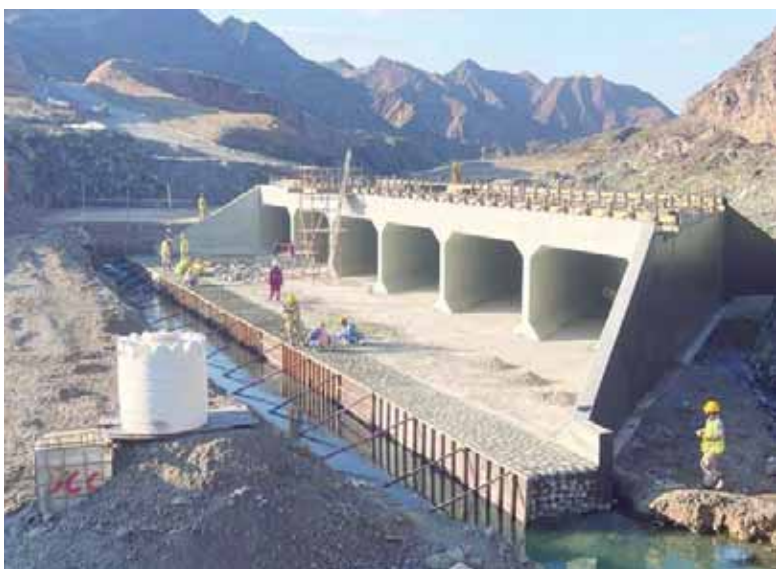


National Museum hosts seminar on housing, environment

MUSCAT: The National Museum, represented by the Learning Centre, hosted a seminar titled 'Hope 2023: Housing, People and the Environment'. The event was organised by the German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech) in cooperation with the Ministry of Health. Talks were given during the event to provide an opportunity for prominent national and international speakers and policymakers to discuss practical tools to transform cities to be sustainable, resilient, healthy and safe. The seminar included workshops and discussion sessions which touched on challenges facing the process of implementing urban regeneration, among other topics. Ahmed bin Mohammed al Humaidi, Chairman of Muscat Municipality attended the event alongside officials, academics and researchers. — ONA



WADI AL HAWASNA ROAD REHABILITATION 85PC COMPLETE



Restoration of Wadi Al Hawasna road in the Wilayat of Al Khabourah has reached 85 per cent implementation rate, the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced on Monday. The rehabilitation works include 20 locations along the road, levelling of road shoulders and building 9 bridges and 5 viaducts.

AL HABEESAH

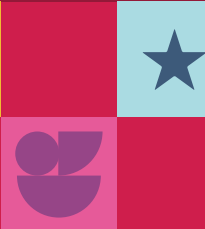
A TRADITIONAL METHOD OF STORING RAINWATER

YAHYA AL SALMANI
PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

ONE of the methods used by the Omanis to store water in the valleys and mountainous areas is called 'Al Habeesah'. This traditional method is still used to reserve wadi water in various wilayats of Oman. In this method, rainwater is collected in basins built of rocks and mud and are designed in different geometric shapes, and the design depends on the spaces available for building such basins. A water channel called (Al Falaj) flows from this 'Al Habeesah' and is one of the most popular traditional irrigation channels. After the basins are filled with water, the water begins to flow into these channels to pass between the plants for long distances. "We still depend on seasonal rains to irrigate our crops. 'Al Habeesah' is a miniature dam which is used to hold back the valleys, so that the villager benefit from irrigating crops throughout the year. We are keen to employ our capabilities that provide us with opportunities to practice agriculture that we grew up with."



The role of 'Al Habeesah' is just not limited to securing irrigation water for crops, but these traditional basins also contribute to providing water for animals, birds and bees. "Rains are an essential resource for sustaining our lives. In recent years, rainfall has increased, and today we follow the same method that we inherited from our older generation, as we do not hesitate to build water basins in new locations to ensure the storage of rainwater," say locals. Today, these traditional basins have become tourist attraction from different countries of the world. There are many nature enthusiasts who devote their time to exploring the treasures of Omani nature, and do not hesitate to make great efforts to reach these unique sites despite the mountainous terrain. "We thank everyone who cooperates with us in cleaning these exceptional sites periodically, because they are making great efforts to remove a lot of waste. However, we request tourists to take into account the preservation of these ponds, by making sure not to throw waste in them, because they are the main lifeline for the inhabitants of villages and its vital resources such as rare wild animals and birds", says the local citizens.



AHMED AL KAABI

MUSCAT, JAN 30

The Oman Automobile Association (OAA) continues to host a variety of activities and programmes aimed at young people and families who love electronic games, as part of the Muscat Nights activities. These events offer entertainment and provide opportunities for young talents to engage with useful equipment. An entry fee of RO 3 allows young people to play, learn, and participate in competitions.

One of the key components of the Muscat Nights activities are simulation and electronic games. The OAA has partnered with various organisations to offer a wide range of simulation games as part of the programme. These games are particularly popular among the younger generation due to the excitement and enthusiasm they provide. They also allow participants to exercise their visual abilities by controlling realistic vehicles such as cars and other games that characterise this type of game.

Puzzle and strategy games also appeal to the younger generation, and the fun in this type of game comes through participation. In recognition of this, the Muscat Municipality has carefully selected a variety of electronic games to be included in the calendar of events, to develop the skills of visitors to the OAA in the field of these types of games. These games, which include difficult puzzles and mental games that require high concentration, allow fans of this type of games to advance through several levels and spend a productive time at the association.

In addition to simulation and electronic games, the Muscat Nights activities also include drifting competitions and e-gaming through other types of electronic games. These games have been introduced as an option for visitors to the OAA and are designed to be educational and entertaining. They include adventure games that help in the learning process.

The OAA also hosts comedy theaters and other theater arts, which hold competitive competitions for attendance.

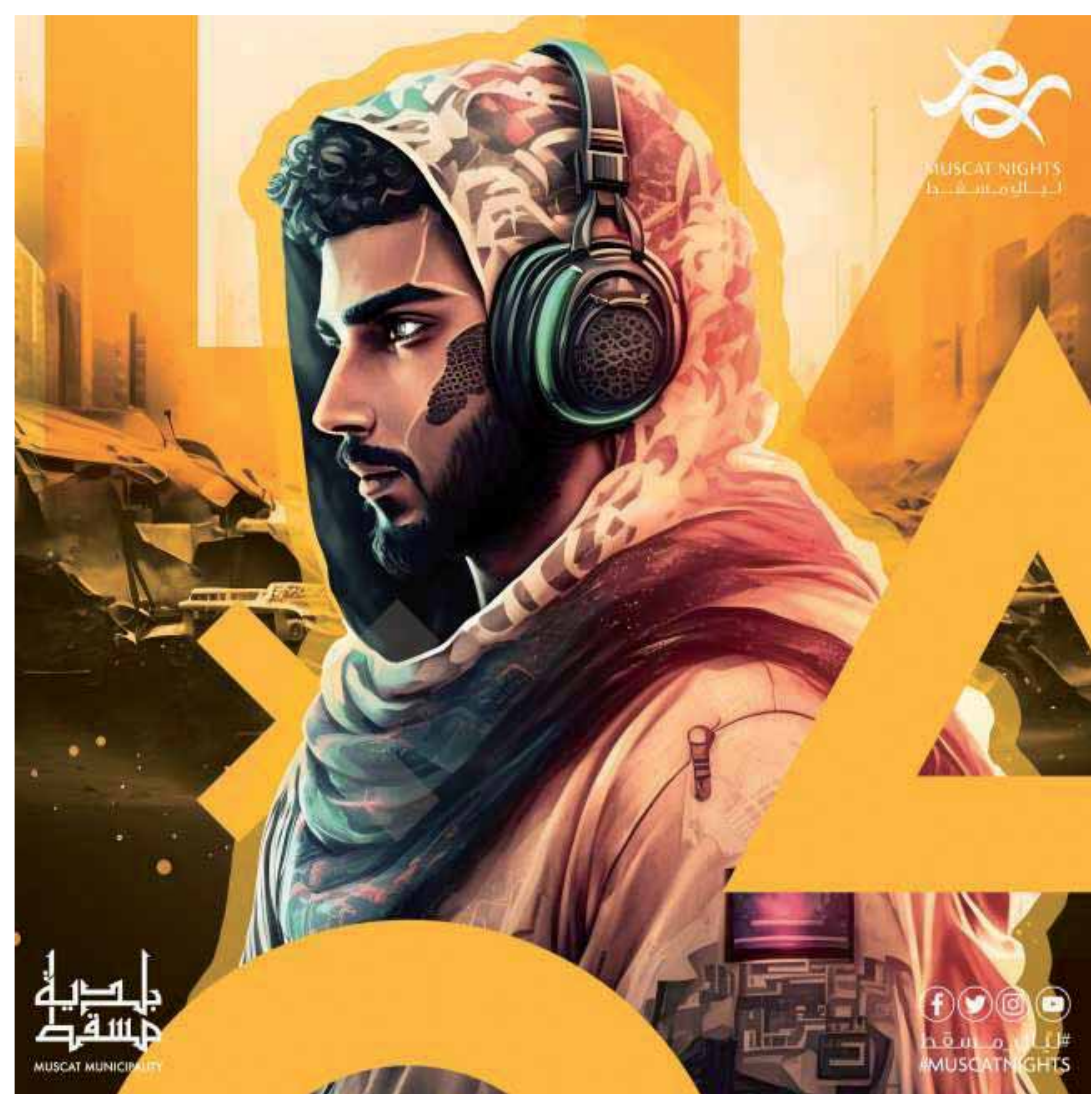
Additionally, there are multiple stalls selling products such as food and clothing.

For those with a creative streak, the OAA hosts an event called the "Creators' Village" where amateurs can display and practice their hobbies such as drawing on pencils and oil paintings.

Overall, the Oman Automobile Association is committed to providing a range of activities that cater to the interests and talents of young people and families in the Muscat area. They continue to organise events that offer entertainment and educational opportunities for visitors.

IN ADDITION TO
SIMULATION AND
ELECTRONIC GAMES,
THE ACTIVITIES
AT MUSCAT
NIGHTS ALSO
INCLUDE DRIFTING
COMPETITIONS AND
E-GAMING

A PERFECT BLEND OF ENTERTAINMENT, EDUCATION





Prospects high for MIBF 2023

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Publishers, bookstores and those who deal in e-learning packages have shown far better interest in the 27th edition of the Muscat International Book Fair (MIBF) than in previous editions.

Nearly three weeks are left for the 10-day MBIF 2023, which is scheduled to open on February 22.

The MBIF has emerged as one of the largest book fairs in the region since its launch in 1992. In 2022 there were over 360,000 titles on display, with the participation of 715 publishing houses from 27 countries. The guest of honour of MBIF 2022 was Al Sharqiyah Governorate.

MIBF has recorded an upward trend on various levels, including the number of participating countries, the number of participating publishing houses, spaces and public attendance.

"There has been a tremendous response for participation in the MIBF 2023, and we are expecting more than 300,000 visitors," a



source from the MIBF organisers said.

A main committee with Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, as Chairman, and Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, as Vice-Chairman has been formed.

Other members of the committee are HH Sayyid Dr Fahd bin Al Julanda al Said, Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University, Dr Abdullah bin Khamis Ambusaidi, Under-Secretary, Ministry of Education for Education, and Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary, Ministry of

Information.

"MIBF 2023 will include a diverse range of cultural programmes, including academic, cultural, literary and scientific," said Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information and Chairman of the Main Committee of Muscat International Book Fair.

"MIBF is an opportunity for all of us, as readers, researchers, academics and students, to pursue our interests to the maximum extent possible," he added.

It will give more attention to the future sciences, providing access to a wide repository of knowledge and also include family and children's programmes fulfilling their educational aspirations and facilitating the development of skills.

Participation in the exhibition, which runs till March 4, is open to publishing houses, libraries, cultural institutions, research centres, associations, universities and international organisations and is limited to books and publications, as well

**A MEDIA CENTRE
TITLED 'JALEES'
HAS BEEN
CONSTITUTED AS
THE MAIN SOURCE
OF OFFICIAL
INFORMATION
RELATED TO THE
BOOK FAIR**

as electronic books.

In addition, a media centre titled 'Jalees' is constituted as the main source of official information related to the fair. The team, jointly run by the Ministry of Information, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs, will monitor social media accounts and broadcast news of all exhibition activities through live coverage. It will also provide specific data and statistics related to the exhibition and announcements of the latest updates, thus linking the MIBF and the community.



SAI at International Public Procurements Conference

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman took part via videoconferencing in the international conference on improving the efficiency and transparency of public procurements and focusing on systems of control.

The State's Audit Institution (SAI) represented Oman at the conference, which was organised by the Court of Accounts of the Portuguese Republic, in coordination with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The event saw the participation of a large turnout of representatives of member states

at the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI).

The conference elaborated on a joint project between the OECD and the Portuguese Court of Accounts funded by the European Union, notably the goals of development.

The project focuses on improving the efficiency and transparency of public procurements by upgrading the quality and effectiveness of external auditing. It also touches on the use of modern technologies and artificial intelligence, besides ways to develop SAI data frameworks. — ONA

150 scouts take part in winter camp

SAHAM: The activities of the winter camp for the scouts organised by the Directorate General of Education in the Governorate of North Al Batinah, were launched at the permanent scout camp in the Wilayat of Saham, with the participation of scout teams from the governorates of Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and Musandam.

The camp concludes on February 2, Thursday.

Suleiman bin Khamis al Bahrani, Commander-in-Chief of the Scout camp, said that more than 150 scouts from the four governorates, in addition to scout leaders and members of the main and



sub-committees, will take part.

The opening ceremony included scout activities like sports competitions such as long jump, football, swimming,

basketball, volleyball, and beach games, in addition to exploration and adventure trips, and the Hobby Badge Forum, workshops, lectures, and exhibitions in community service, environment, traffic and first aid.

The camp aims to develop the skills of scout leaders in managing and leading camp programmes, unifying the practice of scout traditions, increasing community partnership, strengthening the relationship with scouts' parents, as well as strengthening national identity, human values and principles, and providing participants with innovation skills. — ONA

ROP arrests Asian murder suspect in Al Dakhiliyah

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP), represented by Al Dakhiliyah Governorate Police Command, arrested a person of an Asian nationality who is wanted in his country for murder.

Legal procedures against the defendant are under way. The move is part of continued cooperation between ROP and the Interpol.

As part of its efforts to combat drug crimes, Musandam Governorate Police Command arrested a citizen for possessing 20 kg of hashish and 1,900 captagon tablets in addition of crystal meth in connivance with an international drug cartel.

North Al Batinah Governorate Police Command arrested a citizen on charges of possessing drugs for the purpose of trafficking. The police recovered 17 kg of hashish from the accused



Looking for job, car, flat and furniture? Check out the Observer classified page. It's where buyers meet sellers.



Tender Announcement

Tender Number Re-T-25-2022

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:

Tender Name Maintenance work for MWASALAT institute building

Project Summary MWASALAT is planning renovate and utilize the old MWASALAT HQ. The building was built in more than 20 years and major renovation is required. The Scope includes but not limited to the following
a) Electrical Work
b) Civil Work
c) Plumbing

Tender Fee NIL

Grade & Specialty Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field

Start date for tender document distribution Tuesday, 31st January 2023

Last date for tender document distribution Monday 06th February 2023

Last date for submission Tuesday, 14th February 2023

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

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

"Mwasalat"
Head Quarter, Ghala
P.O.Box: 911, Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman

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

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. (6/2023)

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following bidding :

Serial	Bidding No.	Bidding Description	Document Fee	Deadline for Obtaining Bidding Docs.	Deadline for Inquires Submission	Deadline for Submission
1	AB/02/2023	Investment of Plot Number (90) at Al-Hail Wilayat Al-Seeb	1,500/- OMR	30/04/2023	20/04/2023	01/05/2023

Registered companies with Muscat Municipality which are Specialized in above bid are invited to participate as per the following procedures:

- Company registration with Muscat Municipality have to be valid as per note number one below, to be able to get the bid document.
- Pay the specified document fee for the requested bid via bank deposit to Muscat Municipality's Bank account as follows:
Bank Muscat 0423010702710024
- A copy of the transaction's receipt MUST be send to the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om), provided with the company data (name and bid number, delegate name, office phone number, mobile number, email address approved by the company and commercial registration number of the company).
- The tender document will be provided to the company via email.
- 2:00 PM** on the above mentioned dates, is the last timing for obtaining Bidding Documents. Any bid's document request received after the specified time will not be considered, even if the fee of the document is paid.

Submitted offers must be accompanied with a bond mentioned in the tender document valid for a period not less than (90) days issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. Bidding that do not meet the required bond **will not be accepted.**

Documents must be enclosed in a plain closed envelope (without any company information) and drop in the box located in Third floor at Directorate General of Quantity Surveying and Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.

NOTES:

- Companies which are not registered in Muscat Municipality or their registration has been expired shall register through the municipality's website (www.mm.gov.om). For technical support, please contact Muscat Municipality through this email (crm@mm.gov.om).
- If the bidders have any inquiries regarding the scope of the work, they have to sent their inquiries through the following e-mail (MM.PC@mm.gov.om).
- 10:00 AM** on the above submission mentioned dates, is the last timing for receiving bids. Offers submitted after the above mentioned date & time shall not be accepted for any reason.
- Muscat Municipality has the right to accept or reject any offer without assigning any reason.

Website: www.mm.gov.om



47 dead and 150 wounded in Pakistan mosque blast

PESHAWAR: Police officers were among at least 47 killed and 150 wounded in a blast at a mosque inside a highly sensitive Pakistan police headquarters on Monday, prompting the government to put the country on high alert.

The attack happened during afternoon worship in the provincial capital of Peshawar, close to former tribal areas along the Afghan border where militancy has been steadily rising.

A frantic rescue mission was under way at the mosque, which had an entire wall and some of its roof blown out by the force of the blast. “Many policemen are buried under the rubble,” said Peshawar police chief Muhammad Ijaz Khan, who estimated between 300 and 400 officers usually attended prayers at the mosque.

“Efforts are being made to get them out safely,” he added.

Bloodied survivors emerged limping from the wreckage, while bodies were ferried away in ambulances as the rescue operation continued.

“It’s an emergency situation,” Muhammad Asim Khan, a spokesman for the main hospital in Peshawar, said, adding that at



Rescue workers carry the remains of the blast victims from the debris of a damaged mosque in Peshawar on Monday. — AFP

least 47 had been killed and 150 wounded. As darkness fell, at least four men were still trapped in the wreckage, visible through cracks in the concrete, alongside bodies yet to be recovered.

“We have given them oxygen so that they don’t have problems in breathing,” said Bilal Ahmad Faizi, a spokesperson for the rescue organisation 1122.

The police headquarters in Peshawar is in one of the most tightly controlled areas of the city, housing intelligence and counter-terrorism bureaus, and is next door to the regional secretariat.

Provinces around the country

The attack happened during afternoon worship in Peshawar, close to former tribal areas that border Afghanistan where militancy has been steadily rising

announced they were on high alert after the blast, with checkpoints ramped up and extra security forces deployed, while in the capital Islamabad snipers were deployed on buildings and at city entrance points.

“Terrorists want to create fear by targeting those who perform the duty of defending Pakistan,” said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in a statement. “Those fighting against Pakistan will be wiped out from the face of earth.”

Officers said the blast came from the second row of worshippers, with bomb disposal teams probing the possibility of a suicide attack.

Shahid Ali, a policeman who survived, said the explosion took

place seconds after the imam started prayers.

“I saw black smoke rising to the sky. I ran out to save my life,” the 47-year-old said.

“The screams of the people are still echoing in my mind,” he added. “People were screaming for help.”

The drastic security breach came on the day United Arab Emirates (UAE) President Mohamed bin Zayed al Nahyan had been due to visit Islamabad, although the trip was cancelled at the last minute due to bad weather.

Pakistan is also preparing to host an International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation on Tuesday as it works towards unlocking a vital bailout loan to prevent a looming default.

The security situation in Pakistan — once plagued by bombings until a major military crackdown that began in 2014 largely restored order — has deteriorated since the return of the Afghan Taliban in Kabul.

Islamabad has accused the new rulers of failing to secure their mountainous border, allowing militants to travel back and forth without being detected. — AFP

I acted pretty decisively, says UK’s Sunak after sacking party chair

LONDON: British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said on Monday he had acted “pretty decisively” by sacking Conservative Party chair Nadhim Zahawi over his personal tax affairs, moving to quell criticism that he had acted too slowly.

In the latest scandal to involve one of his ministers and just months after he entered Downing Street promising to lead with “integrity, professionalism and accountability”, Sunak has protested his innocence about Zahawi’s tax affairs.

He said he had moved quickly to sack Zahawi, who was briefly finance minister last year under former prime minister Boris Johnson, when his independent adviser ruled that the party chair had broken the rules guiding the behaviour of ministers.

“What I did as soon as I knew about the situation was appoint somebody independent, looked at it, got the advice and then acted pretty decisively to move on because that’s what I think all of you deserve, from me and from government,” he said



Britain’s Prime Minister Rishi Sunak reacts as he leaves Teesside University in Darlington, Britain, on Monday. — Reuters

during a question and answer session in the north of England.

“I will take whatever steps are necessary to restore the integrity back into politics.”

The opposition Labour Party has described Sunak as being too weak to deal with his party, which

ousted two prime ministers last year over scandal and economic chaos.

Sunak now faces a challenge to appoint a new chair to the Conservative Party, a position made ever more important before an election widely

expected next year.

With the opposition Labour Party way ahead in the opinion polls, Conservative lawmakers are already jockeying for position to take a role which could be crucial to the party’s future.

Several lawmakers said they expected Sunak to look for a candidate he could not only trust but also had a clean record in parliament, while others were keen on well-established names who could command the support of party members.

Zahawi’s ousting over his non-disclosure of an investigation into his tax affairs and a resulting fine is yet another setback to Sunak’s attempts to reset government.

Late last year, Gavin Williamson resigned from Sunak’s cabinet team of top ministers over bullying allegations, while Deputy Prime Minister Dominic Raab is under investigation on bullying charges.

“What I’ve done is follow a process, which is the right process. Integrity is really important to me,” Sunak said.

— Reuters

Nato chief urges South Korea to support Ukraine

SEOUL: Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg urged South Korea on Monday to increase military support to Ukraine, citing other countries that have changed their policy of not providing weapons to countries in conflict following Russia’s war.

Stoltenberg was speaking in Seoul, the first stop on a trip that will also include Japan and is aimed at strengthening ties with Western allies in Asia in the face of the war in Ukraine and rising competition with China.

Speaking at the Chey Institute for Advanced Studies in Seoul, he thanked South Korea for its non-lethal aid to Ukraine, but urged it to do more, adding there is an “urgent need” for ammunition.

“I urge the Republic of Korea to continue and to step up on the specific issue of military support,” he said.

“At the end of the day, it’s a decision for you to make, but I’ll say that several Nato allies who have had as a policy to never export weapons to countries in a conflict have changed that policy now,” he said, citing Germany, Sweden and Norway.

“If we don’t want autocracy and tyranny to win, then they (Ukrainians) need weapons,



Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg speaks during an interview at a hotel in Seoul on Monday. — AFP

that’s the reality,” said Stoltenberg, a former Norwegian prime minister. South Korea has signed major deals providing hundreds of tanks, aircraft and other weapons to Nato member Poland since Russia waged a war on Ukraine. But President Yoon Suk-yeol has said a South Korean law that forbids supplying weapons to countries engaged in conflict makes it difficult to send arms to Ukraine.

Stoltenberg also met with Yoon and Defence Minister Lee Jong-sup, who echoed calls for closer ties with Nato based on shared values, but did not publicly address calls for more military aid to Ukraine. — Reuters

TOKYO

Two dead after Japan avalanche

Two men have been confirmed dead after their bodies were recovered following an avalanche in Japan, police said on Monday, a day after the off-piste accident in the central region of Nagano.

Japanese authorities declined to identify the pair, but US ski magazine Mountain Gazette reported that one of the dead was American professional skier Kyle Smaine. Two men who were travelling with Smaine posted Instagram updates saying he had been killed in the avalanche.



Emergency rescue teams “confirmed the death of the two men”, a police spokesman said.

Their identities or nationalities would be released after thorough ID checks, he added.

BEIJING

China’s Sichuan to scrap three-child limit

Southwest China’s Sichuan province will lift its three-child birth limit and remove restrictions on single parents as the world’s most populous nation faces a looming demographic crisis. China’s population shrank last year for the first time in more than six decades, official data released this month showed, and the nation of 1.4 billion has seen birth rates plunge to record lows as its workforce ages.

China ended its strict “one-child policy” — imposed



in the 1980s out of fears of overpopulation — in 2016 and began allowing couples to have three children in 2021. But that has failed to reverse the demographic decline.

SRINAGAR

Rahul Gandhi ends 135-day march

Several hundred people gathered as snow fell in Indian Kashmir’s main city of Srinagar on Monday to mark the end of Congress party leader Rahul Gandhi’s foot march that he began at the southern tip of the country 135 days ago.

The “Bharat Jodo Yatra”, or Unite India March, was aimed at boosting the 52-year-old’s popularity but Congress still faces an uphill battle against Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).



“I didn’t do the yatra for myself or Congress,” said Gandhi, who swapped the T-shirt that he had worn for the majority of the march for a woollen Kashmiri gown to ward off the cold.



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In brief

■ BERLIN



GERMANY EYES EARLIER EXIT FROM MALI MISSION

Defence Minister Boris Pistorius is considering withdrawing Germany's troops from the UN stabilisation mission in Mali earlier than planned, since under current conditions they cannot fulfil their mandate, he told the Sueddeutsche Zeitung in comments. The government announced in November that troops would be withdrawn in May 2024, but said they might be withdrawn earlier if it was impossible to fly the drones that make it possible for soldiers to venture outside army bases.

"If our soldiers can't leave the base or can only move in a small radius round it because the drones can't fly, they aren't fulfilling their mandate," he said.

■ KINSHASA



PART OF STAGE BUILT FOR POPE COLLAPSES

A canopy overhanging a stage built for Pope Francis in a Kinshasa stadium collapsed during a heavy storm, Congo authorities said on Monday, three days before he is due to appear there for a public event.

Francis is scheduled to arrive in the Democratic Republic of Congo on Tuesday afternoon and address young people and catechists in the Martyrs' Stadium in Kinshasa.

The canopy was being fixed on Monday, Kinshasa police chief Sylvano Kasongo said. "It's the structure and the gyproc decoration that collapsed but the podium is still in place and work is under way to get everything back in order," he said.

■ GQEBERHA



8 KILLED IN MASS SHOOTING AT BIRTHDAY PARTY

Gunmen killed eight people and wounded three others at a birthday party in South Africa at the weekend before fleeing, police said. Officers have given no indication of a motive for Sunday's shooting. The incident follows a spate of mass gun attacks last year that shocked the nation. In July, gunmen killed 19 people in random shootings within hours of each other.

"These victims were killed by criminals, and we will not rest until we find out what happened and who was responsible for (this) callous and cold-blooded attack on these unsuspecting victims," said Police Service Commissioner.

Russia claims gains in relentless battles in east Ukraine

KYIV: Russian forces claimed incremental gains in eastern Ukraine on Monday adding up to their biggest advances in months, after relentless battles that Kyiv described as human wave attacks which showed Moscow had no regard for the lives of its own men.

The administrator of Russian-controlled parts of Donetsk province, Denis Pushilin, claimed troops had secured a foothold in Vuhledar, a coal mining town whose ruins have been a Ukrainian bastion since the outset of the war.

A day earlier, the head of Russia's Wagner mercenary force said his fighters had secured Blahodatne, a village just north of Bakhmut, a city that has been the focus of sustained Russian attacks for months.

Kyiv said it had repelled assaults on Blahodatne and Vuhledar, and Reuters could not independently verify the situations there. But the locations of the reported fighting indicated clear, though gradual, Russian gains after around two months in which front lines had largely been frozen in place.

"The situation is very tough. Bakhmut, Vuhledar and other sectors in Donetsk region - there are constant Russian attacks," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a video address late on Sunday.

"The enemy does not count its people and, despite numerous casualties, maintains a high intensity of attacks."



A man speaks on a mobile phone as he walks past a mural depicting a flying missile and an artist at his easel, in the centre of the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv on Monday. — AFP

Vuhledar sits south of Bakhmut, near where the eastern frontline protects Russian-controlled rail lines supplying Moscow's forces in southern Ukraine. Mykola Salamakha, a Ukrainian colonel and military analyst, told Ukrainian Radio NV that Moscow's assault there was coming at huge cost.

"The town is on an upland and an extremely strong defensive hub has been created there," he said. "This is a repetition of the situation in Bakhmut - one wave

of Russian troops after another crushed by the Ukrainian armed forces."

In recent weeks Western countries have pledged hundreds of modern tanks and armoured vehicles to equip Ukrainian forces for a counter-offensive to recapture territory later in 2023.

But delivery of those weapons is months away, leaving Kyiv to fight on through the winter in what both sides have described as a meat grinder of relentless attrition warfare. After Russia

exhausted its military with a failed assault on Kyiv last year, Ukraine's forces counter-attacked and recaptured swathes of territory in the autumn. But that advance has stalled since November, allowing Russia to retake the initiative.

Moscow's Wagner mercenary force has sent thousands of convicts recruited from Russian prisons into battle around Bakhmut, buying time for Russia's regular military to reconstitute units with hundreds of thousands of reservists. — Reuters

Countries 'dangerously unprepared' for future pandemics

GENEVA: The world is "dangerously unprepared" for future pandemics, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) say in a report published on Monday, calling on countries to update their preparedness plans by year-end.

In its World Disasters Report 2022, the IFRC said "all countries remain dangerously unprepared for future outbreaks" despite Covid-19 killing more people than any earthquake, drought or hurricane in history.

"The next pandemic could be just around the corner. If the experience of Covid-19 won't quicken our steps toward preparedness, what will?" said Jagan Chapagain, secretary general of the IFRC, the world's largest disaster response network.

The report said that countries should review their legislation to ensure it is in line with their pandemic preparedness plans by the end of 2023 and adopt a new treaty and revised international health regulations.

— Reuters

France braces for new strikes against Macron pension plan

PARIS: France on Monday braced for another day of mass protests and strikes over proposed pension reforms championed by President Emmanuel Macron, with the government and its left-wing opponents trading blame for the expected disruption.

Around 1.1 million people took to the streets for the first strike day on January 19, according to official statistics, the biggest demonstrations since the last major round of pension reform under right-wing president Nicolas Sarkozy in 2010.

A police source said that security forces were expecting similarly sized crowds on Tuesday in 240 demonstrations around the country, in addition to mass strike disruption to transport, education and other services.

With unions warning more stoppages are to come, the strikes represent a major test for Macron as he seeks to implement a showcase policy of his second term in office.

The president's ministers and their opponents are desperately seeking to sway public opinion ahead of what is expected to be a bitter and costly standoff if more strikes are called over the next month.

Senior hard-left MP Mathilde Panot from the France Unbowed (LFI) party accused Macron and his ministers of being responsible



In this file photo taken on January 19, 2023 a demonstrator holds a sign reading 'Metro, job, tomb' during a rally as workers go on strike over French President's plan to raise the legal retirement age from 62 to 64 in Paris. — AFP

for the stoppages that are to cripple public transport and other services. "They're the ones who want to wreak havoc on the country," she told BFM TV while also criticising comments by Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin over the weekend as a "provocation."

Darmanin, a close Macron ally, said on Saturday that left-wing political parties were "only looking to screw up the country" and were defending "idleness and champagne socialism."

The most controversial part of the proposed reform is hiking the minimum retirement age to 64 from its current level of 62, which is the lowest level in any major European economy.

Macron made the change part of this re-election manifesto in April last year and he insists it is needed to guarantee the future

financing of the pension system, which is forecast to tip into deficit in the next few years.

Opponents point out that the system is currently balanced and that the head of the independent Pensions Advisory Council recently told parliament that "pension spending is not out of control, it's relatively contained."

For pro-business Macron, who has repeatedly told French people they "need to work more", failure to succeed with a signature proposal would severely undermine his credibility for the remainder of his second and last term in office, analysts say.

The government headed by Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne has signalled there is wiggle room on some measures as parliamentary committees started examining the draft law on Monday. — AFP

Keep cool and keep going great



Dr Anchan K

The writer is an advisor on business, economy

Going through tough times is a part of life. Life can feel like a challenging maze sometimes where you are left with difficult options, which might make you feel unfocused, overwhelmed, and helpless.

Start dealing with this stress by finding immediate relief from emotional distress.

Learn to deal with your emotions to ease some of your inner conflict and distress.

Accept that tough times happen to all of us. Loneliness aggravates anxiety.

Be in the company of those you love. But instead of merely spending time with family and friends, take steps to rejuvenate your relationships.

The best way to do this is to give more of yourself in terms of time, energy and attention. Give yourself the credit you deserve for going through hard times.

Moderation is key, but you can reward yourself for keeping calm. Take yourself out to a movie, or take a walk in a park.

Releasing emotions is a great way to help yourself feel calm during tough times.

Many times, you can feel angry, helpless, afraid, sad, grief, or ashamed when life has thrown you an overwhelming challenge.

When emotions are bottled up, they add to feelings of panic and feeling out of control.

Fear may be the biggest emotion that gets in the way of feeling

RELEASING EMOTIONS IS A GREAT WAY TO HELP YOURSELF FEEL CALM DURING TOUGH TIMES. STUDIES HAVE SHOWN THAT USING MINDFULNESS TECHNIQUES CAN HELP YOU FEEL CALMER AND MORE RELAXED

calm during tough times. Fear is just an emotion, like all the other emotions. By accepting fear for what it is, an emotional response that can be dealt with like all other emotions, you can take steps towards facing fears.

The truth about fear is that it is always concerned with the future. Be patient with yourself. Dealing with fears can be a lifelong learning process, and it may take some time for you to overcome the ones you're currently dealing with.

Mindfulness has scientific support.

Studies have shown that using mindfulness techniques can help you feel calmer and more relaxed, improve your relationships, increase your empathy, and even lower your blood pressure.

Make a list of all the negative thoughts you have about yourself related to your situation, and then reframe them into positive, realistic statements.

One powerful coping strategy

for getting through tough times is finding meaning in yourself, your struggle, and adversity.

Using your journal, write down things you are learning about the current struggle you are going through.

Write down the opportunities you have to be brave, what you can learn, and how you can decide to grow from this experience.

Write down things that keep you going. Write down why you have chosen to deal with this life struggle.

Learning to honour your emotions will always help prepare you for understanding more coping strategies. Keep cool, you will always have a great going for sure.

Strikes, stability as Sunak marks 100 days as UK prime minister

JITENDRA JOSHI

On reaching 100 days in 10 Downing Street this week, Rishi Sunak will double the duration of Liz Truss's brutally short term as British prime minister.

But having stabilised panicky financial markets after the calamitous Truss tenure, the Conservative leader has little to celebrate.

Double-digit inflation is fuelling a winter of misery for many in Sunak's Britain.

On Wednesday, the day before his mini-anniversary, up to half a million workers will escalate a rolling series of strikes to shut down schools, railways and other public sectors.

Opposition Labour leader Keir Starmer has been portraying the wealthy premier as "weak" and out of touch, as both parties gear up for an election likely next year.

"Is he starting to wonder if this job is just too big for him?" he told the diminutive Sunak in parliament last Wednesday.

The Labour leader was merciless as he ran the rule over Britain's state of permacrisis since Brexit and the Covid pandemic, and "sleaze" among the Conservatives.

Ambulance drivers have also been striking, joining nurses on their first-ever walkout. But Sunak is adamant that unions' pay demands will only fuel the decades-high inflation.

"Being an effective manager of public money and public services is not a sin," senior minister Michael Gove said, rejecting criticism that Sunak is an uninspiring leader after Boris Johnson, who preceded Truss.

"It is the case that first of all we have to bring the stability — and we have — and now we have set out areas where we are performing," he told Sky News on Sunday. Sunak faces a mountainous challenge as he bids to emulate Conservative leader John Major's surprise win over Labour in 1992.

Outside Number 10 in October, he promised "integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level" — in pointed contrast to his two predecessors.

But Sunak has been forced on the defensive by the tax affairs of the Conservative chairman Nadhim Zahawi, who until this weekend sat in the cabinet. Starmer accused Sunak's Tories of "moral bankruptcy", as less well-off voters are forced this winter to choose between eating and heating.

Sunak had sought to buy time by launching an internal inquiry into Zahawi, who admitted to being "careless" with his own taxes and had to pay a seven-figure sum to the UK's tax agency — when he was finance minister in charge of the same agency. — AFP

Baghdad loses green space to real estate boom



Jane Arraf

The writer is a Palestinian-Canadian journalist



Yasmine Mosimann

The writer is a Baghdad-based multimedia Journalist

Along the highway in the Dora suburb of Baghdad, the decapitated trunks of dead date palm trees rise up through the sandy soil like fingers from a grave, relics of once-lush groves increasingly being supplanted by a construction boom in Iraq's expanding capital.

Many of Baghdad's orchards and gardens have been sacrificed to largely unregulated building over the past decade, reducing the green spaces that have traditionally helped keep the capital livable as temperatures increase in what is already one of the hottest cities in the world.

Construction — both legal and illegal — is accelerating in Baghdad amid a serious housing shortage and what Iraq's prime minister has described as laundered money poured into major real estate investments.

"We are gradually losing the living lungs of our city," said Maryam Faisal, a lecturer at Al Farabi University College in Baghdad.

Baghdad, with its population of more than 7 million, is one of the largest cities in the Arab world. Intersected by the Tigris River, it was once the centre of the Islamic world, known for its elaborate gardens.

But green space in the capital has contracted in the past two decades, to about 12 per cent from more than 28 per cent, Faisal said.

Shaded areas in Baghdad are more than 5 degrees cooler than areas with

CONSTRUCTION, BOTH LEGAL AND ILLEGAL, IS ACCELERATING IN BAGHDAD AMID A SERIOUS HOUSING SHORTAGE. GREEN SPACE IN THE CAPITAL HAS CONTRACTED IN THE PAST TWO DECADES TO ABOUT 12 PER CENT

no plant cover, according to studies. Without trees and plants, concrete and metal surfaces absorb heat and then radiate it back, creating what are known as urban heat islands.

Iraq, with its declining water levels, intensified droughts and population surge, has been assessed as one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change.

But successive governments have essentially ignored the growing crisis, according to environmentalists.

Muhmood Aziz, the director of planning for the Baghdad municipality, said the loss of green space had accelerated since 2003,



Shoppers at the Babylon Mall, which was built on a date palm grove in central Baghdad.

when the United States invaded Iraq.

He pointed to "the weakness of the Iraqi state and the weakness of the monitoring measures."

In a city where summer temperatures have reached up to 125 degrees Fahrenheit, the heat and increased air pollution pose particular hazards for the poor, who have no access to air conditioning.

In the past few decades, Arabian Gulf countries, including Iraq, have warmed almost twice as fast as the global average, and more than many other parts of the world. Now, the worst months of summer are nearly unlivable.

In Basra, Iraq's steamy coastal city, a recent New York Times report found outdoor workers at risk in the summer of heat stroke, heart problems and kidney disease from the heat.

The suburb of Dora, on the southern outskirts of Baghdad, was traditionally a mix of residential, industrial and agricultural land, dotted with huge date palm groves and citrus orchards.

Municipal inspectors routinely investigate reports of palm trees being illegally destroyed — often by pouring kerosene or gasoline on the roots — to allow owners to build on the land. But the municipality's tree patrol, even backed by Interior Ministry forces, is no match for the frenzy of development.

"In Dora, for example, we go in the morning and see that trees have been cut down in the night," said Aziz, the municipal planning director.

"It is illegal to cut down trees, and if we catch them, we arrest them and put them in prison."

Some groves have been razed for what is expected to be one of the biggest shopping malls in the Middle East, the Iraq Mall, with almost 6 million square feet of international brands, cinemas and dancing water fountains.

Real estate investment in Baghdad has become a prime tool to launder money in Iraq, notorious for corruption in politics and business, according to Iraqi government and local government officials. Property in Baghdad is routinely paid for in cash. — *The New York Times*

A case of a marriage proposal...

Marriages are made in heaven, they say, but not for my friend.

Each proposal that comes to her through her family is scrutinised by her. All just to analyse the potential bride groom's personality and character. Now I have been waiting to see the occasion of marriage, but when it comes to her I just wait for the minute she will give reasons for rejecting the proposal.

It tickles me in a way because she should be an inspiration for girls who worry about never being proposed or worry about being left behind.

She said she is getting engaged this weekend. She has a great sense of humour and jokes a lot so the instant response was, "Don't believe you," (secretly hoping it's true).

She laughed, and said, "Right, had to reject."

So what happened?

She asked for the potential groom's ID card and sure enough he sent a copy. If only he had told me, I would have said no, please don't.

She checked his traffic fines and he had nine of them for over speeding.

He lost his first point there in her checklist.

She got a chance to look at his shoes. "Why is that important?" I asked. "The shoes tell everything about a man," she replied.

For sure, all men are looking down at their shoes. Are shoes well maintained, practical, cheap or classy or expensive? Didn't have time to gather myself because she gave the third reason for not thinking of accepting the proposal - "I didn't like his name."

His name?

Yes. Now what do you say to that?

How about nicknames? And in Omani culture woman does not change to husband's name as last name after marriage. So we could work around that.

She had one more point of concern - weight. Now we should not sound like discriminating or body shaming and there are ways to control and



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

MARRIAGES ARE NOT MADE IN HEAVEN. IT IS VERY MUCH ON EARTH. THE REALITY IS A BIT HARSH. IT STARTS WITH FAMILY ORIENTATION TO PERSONAL TRAITS

change life style. I did not ask her for any more specifications as I was dazed at the criteria of being selected and accepted as a groom or bride or rather husband or wife.

Bet the list would be long for the men too when they look for their ideal wife. Expectations can be high, then again the reality could be different. Or could this be the reality check in arranged marriage situation? As in the case of love marriage the elders would say, "Love is blind."

Others in the family would be able to say what are the reasons there could be a mismatch, but the Cupid struck couple would never be able to spot the problems. Some say the honeymoon period is short lived when the imbalances emerge. But then that is life they say the art is to adjust and accept. On the other hand, the person who knows what they want in life would not be compromising their life or the other person's life. After all, as they say, it is a life time decision.

A few years ago, it was in a sociology class called 'Marriage and Family', our professor had asked who all think marriages are made in heaven? Almost all of us except a couple of them did not raise their hands. The professor just said you are wrong

Marriages are not made in heaven. It is very much on earth. The reality is a bit harsh, she had pointed out. It starts with family orientation to personal traits.

"A marriage is between two families and not two individuals," she had noted. Individuals carry their genetic setting and characteristics from their parents so it might be a good idea to see the parents too. And much before the actual wedding one must be able to accept each other's families too. Because each person is part of their family. Then what about personal likes and dislikes? Would there be enough opportunity to grow as an individual?

As they say life is a gift, and a secret of good marriage is the ability to adjust and compromise, but could it go overboard so much so that one loses the ability to comprehend life?

DESIRE FOR REVENGE



This photograph shows a mural of late Argentinian football legend Diego Maradona at the Via Emanuele De Deo Spanish quarter in central Naples. In Naples, in the bubbling Spanish quarters near the Maradona fresco, as in front of the stadium bearing the name of the Argentine idol, "Napoli campione d'Italia!" as the dream of the scudetto grows between "superstition" and the desire for "revenge" on the richer north of Italy. – AFP

Nato tanks will change the complexion of the Ukraine war

Within a span of few hours, three landmark decisions - first by Berlin, second by Washington and then by Ottawa – have suddenly evaporated the pessimism that had enveloped the efforts towards Russia's exit from Ukraine for quite some time.

Everyone was expecting that Ottawa would also follow suit. And it happened exactly the same way. Canadian Defence Minister Anita Anand's announcement to donate four of the Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine. So, we are witnessing a snowball effect in this matter.

President Joe Biden's decision to send 31 M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, joining German Chancellor Scholz who announced a few hours earlier to send 14 Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine to bolster the fight against Russia's war, is expected to change the whole complexion of the Ukraine war.

Scholz has also given green signal to other European countries to send German-made tanks from their own stocks. With these announcements, one of the last proscriptions - providing weapons that are primarily used for offensive rather than defensive operations - in Western support has been effectively removed.



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

GERMAN CHANCELLOR SCHOLZ HAS ALSO GIVEN GREEN SIGNAL TO OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES TO SEND GERMAN-MADE TANKS FROM THEIR OWN STOCKS

Certainly, it is a great breakthrough in a chronic diplomatic deadlock within Nato as well as a big boost for Kyiv which has been pleading for the supplies of these fat armoured behemoths for the last several months. At the same time, it is a major morale booster for Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his people who are bracing for a major spring offensive from Russia.

Just three days ago, when the meeting of Nato defence ministers at Ramstein air base, Germany, failed to take any decision on sending tanks to Ukraine, things appeared to be very frustrating for all the stakeholders. There was consensus among all technical and defence experts on the matter that Ukraine desperately needed these tanks so as to bolster its attacking capability to push back the Russian forces from the occupied territories, but in spite of such compulsive reasons, Nato members were unable to find an amicable agreement on the methodology and quantum of tanks-supplies to Ukraine.

All players were waiting for yes from each other, but none was ready to take the lead. Immersed in their own reasons

and reservations, the European capitals were exhibiting a strange kind of paralysis in their collective decision-making at this crucial phase of the Ukraine war. There is a very strong feeling in the Ukrainian military leadership about the strategic merit of tanks to push back the invading Russian forces. Ukrainians expect that as soon as the winter season starts receding, the Russians may resume their invasion plan with more intensity. British PM Rishi Sunak was the first one who promised to send a small company of 14 Challenger 2 tanks. After Sunak's pledge, the Ukrainians were quite hopeful that other Western

countries would also follow suit. And it has happened. The decision by Germany is likely to encourage more Nato members – and the United States as well – to donate their share of tanks to build a reasonable inventory in the coming months.

Moscow has warned Nato bluntly on the supplies of tanks and other weapons to Ukraine as a "pre-planned war" against Moscow. Severe reaction from Moscow over this development does not come as a surprise.

Reports are emanating that Putin is preparing for a massive attack in the spring. But the supply of sophisticated tanks from Nato

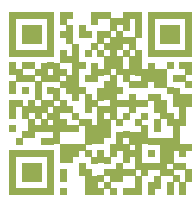
is likely to drastically alter the complexion of the Ukraine war. The arrival of tanks from Europe – and the US – will definitely change the power equation and it is expected that Putin will revisit his strategic plan in Ukraine now. Berlin's consent to deliver Leopards 2 tanks to Ukraine has also sent two very strong messages to Putin: one, the long-drawn war in Ukraine has gradually pushed Nato members to forget their differences and display unity against the Russian war, and two, Nato members are now ready to adopt a more aggressive stance by sending "offensive warfare" to Ukraine and that they are also ready to pay the "heavy price" for this. Delivery of tanks to Ukraine will also have a symbolic significance and it will certainly tilt the balance of power equation towards Ukraine. Although the Russians claim that the European tanks will also "burn like all the rest", but the fact is the all the current version of the European and American battle tanks – including Leopards 2, Challenger 2 and M1 Abrams – are far superior in mobility, firepower and protection capabilities than their Russian counterparts.



A rescuer stands outside a residential building partially destroyed after a missile strike in Kharkiv on Monday. – AFP

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AL NAHDA, AL SUWAIQ AND AL RUSTAQ SNATCH CRUCIAL WINS



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 30

Al Nahda club put one foot in the semifinal of His Majesty's Cup football as they defeated Al Oruba 3-1 in the first leg of their quarterfinals on Monday.

At Al Buraimi Sports Complex, national team player Omar al Malki put his team Al Nahda ahead as he scored an early goal in the first 12 seconds of the match. Later, Abubaker Demba doubled his team lead before first half end. Al Malki came back again to score the third goal to confirm Al Buraimi representative club's triumph.

Al Asim al Harthy scored the consultation goal for Al Oruba in the dying minutes. Al Oruba will be in a difficult assignment when they will host Al Nahda for the



second leg match on February 9 at Sur Sports Complex.

AL SUWAIQ HOLD ADVANTAGE

In an earlier first leg quarterfinal match on Sunday,

Al Suwaiq passed their half way to the semifinals stage after they thrashed Al Bashayer 3-0 at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

Oman national team player Esam al Subhi was the star of the match as he netted two



goals (19th and 84th minutes) while Omid Okri (30th) struck the second goal.

The first goal of Esam came as he benefited from Al Bashayer defender's mistake to take the ball and send it to the

net. Eleven minutes later, Okri doubled the lead of the hosts as he netted the second goal of Al Suwaiq from the same side after he broke the defence of the opponents to face the goalie inside the box and shot a

strong ball to the net.

Esam took advantage of Al Bashayer's goalkeeper's position outside the box to loop the ball over him and struck the third goal for Al Suwaiq. The triumph eased Northern Batinah team's way to the next round but Al Bashayer have all the chances to fight until last moment despite the difficulty of the forthcoming encounter.

Last edition's runners-up Al Rustaq, snatched a crucial win as they beat Oman Club 1-0 at Seeb Stadium. The all-important goal in the game was scored by Mohammed al Ghafri in the 56th minute. The second leg match will take place on February 10 at Al Rustaq Sports Complex and the match will kick off at 8:15 pm.

Talya wins U11 girls title at WTT Youth Contender

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 30

Oman's promising female paddler Talya al Rawahi overcame a stiff competition to emerge champion at the WTT Youth Contender Doha 2023. The Muscat-based 10-year-old impressed all to win the gold medal in the U-11 girls singles competitions category.

Talya managed to end her deciding match against Qatar's Al Dana al Kaabi in a straight-set 3-0 win at 12-10, 11-6, 11-7. In the previous match, Talya beat Qatar's Salwa al Sadaa 3-1 at 7-11, 11-2,

11-4, 11-2.

With the triumphs, Talya topped the group order and clinched the gold medal. Al Dana defeated her teammate Salwa 3-1 to end as runner-up in the group while Salwa finished third. This international triumph acts as a first official accomplishment in her table tennis career. Few months ago, she had took part in an international table tennis event in Thailand which had served her a lot in terms of building up the technical experience and entering the international competitions mood.



After the podium ceremony, Talya expressed her joy with the first achievement. "I am very happy with the gold medal in this world-class TT event. This medal will encourage me to do much better in the near future to raise my national flag in the forthcoming events at international level," she said.

Talya was under watchful eyes of Iranian head coach of Oman team, Omid Shamas Shaharbabki. The 10-year-old underwent a comprehensive training programme during the past few months in an internal camp in Muscat.

Meanwhile, Oman's national junior paddlers ended their participation at the WTT Youth Contender Doha 2023 at quarterfinals. Ali al Rawahi managed to reach to quarterfinals before he suffered a 3-0 defeat against Qatar's Mohammed al Sulaiti while Turki al Abri progressed into the same stage before he lost against Iranian player Perham in the U-13 boys singles competition. Ahmed al Riyami advanced to round 32 of U-17 boys singles competition before he lost against Romanian player Robert 3-0.

SON BRACE SEES SPURS THROUGH IN FA CUP

ANDY JALIL
PRESTON, JAN 30

With a marvellous double strike, Son Heung-Min led Tottenham Hotspur into the fifth round of the FA Cup after a 3-0 win against Championship side Preston.

Prolific goal scorer Son, who won the Premier League's Golden Boot last season, has been a little out of form by his own standards, although hitting 8 goals so far this season in all competitions. His goals were his first in the cup since February 2020.

He said: "I needed these goals for my confidence. It was really important. It was the kind of position I like to shoot. In the first half I had a couple of chances to shoot but the keeper made good saves."

He added: "As a striker the important thing is that you get that goal. It is important that I could help the team go to the next round. I'm very, very happy. When you look at the scoresheet it looks like a comfortable win but the FA Cup has never been comfortable. We suffered a lot away from home. The lads did an amazing job."

Although continuing to enjoy most of the possession, Spurs struggled to break their opponents down. Their crosses were poor and they lacked cohesion. Preston proved strong enough to survive the early pressure and grew into the match, making occasional forays out of their own half and offering some threat from set-pieces.

Tottenham were unable to beat the defence throughout the first half although Son forced a save



Tottenham Hotspur's Son Heung-min scores their second goal. – Reuters



from Freddie Woodman from just outside the box and Dejan Kulusevski was off target from similar range and had another effort blocked by Liam Lindsay.

It wasn't until five minutes after the break that Tottenham were able to break the deadlock. Son collected a pass from Japhet Tanganga and unleashed a lovely left-footed curling shot from 30 yards into the corner of the net, giving no chance to the diving Woodman.

Twenty minutes later Son doubled the lead. He received a neat flicked pass from Ivan Perisic and spun passed Jordan Storey to superbly drive in his shot. Spurs coach: Christian Stellini said: "You could feel this from Sonny. Without Harry he was the most important striker for us. He's a top player. He just has to wait for the right moment."

With twenty minutes of play left, Tottenham were well in control. Their manager, Antonio Conte made three changes but left their main striker Harry Kane on the bench still resting after having had fever last week.

One of the substitutes to come on was Arnaut Danjuma, a loan signing from Villarreal this week. He marked his debut with an 87th minute goal, firing in a shot from a low cross by Kulusevski.

Preston manager, Ryan Lowe said: "I'm immensely proud to have kept a team of the like of Tottenham at bay for as long as we did. Then a world-class player provides a world-class finish. It was a moment of brilliance from Son. It was a perfect first-half performance. We gave a good account of ourselves."



Oman women's hockey team to train in Malaysia

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, JAN 30

Oman national women's hockey team are preparing to represent Oman in the Hockey5s World Cup, which will be hosted by the Sultanate of Oman in January 2024.

In this regard, Oman Hockey Association has arranged the first external camp for Oman national women team in Malaysia from January 31 to February 11.

Hanan bint Sulaiman al Harasiyah, a member of the Board of Directors of the Oman Hockey Association, said: "The national women's team are having the first external camp to achieve several goals, preparation and raising physical and technical readiness for the upcoming tournaments. The most important event will be the Hockey5s World Cup in Muscat," she said.

"Our aim is to prepare the national team for international matches in order to develop

technical performance, earn the experiences from Asian teams, and acquire new skills in the game. Malaysia was chosen for the camp because there are no women's hockey teams in the Gulf and Arab countries to organise friendly matches", Hanan added.

This is the first ever Oman national women's team in hockey. During the camp the head coach will evaluate the technical levels of the players during the friendly matches. Players will be divided into two teams, the first for the general hockey team and the second for the hockey 5s to represent Oman domestically and internationally.

Ola al Balushi, national team player, said: "This is the first external camp organised by the Oman Hockey Association for the women's national team in Malaysia. We are ready to face the teams in friendly matches, we will play with winning ambition, and we will make an effort to benefit from the camp."

"We thank the Oman Hockey Association for organising the external camp, also the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for encouraging Omani women. We also seek private sector institutions to support the national team to raise the Oman flag in regional and international forums," she concluded.

Assarain Golf Classic on February 3 and 4

MUSCAT: The 27th Assarain Golf Classic, one of the most prestigious golf tournaments of the Sultanate of Oman, will take place at Ghala Golf Club on February 3 and 4, 2023.

More than 130 Golfers have registered for the tournament as per the organisers.

According to a press statement issued by the organisers, the Assarain Golf Classic, sponsored by Assarain Group of Companies, is a premium golfing event that gives amateur golfers the opportunity to participate in a professional tournament that meets international golfing standards.

Ibrahim al Wahaibi, Director, Assarain Group of Companies, and the pioneer of the Assarain Golf Classic, said: "We support golf and are committed to help the game flourish in Oman. We look forward to the 2023 edition of the Assarain Golf Classic and are confident that it will exceed expectations."

"The 2023 Assarain Golf Classic is a highly anticipated golfing tournament, one that the entire golfing community in Oman looks forward to. The Classic, to be staged at Ghala Golf Club, will witness the coming together of golfers of varying handicap who will take on the challenge of taming the greens. Open to men, ladies and



juniors, the Assarain Golf Classic 2023 is a highly awaited golfing tournament in Oman. This tournament sets a new standard every year, and I keenly look forward to it."

The 36-hole competition is one of the largest golfing tournaments in the region and is open to all players with a verifiable handicap. Another not-to-be-missed attraction will be the colourful presentation ceremony planned for February 4 to felicitate the winners of different categories.

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 30

The ninth edition of Oman Individual Chess Championship for the age groups under 16 years concluded on Monday in the Ibri Sports Complex hall in Ibri.

The competition for the clubs was organised by the Oman Chess Committee (OCC) with support from Khalid bin

Khalifa al Hatmi, Director of the Department of Culture, Sports and Youth in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

Al Hatmi distributed cups and medals to the top winners in various categories.

The tournament was the first tournament organised by the OCC during the current year. The competition lasted for four days, and it was held according to the Swiss system, consisting of seven rounds for five age groups.

The tournament is one of the competitions that the OCC is keen to hold annually to encourage young children to play chess.

The tournament for the current year included five categories for eight years old, 10 years old, 12 years old, 14 years old and 16 years old. More than 104 players representing various clubs of the Sultanate of Oman participated in the tournament.

In order for the tournament to be a success, several committees were formed, represented by

AGE-GROUP WINNERS

In the eight-year category, Youssef bin Yasser al Maawali from Masirah Club won the first place, Majd bin Abdullah al Riyami from Salalah Club claimed the second place and Hamad bin

the main committee headed by Ahmed al Balushi. The Referees Committee consisted of Musallam al Wadhahi, Khalid al Jadidi, Hamdan al Hinai and Sultan al Harasi. Hamdan al Hinai and Yasser al Maawali handled the housing and subsistence committee.

Muhannad al Balushi from Salalah Club finished third.

In the 10-year category, Abdulaziz bin Hilal al Hinai of Salalah Club claimed the first place, followed by Mohammed bin Khalid al Hadidi from Masirah Club and Saud bin Khalid al Farsi from Yanqul Club in second and third places respectively.

In the 12-year category, Al Moayad bin Imad al Buraiki from Salalah Club came in first, Ammar bin Khalid al Hatemi from Salalah claimed second spot and Al Yaman bin Nasser al Shamli from Ibri Club ended third.

In the 14-year category, Mohammed bin Hamad al Mahrouqi from Salalah Club won the first place and Mohammed bin Abdullah al Riyami from Masirah Club was second and Mohammed bin Imad al Buraiki from Salalah Club took the third place.

In the 16-year category, Abdul Rahman bin Tariq al Yahmadi from Masirah Club snatched the first place, Ahmed bin Badr al Rahbi from Masirah Club claimed the second place and Mahmoud bin Hamad al Mahrouqi from Masirah Club finished third.



Top field for International Series in Oman

THE INTERNATIONAL SERIES
KICKS-OFF THE 2023 ASIAN TOUR
SEASON IN MUSCAT

MAJOR WINNERS GARCIA, MCDOWELL,
OOSTHUIZEN AND SCHWARTZEL IN
FRAY AT AL MOUJ GOLF FROM FEB 9-12

MUSCAT: The International Series returns in 2023, making its Middle Eastern debut at Al Mouj Golf, Oman, from February 9-12 with the Asian Tour's enhanced tournament series' strongest field to date.

The 132-player field including golfers from 23 countries across 6 continents is headlined by major winners Sergio Garcia, Graeme McDowell, Louis Oosthuizen, and Charl Schwartzel.

The all-time Ryder Cup points earner, Garcia, is joined in the field by fellow Spaniards Eugenio Chacarra and David Puig.

The all-star field also includes Chile's two top-ranked players Joaquin Niemann and Mito Pereira.

Cho Minn Thant, Asian Tour CEO, said: "Re-introducing the International Series, with heavyweight stars such as these, in new markets like the Middle East, provides unimaginable exposure for the game of golf in locations where the potential for growth is enormous."



Now in its second year, The International Series will contribute a total of over \$20m to the 2023 Asian Tour prize funds. Comprising of 10 events, an

increase from seven in 2022, this investment ensures elevated purses of minimum \$2m per tournament.

Alongside the numerous global players seeking to capitalise on the

increased prize purse are Asian Tour stalwarts, Sihwan Kim – winner of the 2022 Asian Tour Order Of Merit, and Scott Vincent – winner of the 2022 International

Series Order Of Merit.

The 30-year-old Zimbabwean who's earned a coveted place in the LIV Golf League under captain Niemann, said: "With the

introduction of The International Series and the clear pathway to the heights of LIV Golf, The Asian Tour is a really exciting place to be playing golf right now.

"It's always exciting to visit new places and it's great that The International Series is breaking ground in the Middle East this year."

Representing the region, Othman Ibrahim al Mulla, Saud Abdullah al Sharif and Faisal Mohammed Salhab, from Saudi Arabia plus Jordan's Shergo Al Kurdi, will also showcase their talents in Oman.

Rahul Singh, Head of The International Series, spoke on the advancement of the events, saying: "Besides the exciting line up we already have confirmed, helping us kick-start the 2023 season, our aim with the series has always been continued growth.

"With the names competing and the commitment we've made to growing the purses at each event, it shows we're already achieving this, in just our second season."

Pitch 'shocker' as India level T20 series with tense win

LUCKNOW, India: Skipper Hardik Pandya on Sunday blasted the Lucknow pitch as a "shocker" after India edged New Zealand by six wickets in a low-scoring second Twenty20 international to level the series at 1-1.

India restricted New Zealand, who won the opener of the three-match series, to just 99-8 with Yuzvendra Chahal leading the spin charge on a viciously turning pitch.

India then lost regular wickets as the Kiwi bowlers took it into the final over but Suryakumar Yadav hit an unbeaten 26 and along with Pandya (15 not out) anchored the tricky run chase to achieve the target with one ball to spare.

"To be honest, it was a shocker of a wicket," Pandya said.

"I don't mind difficult wickets. I am all up for that, but somewhere down the line the curators or the grounds that we are going to play in should make sure they prepare the pitches earlier."

The series moves on to the decider in Ahmedabad on Wednesday.

The match witnessed 30 overs of spin without a six being hit in either innings.

The Kiwis just used 2.5 of overs from their fast bowlers. Spinners Michael Bracewell and Ish Sodhi took a wicket each.

17 OVERS OF SPIN

"We bowled 17 overs of spin, definitely something different," said New Zealand skipper Mitchell Santner. "With the bounce out there, it looked challenging."

Chahal, a leg-spinner who came in as the only change in the team from the opening loss, bowled the fourth over of the innings and started with a wicket maiden.

He bowled just two overs for four runs and a wicket but it set the tone for his fellow bowlers,



with left-arm quick Arshdeep Singh taking two.

New Zealand opener Finn Allen attempted to take on the Indian bowling with two straight boundaries in the third over after they elected to bat first, but was bowled by Chahal as he tried a reverse sweep.

The reverse sweep also proved to be the undoing of the next two

batsmen, with Devon Conway caught behind off Washington Sundar and then Glenn Phillips bowled by Deepak Hooda.

New Zealand were in trouble when previous-match winner Daryl Mitchell was bowled by left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav, and slipped to 60-5 after a mid-pitch mix-up got Mark Chapman run out for 14. — AFP

Bavuma century sets up series win for South Africa

BLOEMFONTEIN, South Africa: South African captain Temba Bavuma hit a century to lead his team to a series-clinching five-wicket win in the second one-day international against England at the Mangaung Oval in Bloemfontein on Sunday.

Bavuma hit 109 as South Africa chased down an England total of 342 for seven, winning with five balls to spare.

Bavuma battled cramps shortly before reaching his hundred. With his score on 96 there was a lengthy break while he received treatment. He reacted in emotional fashion when he hit the next ball from Adil Rashid through the covers for four.

He thumped his chest and pointed to his name on the back of his shirt. He was the only member of the South African team not signed up for the country's new Twenty20 league and his place in the national white-ball teams had been questioned because of a perceived inability to score at the rapid rate required in modern limited overs cricket.

But he was in outstanding form on Sunday as he spearheaded South Africa's third-highest successful run chase, facing only 102 balls and hitting 14 fours and a six. "It was very special," said Bavuma. "It was very enjoyable. I managed to hit a few out of the middle."

Bavuma said it was a confidence-boosting performance from his team, who have yet to qualify automatically for the World Cup later this year. "We knew we had to come out and play. We played the conditions, which were good for batting."

Bavuma sent England in to bat, reasoning correctly that there could be early life in the pitch. England struggled initially, losing both openers inside the first seven



South Africa's Temba Bavuma celebrates after scoring a century during the second ODI against England at Mangaung Oval in Bloemfontein. — AFP

overs, but prospered as batting conditions eased.

Harry Brook, playing in his second one-day international after being dismissed for nought in the first match on Friday, made 80 off 75 balls. Captain Jos Buttler hit an unbeaten 94 off 82 deliveries.

Moeen Ali was also in fine form for England, hitting 51 off 45 balls and sharing a fifth wicket stand of 106 with Buttler. There was a brief lull after Ali's dismissal but England scored 60 runs off the last four overs, with Sam Curran hitting three sixes in scoring 28.

"We didn't expect the ball to swing as much as it did at the start but to come back and post 340 was a fantastic effort," said Buttler. "It was a brilliant game of cricket and a great chase by South Africa."

Bavuma and Quinton de Kock made a fast start, putting on 77 for the first wicket in 12 overs. All the South African batsmen made contributions and the hosts were always up with or close to the required rate. David Miller hit 58 not out off 37 balls and finished the match with a six off Chris Woakes. — AFP



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Oman LNG signs binding term-sheet agreement with Turkish BOTAS

MUSCAT: Oman LNG signed on Monday a binding term-sheet agreement with Turkish BOTAS Petroleum Pipeline Corporation (BOTAS) to supply 1 million metric tonnes per annum (mtpa) of LNG, starting in 2025.

This agreement helps to strengthen Oman LNG's partnership with international firms in the energy and LNG industry.

The signed term-sheet agreement will see Oman LNG supplying BOTAS with a total volume of 1 million metric tonnes per annum of LNG based on a 10-year contract, starting from 2025; helping to emphasise Oman LNG's role in leveraging the Sultanate of Oman's reputation and Oman LNG as a reliable and trusted LNG supplier, coupled with the effective management of business processes to produce clean energy delivered to customers around the world safely and reliably.

The agreement was signed here, in the presence of Eng Salim



bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, by Hamed bin Mohammed al Numani, CEO of Oman LNG, and Burhan

THE SIGNED TERM-SHEET AGREEMENT WILL SEE OMAN LNG SUPPLYING BOTAS WITH A TOTAL VOLUME OF 1 MILLION METRIC TONNES PER ANNUM OF LNG BASED ON A 10-YEAR CONTRACT, STARTING FROM 2025.

vOzcan, Chairman of the Board and General Manager of BOTAS Petroleum Pipeline Corporation (BOTAS). — ONA

Oman posts increase in water and electricity production

MUSCAT: The total electricity production in the Sultanate of Oman until the end of November 2022 increased by 1.6 per cent, reaching 39,819 gigawatts per hour, compared to 38,483 gigawatts per hour, during the same period in 2021, according to the data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The Dhofar Governorate recorded an increase in total electricity production by 9.0%, to reach 3,934 gigawatts per hour until the end of November 2022, compared to the same period in 2021.

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Oman's oil activities increase 73.6 per cent to reach RO 12.5 billion



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 30

The value added of oil activities in the Sultanate Oman at the end of Q3 2022 reached RO 12.5 billion, compared to RO 7.2 billion at the end of Q3 2021, registering an increase of 73.6 per cent. The growth is attributed to the rise of value added of oil activities by 79 per cent, reaching RO 10.9 billion, compared to RO 6.1 billion at the end of Q3 2021.

The value added of natural gas increased by about 36.7 per cent by the end of Q3 2022, compared to the same period in 2021, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre of Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The total value added of non-

oil activities at the end of Q3 2022 reached RO 20.8 billion, a rise of 14.9 per cent compared to the same period in 2021. The increase is led by surge in value added of industrial activities (28.6 per cent), followed by agriculture, forestry and fishing (12.4 per cent) and service activities (9.7 per cent).

On the other hand, the surplus in the trade balance at the end of Q3 2022 reached RO 7.8 billion, an increase of RO 4.9 billion, compared to the same period in 2021. This is due to the increase in the value of exports.

Merchandise imports at the end of Q3 2022 reached RO 19.1 billion, an increase of 61 per cent, compared to RO 11.9 billion in the same period in 2021.

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Promising investment opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman's space sector

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 30

The Sultanate of Oman's executive space sector programme, unveiled by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology earlier this month, envisions promising opportunities for investment in this emerging sector.

"The vision of the space sector over the next ten years is to position the Sultanate of Oman as a regional getaway for space applications," shared Dr Saud bin Humaid bin Salim al Shoaali, Director General of Policies & Governance Department and Head of National Space at the Ministry.

Speaking during a symposium on the theme, 'Future Visions and Investment Opportunities', Dr Al Shoaali said the total value of the global space market reached \$337 billion in 2021, with upstream space services — space transportation and exploration — making up only 10 per cent of the market.

"Ninety per cent of the [space industry market] is found in end-to-end activities in applications and terrestrial uses," he noted, adding: "The Sultanate of Oman will focus on downstream opportunities, where most



The Sultanate of Oman will focus on downstream opportunities, where most investment opportunities and most profitable returns lie, whether it be from government investment or through attracting foreign investment

investment opportunities and most profitable returns lie, whether it be from government investment or through attracting foreign investment."

Dr Amjed al Thuhli, a consultant at National Space and AI Center, shared some of these opportunities during his presentation. One of which is the upcoming world space conference next year which will focus on the downstream space industry.

"There are many global space conferences but most of them

focus on manufacturing, our goal is to focus on space applications," said Al Thuhli.

The ministry hopes that the conference will put Oman on the global space map, and attract tourists and investors alike.

Another project is the End User Application Booster programme, simply known as sandboxing. The programme will aim to encourage sectors to use "space based solutions via pilot and demonstration projects", he said. Sandboxing is a cybersecurity

method of testing applications in a secure isolated environment.

According to Al Thuhli, the ministry will issue temporary and investment licences to companies interested in utilising the service.

Additionally, he shared, "The ministry will coordinate with the various other parties in order to have proper governance and ensure that there is a desired benefit that will return to the Sultanate of Oman, whether it is in the recruitment process or to add it in the GDP contribution process."

Moreover, the ministry will allow investors to establish ground stations as part of its ground station hub initiative.

"The programme will allow companies to establish ground stations and provide services to other companies or countries," stated Al Thuhli.

"It will allow faster access to data for researchers in the Sultanate of Oman as well as for academics and other institutions that use satellite data in their daily work, such as companies in the oil and gas sector and other economic sectors" he added.

Other investment opportunities include the establishment of cloud partnerships, cube satellite initiatives, space observatories, and research and development opportunities.

Bank Muscat wins two awards for excellence and leadership in US Dollar based fund transfers

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, was recently honoured with 2 elite awards by the New York headquartered JP Morgan, a global leader in financial services offering solutions to the world's most important corporations, governments and institutions.

The awards were received by Saleh bin Nasser al Habsi, Deputy General Manager, Enterprise Growth & Capital Market Operations, Bank Muscat, in the presence of senior bank officials. The bank won the 2022 USD clearing Elite Quality Recognition Award for outstanding achievement of best-in-class MT103 with Straight-through Processing rate of 98.77 per cent.

It also won the 2022 USD clearing Elite Quality Recognition Award for outstanding



achievement of best-in-class MT202 with Straight-through Processing of 99.90 per cent. The twin awards for operational excellence in the field of SWIFT-based dollar payments processing in both commercial and treasury

payments, highlights Bank Muscat's commitment to the highest quality standards in fund transfers.

On this occasion, Zuwaina bint Abdullah al Sharjiyah, Assistant General Manager –

Central Operations & Change Management, Bank Muscat, said: "We are delighted to win this award once again and thank JP Morgan for recognising Bank Muscat's ongoing and continuous commitment to the highest

standards in Straight-through Processing. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the operational teams at the bank for this achievement by consistently maintaining exceptional quality in both commercial payments and transfers, thereby ensuring the highest standards for processing throughout the payment chain."

The awards are a recognition of the bank's high standards in Straight-through Processing, which is backed by a state-of-the-art inhouse payment structure and investments in cutting-edge technology.

During the awards handover, JP Morgan representatives commended the operational teams involved in processing dollar payments at Bank Muscat for maintaining error-free transactions consistently.

It should be noted that JP

Morgan is one of the leading corresponding banks which Bank Muscat partners with to process US Dollar-based fund transfers using the SWIFT global financial system. Bank Muscat is focused on maintaining its leadership in offering cutting-edge products and services, including electronic payment and online services, through multiple channels and new products and services which cater to its different customer segments.

The Bank's performance, which is driven by its customer-centric vision and the adoption of global best practices, has been consistently lauded by the international financial and banking community for decades, with the bank winning similar awards from Wells Fargo, Standard Chartered and Citibank in the past.

Oman's oil activities increase 73.6 per cent to reach RO 12.5 billion

FROM PAGE 13

The value of merchandise imports reached RO 11.3 billion, an increase of 26.6 per cent, compared to RO 8.9 billion in the same period in 2021. However, value of re-exports decreased by 4.5 per cent by the end of Q3 2022, to reach RO 972.6 million.

The NCSI report showed growth in commodity exports, led by the surge in value of oil exports by 76.1 per cent. The value of non-oil exports also increased by 50.1 per cent compared to the same period in 2021.

Meanwhile, Oman's total domestic liquidity (M2) at the end of Q3 2022 reached RO 20.7 billion, an increase of 3.8 per cent compared to the end of Q3 2021. The money supply (M1) reached RO 5.8 billion, an increase of 1.8 per cent at the end of Q3 2022 compared to the same period in 2021.

The total value of private sector deposits reached RO 17.3 billion, an increase of 0.3 per cent at the end of Q3 2022, compared to RO 17.2 billion at the end of Q3 2021. The purchasing power of the Omani riyal increased by 12.6 per cent at the end of Q3 2022, as the real exchange rate index scored about 118.2 points, compared to 105.0 points at the end of the same quarter of 2021.

The total value of loans and financing granted through commercial banks and Islamic windows increased by 3.9 per cent at the end of Q3 2022, to reach RO 28.8 billion, compared to RO 27.7 billion at the end of Q3 2021. The total value of personal loans reach RO 8.9 billion, an increase of 2.4 per cent, while the average interest rate on total loans reached 5.4 per cent at the end of Q3 2022, down by 1.4 per cent from the same period in 2021.

Sohar International continues to support Injaz Oman

MUSCAT: As an organisation that is invested in the youth of the country, Sohar International has consistently been a keen supporter of education and development programmes that aid in creating a knowledge-based economy.

The bank's most recent endeavour was signing an agreement with Injaz Oman to work together on two student programmes. Sohar International has provided assistance to the "Company Programme" and the "Personal Finance Programme" in accordance with the terms of the agreement, which was signed in the bank's main office on the Waterfront by Mazin bin Mahmood al Raisi, the Chief Marketing Officer of Sohar International, and Khaula al Harthy, the Executive Director of Injaz Oman.

Mohammed bin Mahfoodh al Ardhi, Chairman of Sohar International, commented, "With Oman Vision 2040 underscoring the value of education and identifying it as one of the key pillars to attaining sustainable human development, it becomes increasingly important to broaden



the horizon and go beyond academic syllabuses – it becomes essential to provide students with targeted programmes that focus on sharpening skills in their specific areas of interest. Through efforts to promote such programmes and platforms, Sohar International will remain committed to contributing towards fostering a self-motivated, capable, and socially-conscious generation that will uphold its roles and duties to the nation and drive sustained socio-economic progress." The latest edition of the Company Programme, which was launched earlier in October 2022 and will continue until September 2023, focuses on guiding students from diverse academic

backgrounds on how to start, build, and sustain a business, including the fundamentals of carrying out various operational procedures in line with international standards and government regulations, and tackling various challenges in running a business. Going beyond imparting theoretical knowledge, the programme provides students with an opportunity to launch their own companies. Meanwhile, the Personal Finance Programme is geared at acquainting students with real-world money management skills and the tactics of effective budgeting while instilling in them a savings mind-set and encouraging them to start taking concerted efforts to invest

in their future. Highly interactive, engaging, and stimulating, both programmes focus on promoting team spirit, collaboration, and healthy competition – essential elements that are vital to surviving and thriving in the modern world.

Al Ardhi added saying, "At Sohar International, we constantly align with the national efforts to enhance the educational opportunities available to the youth. Nurturing an ecosystem of inclusive and accessible programmes that focus on providing students with practical entrepreneurial skills while broadening their financial literacy contributes to creating a youth workforce that is empowered, inspired, and skilled to lead transformational change."

Khaula al Harthy, Executive Director of Injaz Oman, commented, "At Injaz Oman, we play a pivotal role in furthering the educational, learning, and development goals of the Sultanate of Oman. We always strive to stay ahead of the curve by introducing and conducting programmes that have a tangible impact on our beneficiaries."

ODBW to contribute to growth in infrastructure and residential projects

MUSCAT: One of the most anticipated events in the building, construction, design and real estate industry, the 18th edition of the Oman Design and Build Week (ODBW) incorporating Oman Real Estate Expo (OREX) is slated to commence on March 13, 2023 at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Muscat (OCEC).

Organised under the patronage of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning and supported by the Oman Real Estate Association, the 3-day event will run until March 15, 2023.

Recognised as the Sultanate of Oman's largest trade exhibition and conference in the sector, ODBW will bring together the



latest products, advanced services, and emerging solutions in the industry, providing definitive networking and information

exchange opportunities to both exhibitors and visitors.

Meanwhile, OREX is uniquely positioned to connect local and

international property developers and brokers with potential buyers and investors from Oman's market.

An event that seamlessly unites different facets of the industry, ODBW is expected to register around 250 exhibiting companies and witness more than 12,000 attendees. In addition, the exhibition will also feature more than 5 dedicated country pavilions. It is set to welcome individuals from different business domains that include architects, engineers, consultants, contractors, surveyors, trade associations, government representatives and real estate developers as well as private homeowners.

Atelier Rebul opens first boutique store in Oman

MUSCAT: Award-winning brand from Istanbul, Atelier Rebul has opened its maiden store at the Mall of Oman in Bausher, marking the brand's debut into the luxurious scent expertise in the Sultanate of Oman.



Inaugurated in the presence of HH Sayyidah Hujaija bint Jaifar al Said, who graced the opening as the esteemed Guest of Honour, Atelier Rebul boutique will house over 220 products in their unique range of authentic collections. The store is located at the L2 floor in the Mall of Oman.

Atelier Rebul Co-CEO Nuket Filiba said: "Atelier Rebul is a fragrance expertise brand representing more than 125-year-old-pharmaceutical heritage. Our essence is based on our founder Jean Cesar Reboul's slogan "Quality and Trust Are the Most Significant Legacy of Rebul Family". Therefore, we carry this deep-rooted brand tradition of selecting the finest quality ingredients in most sophisticated scientific formulas from Istanbul to the world."

CEO: MSX aims to be a world-class Omani bourse with global presence

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 30

A five-year strategy first unveiled by Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) last year seeks to position Oman's only bourse as a "world-class exchange with a global presence", according to Haitham bin Salem al Salmi, CEO.

The official said in an interview published by The Business Year, a leading news portal, that the strategy envisions a portfolio of initiatives designed to boost liquidity, strengthen connectivity with regional markets, and enable the rollout of market enhancing measures.

"Through its five-year strategy, MSX is striving to improve the liquidity status in the market by focusing on the main priority of upgrading the market to the emerging markets list by satisfying the international indices (MSCI and FTSE) requirements which would facilitate capital inflows, widen investors' base and hence increase market depth," Al Salmi stated.



Through its five-year strategy, MSX is striving to improve the liquidity status in the market by focusing on the main priority of upgrading the market to the emerging markets list.

HAITHAM BIN SALEM AL SALMI
CEO, MSX

In support of this broader objective, the MSX has already eased

all restrictions on foreign ownership limits for all listed securities, he said. It is currently working on the introduction of market making and liquidity providing services, among other measures to help stimulate market activities.

They include initiatives to authorise, for the first time in the Sultanate of Oman, short selling, margin financing, and securities lending and borrowing, he said. Further, with the goal of supporting dual and cross listings across bourses within the Gulf and wider Middle East, MSX has begun establishing connections and partnerships with its peers.

To this end, agreements have been signed with Saudi Tadawul, Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange, Bahrain Bourse, and Iraq Stock Exchange. These linkages, Al Salmi noted, will help publicly traded companies in the Sultanate of Oman gain visibility in the wider region, as well as benefit from higher trading activity and market coverage.

Also notable is the recent

agreement signed by MSX with Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange and Bahrain Bourse, which enables access to the Tabadul Hub, an integrated platform that allows GCC investors to trade in different regional markets.

"These are all the steps taken towards promoting the local capital markets and making the market more liquid more attractive to the institutional investors from around the globe, while strengthening our retail investors' confidence and maintaining the market integrity by creating a sustainable ecosystem for market forces to take their course and provide a conducive investment environment," Al Salmi stated.

In addition to boosting investor confidence and enabling the rollout of new investment products, the 5-year strategic plan also aims to introduce new trading technologies, help improve the financial performance of listed companies and enhance the capabilities of the capital market's human capital, he added.

Oil ready to pop as coffee perks up and gold takes a breather



OLE S HANSEN

The author is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank

The Bloomberg Commodity Index (BCOM) traded higher for a third week as it continued to recover from an early January sell-off that was driven by the IMF's global recession warning.

Gains were broad, although the energy sector was being weighed down by continued weakness in natural gas as prices slumped to their lowest since June 2021.

The themes underpinning prices remain the same, with financial markets seeing a softer dollar and lower yields in anticipation of the US Federal Reserve moving closer to pausing an aggressive rate hike cycle.

Since starting last March, this has driven the US Fed Funds rate up to 4.5 per cent with the market now pricing in less than two 25 basis point rate hikes before the pause. The demand side, apart from the risk of a slowing global economy, is being supported by the prospect of China's reopening – driving expectations for a pick-up in demand for commodities from the world's biggest consumer of raw materials.

However, with the prolonged shutdown of markets in China during the Lunar New Year holiday, some recent strong gainers, such as copper, iron ore and crude oil paused, thereby allowing other commodities to appear at the top of this week's leaderboard.

In the coming weeks, the risk to supplies of Russian fuel products may add an extra layer of support for gasoline and not least diesel,

thereby providing enough support to keep crude oil shielded from recession-related demand fears.

The BCOM agriculture sector index was heading for its highest weekly close in nearly three months and, following a troubled start to the year, both the grains and soft sectors showed signs of bottoming out, as improved fundamentals helped reign in some elevated short positions held by hedge funds – especially in wheat and coffee.

Crude oil trades near unchanged on the month and while recession risks remain and, in some places, have strengthened, the market has managed to find support from an expected increase in Chinese demand and supply concerns related to the February 5 introduction of an EU embargo on Russian seaborne sales of fuel products.

Once the EU embargo on Russian seaborne fuel exports kicks in, we are likely to see prices for gasoline and especially diesel remain supported by tightening supply – not least if the embargo is being followed up by a \$100 per barrel price cap on diesel, a level that is some \$30 below current market price.

Russia may, however, struggle to offload its diesel to other buyers, with key customers in Asia being more interested in feeding their refineries with heavily discounted Russian crude, which can then be turned into fuel products selling at the prevailing global market price.

Supply of diesel to Europe from the US and the emerging refinery hub in the Middle East may make up some of the missing barrels from Russia, but a shortfall seems likely, not least considering the prospect for a strong recovery in China leading to lower export quotas.

In addition, the recovery in jet fuel demand will pressure diesel yields, thereby creating another layer of support for distillate cracks on either side of the Atlantic.

Oman posts increase in water, electricity production

FROM PAGE 13

The net electricity production of the Sultanate of Oman until the end of November 2022, which includes purchases by the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company and purchases by the Rural Areas Electricity Company, by region, amounted to 37,833 GWh, an increase of 2.0 per cent compared to the same period in 2021.

The largest amount of net electricity production came in the Governorate of Dhofar, amounting to 3,753 gigawatts per hour, with an increase of 9.5 per cent. The governorates of North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah and Al Dhahirah recorded an increase in net electricity production by 5.9 per cent, to reach 24,602 gigawatts per hour.

The statistics issued by NCSI indicated that the amount of water produced in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 5.1 per cent to reach 469.65 million cubic metres until the end of November AD compared to the same period in 2021, during which the amount of water produced amounted to 446.89 million cubic metres.

The governorates of Dhofar and Muscat recorded an increase in water production by 9.2 per cent and 7.1 per cent, respectively, compared to the same period in 2021.

—ONA

Agreement signed to support SMEs in e-commerce in Oman



MUSCAT: The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) has signed a cooperation agreement with DHL Express to empower small and medium enterprises and craftsmen and enhance the growth of their business through a package of initiatives.

The agreement was signed by Abdulaziz bin Saeed al Raisi, Vice-President of SMEDA and Mustafa Othman, General Manager of DHL Express in Oman.

The agreement includes enhancing the support between the two sides to provide services, training programmes and business opportunities for SMEs, including cooperation in business opportunities such as procurement, contracts and tenders for SMEs registered with SMEDA and providing preferential prices for shipping and storage services outside and inside the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to allocating spaces for storing products of SMEs and

craftsmen in the storage sites of DHL Express in the Oman.

DHL Express will also provide training programmes and technical consultations in the field of logistics and e-commerce programmes for SMEs and craftsmen, including knowledge of types of packaging, weight and quantity of products and the instructions used according to the type of materials from which the products were manufactured to be shipped to global markets.

— ONA

Maha Energy signs joint operating pact for Block 70

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 30

Maha Energy AB, through its wholly-owned subsidiary Maha Energy (Oman) Ltd and Mafraq Energy LLC, has entered into a Joint Operating Agreement (JOA) for Block 70 in Oman.

The signature of the JOA, alongside the Governmental approval ratified by Royal Decree 74/2022 and other relevant procedures, marks the satisfaction of all conditions precedent required for the

conclusion of the assignment of Maha's 35 per cent work interest to Mafraq Energy, as provided in the relevant Farmout Agreement signed by the Parties in August 2022 (FOA).

Maha and Mafraq Energy will address the post-transfer obligations moving forward, it was announced on Monday. Maha is the Operator of Block 70, with 65 per cent shareholding interest.

The agreements require Mafraq Energy to reimburse Maha for their prorated share



of all past costs, including the signature bonus required under the relevant agreement with the Government. Mafraq Energy

will also be required to pay its share of all future expenditures on Block 70. Paulo Mendonça, Maha's CEO said: "We are proud to have finalised yet another major milestone in what is to be a great partnership. Maha is moving forward to commence the testing aiming for fast production of Block 70 and having Mafraq Energy as its local partner with competent and experienced Omani team, bringing knowledge of the local market to the operations."

Talal al Subhi, Director of

Mafraq Energy LLC, said: "It is exciting times. Mafraq Energy LLC is honoured to play its part in achieving Oman Vision 2040 as set by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. This partnership is a true embodiment of enhancing the ICV content of Block 70.

The focus now is to collaborate to kick off the production testing stage. Proving the productivity of the field is a key aspect to declare commerciality. We look forward to bring that value to the Sultanate of Oman."

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Muscat Night's "Bride Show" helps ease burden of wedding preparations

A plethora of multinational companies specialising in weddings is all set to meet couples with wedding needs as the Bride Show takes centrestage at Muscat Nights... **P20**

'Avatar' sequel now ranks fourth all-time in global sales

"AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER" continued to dominate the box-office charts, taking in an estimated \$15.7 million this weekend in North American theaters to make it the fourth-leading global grosser of all time.

The Disney/20thCentury sci-fi film, directed by James Cameron, "has been #1 for 7 straight weeks... a feat that hasn't

been accomplished" since Cameron issued the original "Avatar" in 2009, industry watcher Exhibitor Relations said on Twitter.

Hefty results from theaters around the world — including \$237 million in ticket sales in China — helped boost "The Way of Water" to fourth place globally all-time at \$2.117 billion, unadjusted for



inflation.

That means Cameron now has his name on three of the four top grossers ever: the original "Avatar," "Titanic" and

"The Way of Water" ("Avengers: Endgame" from Disney and Marvel sneaks in at second).

In second place for the North

American weekend was Universal's family-friendly "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish," at \$10.6 million for the Friday-through-Sunday period.

In third, up two spots from last weekend, was Sony's feel-good "A Man Called Otto," at \$6.8 million. Tom Hanks plays the title curmudgeon in the adaptation of Swedish novel "A Man Called Ove."

Scary-doll thriller "M3GAN" from Universal and Blumhouse Productions took in \$6.4 million to place fourth. It has an android doll, created as a companion to a young orphan, turning steadily creepier. And Yash Raj Films' new action thriller "Pathaan" placed fifth at \$5.9 million, an impressive North American total for a Hindi-language film. It stars Shah Rukh Khan, known as the "King of Bollywood," in a story about spies, rogue agents and a deadly lab-generated virus.

Rounding out the top 10 were:

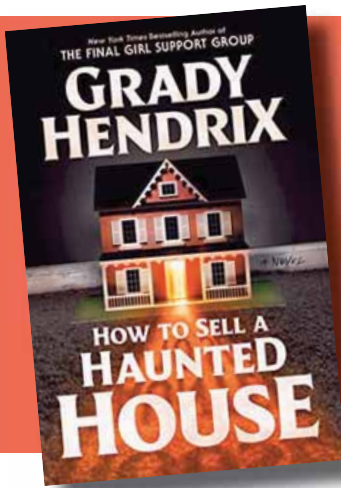
"Missing" (\$5.7 million)
"Plane" (\$3.9 million)
"Infinity Pool" (\$2.7 million)
"Left Behind: Rise of the Antichrist" (\$2.3 million)
"The Wandering Earth 2" (\$1.4 million) — **AFP**

READ

HOW TO SELL A HAUNTED HOUSE

BY GRADY HENDRIX

After her parents die, Louise encounters more than she expected in dealing with the family home.



ART

A visitor looks at the painting "The Boating Party" (1877) by French artist Gustave Caillebotte (1848-1894), presented during the exhibition "Impressionism along the Seine" in Giver as part of the Normandie Impressionist festival retracing the history of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism.



CULTURE

A Rajasthani dancer performs at a desert camp near Jaisalmer in India's desert state of Rajasthan. — **AFP**





Joseph the Blind's healing balms for Turkey's troubled city

THE KURDISH HERBALIST reaches for a sachet as fragrant as a wild meadow, garnished with linden, rosehip, slivers of dried ginger, cinnamon stick and a touch of mystery.

It is the tea his mother, Hacı Nahide, makes to fight flu and colds.

"It's the mixture she made for me when I was a kid. Winters were harsh," Suleyman Onur recalled with a smile, surrounded by hundreds of herbal teas, spices and aromatic herbs.

Each is bagged or tied in bouquets piled high on the shelves of the oldest herbal shop in Diyarbakir, a restless predominantly Kurdish city in Turkey's southeast, not far from Syria, Iraq and Iran.

The shop "Joseph the Blind" established in 1891 has kept the nickname of its founder, a Chaldean Catholic of the Syriac rite whose descendants moved to Istanbul in the 1950s, ceding the shop to Onur's parents.

Its black lacquered cabinet drawers are from that period but its walls are relatively new.

"The first store was destroyed in 1977," said Onur. The Turkish government of the time decided to open up the streets of the historic quarter to traffic, which once had to wind through a mesh of alleys hugging the ancient black basalt wall running along Diyarbakir's central Sur district.

The city centre had to be rebuilt yet again in the wake of violent clashes between Kurdish militants and government forces in 2015-16.

- HERBAL TREASURES -

Now 57 years old, Onur no longer remembers the original shop.

When he took over with his brother Seyyaf after their father's death, the shop was already here, reinstalled in a new alley, far too cramped for its wealth of herbal treasures.

A window counter serves customers directly on the street, saving space for Onur -- belly tucked and shoulders hunched



-- to scoot around piles of thyme and jars of chilli paste.

But the shopkeeper is expansive about the virtues of the potions made from the herbs collected around Diyarbakir.

The region, framed by mountains and bathed by two rivers that defined ancient Mesopotamia -- the Tigris and the Euphrates -- was attached to the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century.

Its granaries, along with those of Egypt, fed Ottoman armies in wars fought over the centuries against the Persian shahs and Russian tsars.

"Diyarbakir has rich flora thanks to its geographical location, geomorphologic structure and influence of various climate types," according to Alevcan Kaplan, a pharmacological botanist at Turkey's southeastern Batman University.

A study by his university of the region's medicinal plants discovered 406 species and 226 genera, 56 of which are endemic to the lands around Diyarbakir.

Many of them offer relief for respiratory, dental and urinary infections, as well as high blood pressure and stomach problems.

- 'Tested and proven' -

"We have our own pickers," Onur proudly explained, adding that he sells "nothing that has not been tested and proven" to work.

From morning to night the shop is bustling with activity.

Among the first customers, an elegant sexagenarian, sent by his wife, unfolded an impressive shopping list.

A young man walked in to ask about the price of saffron (\$1,350 per kilo) and left shocked. Then an elderly woman waddled in to ask about a kidney problem.

The neighbourhood's young and impeccably dressed butcher, Hurrem Yalcin, came in to pick up spices for her sucuk -- a dry Turkish sausage.

"We come here because we trust them. They are the only ones who know our recipe," she laughed. — AFP

A LOOK AT THE ACADEME



By Dr Zainab al Ajmi
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Developing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

"INTERNATIONAL EVIDENCE suggests that educational reform's progress depends on teachers' individual and collective capacity and its link with school-wide capacity for promoting pupils' learning. Building capacity is therefore critical. Capacity is a complex blend of motivation, skill, positive education, organisational conditions and culture, and support infrastructure.

Put together, it gives individuals, groups, wholeschool communities, and schoolsystems the power to get involved in and sustain learning over time. Developing professional learning communities (PLCs) appears to hold considerable promise for capacity building for sustainable improvement. As such, it has become a 'hot topic' in many countries" (Stoll, L. et al., 2006).

Considering the importance of professional learning communities (PLCs), many educational researchers have proven that continuous professional development cannot be underestimated, particularly for the coming stage of the educational evolution which is a burden on teachers and the demands required of them increase. Moreover, the professional development of teachers contributes to improving education for students which, in turn, improves lifelong learning.

In addition, professional learning communities have characteristics, including Focusing on teamwork that improves teachers' performance, sharing vision, values, and goals, improving student teaching, and learning processes, taking responsibility for providing better education to students and increasing their academic achievement, and teachers' sense of self-accountability and professional confidence.

According to (Tuli& Bekele, 2021) "Research has found that supportive conditions need to be in place so that professional learning communities can flourish and be sustained. Hord (2004) described the supportive conditions of professional learning communities (PLCs) as the physical conditions and human capacities that encourage and sustain a collegial atmosphere and collective learning. On the other hand, others categorise supportive conditions as structural conditions and social/human resources.

"Structural conditions included: time to meet and talk, Physical proximity, Interdependent teaching roles, Communication structures, Teacher empowerment, and Autonomy. Social and human resources include openness to improvement, Trust and Respect, Access to expertise, Supportive leadership, and Socialisation. Collegiality and collaboration require time which must be frequent and long enough to discuss ways to collaborate to improve student learning".

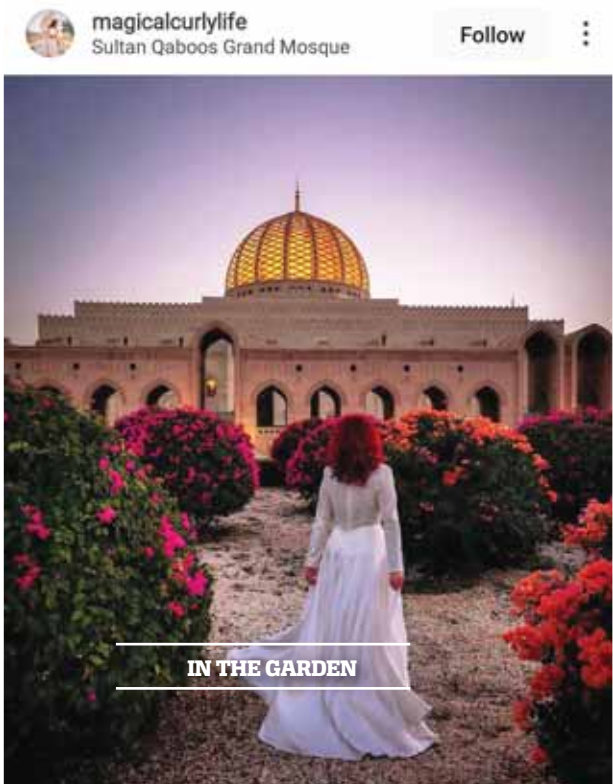
Lave and Wenger (1991) posited that learning is a social process in which individuals co-construct knowledge rather than transmit knowledge from one individual to the next. In the case of Lesson Study, the learning occurs as teachers exchange ideas and collaborate on lessons for their actual classrooms. As teachers engage in the process of Lesson Study, they are collectively examining practice. The Lesson Study approach helps teachers to form communities of practice around planning and teaching. In these communities, teachers construct, organise, share, and refine their knowledge of the lesson".

In conclusion, recognising the importance of professional learning communities, it is of great interest to stakeholders, scholars, and practitioners to support teachers implement PLCs effectively inside their schools. Where professional learning communities encourage cultural change within the educational institution and provide opportunities for the exchange and support of ideas between teachers, whether they are from one school or from another schools. This, in turn, applies innovative approaches to teaching and learning and provides an opportunity for educational reform of the learning process at all levels individual, group, and organisational.



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AROUND THE WORLD

CINEMA

Shah Rukh Khan's 'Pathaan' smashes Indian box office records



SUPERSTAR SHAH RUKH Khan's new film "Pathaan" has smashed Indian box office records following its release last week, bringing hope to Bollywood after a spate of weak showings.

"Pathaan" recorded the highest-ever box office collections for a Hindi film for its opening and second day in India, and raked in 2.5 billion rupees (\$30 million) in its first five days, trade analyst Taran Adarsh tweeted on Sunday.

Its international ticket sales soared past one billion rupees (\$13.7 million) in just three days, according to Yash Raj Films, which produced the movie.

It comes after glitzy Hindi-language Bollywood films struggled at the box office following the reopening of Indian cinemas about a year ago after a pandemic hiatus.

"The unprecedented celebratory success of 'Pathaan' I think speaks volumes about where we are headed as the Hindi movie industry," movie theatre chain owner Akshaye Rathi told AFP on Monday.

"Here we are back to the old school way of celebrating cinema in theatres as a community viewing experience."

The release of "Pathaan", 57-year-old Khan's first movie in four years, had been highly anticipated.

Khan, popularly known as "King Khan", has a huge



fan following around the world. The film also features Bollywood heart-throb Deepika Padukone and action hero John Abraham.

Videos shared on social media showed fans in Indian cinemas dancing and cheering during the film.

In recent months, "Pathaan" and other Bollywood films -- particularly those starring actors from India's Muslim minority such as Khan -- have been criticised by Hindu right-wingers on social media, with activists calling for boycotts.

Hardline Hindu groups had called for "Pathaan" to be banned because Padukone wore a saffron-coloured bikini -- a colour associated with their religion -- in one of the film's songs.

Last year, films from southern India, such as Telugu-language "RRR", dominated box office takings.

"RRR" has also been feted internationally, winning a Golden Globe for best song and scoring an Oscar nomination in the same category. — **AFP**

LIFESTYLE

Nigerian artist uses AI to re-imagine life for the elderly



A NIGERIAN ARTIST is using artificial intelligence to re-imagine life for African elderly people by showcasing near real-life pictures and videos of them walking down the fashion ramp and on the beach.

Malik Afegbua, who is also a film-maker, said because many elderly people were marginalised in society, especially in the fashion world, he began to imagine how they would look if they were models.

Afegbua started posting some of his work on social media and it went viral.

He came up with "Elders Series", a catalogue of pictures and videos showing white-haired women and bearded men strutting the runway for a virtual fashion show in Afrocentric attire, including ornamental neck and arm bands.

"So I wanted to... imagine the elderly people in a place that is not either in a sad space or in a suppressed state," Afegbua told Reuters.

"However, when I was making it, I kind of knew there was something there. I was like this is dope. I'm loving what I'm seeing."

Afegbua was not always an artist. He studied business in university but stepped into the world of filming after a friend bought him a camera in 2011.

He said the idea to explore a different world for old people came when his elderly mother fell ill. Using an artificial intelligence app, he started creating content showing a brighter side of old age. — **Reuters**



CULTURE

Funny old world: The week's offbeat news



FROM THE PERFECT semi-automatic rifle for a five-year-old to what film stars really think... Your weekly roundup of offbeat stories from around the world.

- NO PEASANTS PLEASE -

Shame on the film producers who have been trying to portray Hollywood actress Eva Green as a "diva" as they try to wriggle out of paying her \$1 million for a sci-fi movie that was never made.

A London court heard that "The Dreamers" and "Casino Royale" star described one of the producers as "pure vomit" and the other as a "devious psychopath" in texts.

Her lawyers did concede, however, that French-born Green's language may have been a tad "unguarded" as she complained that she would be "obliged to take shitty peasant crew members from Hampshire."

- TALKING CREPE -

A crepe restaurant in Brittany, the home of the delicious French pancakes, is being taken to court by a neighbour because it "smells of crepes".

The case has prompted comparisons with the notorious case of Maurice the French cockerel, whose owners were sued by their new townie neighbours because it crowded in the mornings.

Some 35,000 locals have signed a petition in support of the creperie in the seaside village of Erquy, but their neighbour still insists they close at seven at night.

- LET THERE BE LIGHT -

A US high school has not been able to turn off its lights for a year and a half because of a computer glitch.

The 7,000 lights at the Minnechaug Regional High School in Massachusetts have been blazing day and night with teachers forced to remove bulbs to try to reduce the mounting electricity bill.

The first-world nightmare caught the attention of the satirical "Saturday Night Live" television show, which joked, "The students are doing fine but the classroom hamster has gone insane."

- PUT YOUR BIKE IN THE CANAL -

Amsterdam believes it may be about to crack its chronic bicycle parking problem by putting bikes in the canals.

It has just opened the first of two giant underwater bike parks that can accommodate 7,000 cycles.

Conveyor belts take cyclists nine metres (30 feet) down into what space architects compared to an "imaginary oyster". Thankfully cyclists don't have to swim back up.

- GUNS FOR KIDS -

But our bright idea of the week award goes to the American gun maker Weel Tactical which has come up with a semi-automatic rifle for children.

The military-style JR-15 can fire off 10 rounds as quickly as you can say "Die teacher" and comes after another week of mass shootings and with a Virginia teacher in hospital after being shot by a six-year-old.

"What are we coming to?" asked Democrat Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, who called for the "despicable" campaign to be banned.

"The law says you shouldn't be marketing guns to kids," he said. "With the epidemic of youth gun violence and mass shootings, an idea like this... should just not see the light of day." — **AFP**



art & life

Local Scene

TUESDAY | JANUARY 31 | 2023



Muscat Night's “Bride Show” helps ease burden of wedding preparations

By Kabeer Yousuf
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The countless needs of a wedding, a gamut of do's and don'ts, and the multitude of things to do once the date is fixed for that 'big day' seem to be strenuous. However, come the 'Bride Show', the three-day 'all about brides' beginning on February 1 as part of the Muscat Nights which comes to an end on February 4, one would be better informed about the day one says 'I do'.

A plethora of multinational companies specialising in weddings is all set to be here to talk to those who need to clarify how to tie a knot and how to walk the carpet when you are the cynosure of the eyes seeking 'the best of you'.

"We are conducting the Bride Show to advance diversity and compete with international companies specialised in the wedding event management industry and making the fashion sector anew," a spokesperson from the Muscat Municipality, the key organisers of the Muscat Nights told the Observer.

"We consider this exhibition as one of the comprehensive and major exhibitions that are held annually," he added.

The event, to be held under the auspices of Her Highness Basma bint Fakhri al Said at 5.30 pm on February 1 will see numerous brands and individuals specialised in making the special day even more special.

The three days will be a platform for those specialists in weddings to show their potential takers the most exclusive wears and accessories available in the Sultanate of Oman. It will be a confluence of suppliers who offer great value for money to those who visit where they will be spoilt for choice as local as well as international brands in fashion apparel, wedding wear, casual wear and grooming options, the latest international wedding and fashion trends are meeting in a dedicated hall.

The show will also offer a kaleidoscopic view of the trends in designs, fashion, care and beauty products related to the wedding sector events, and it is considered one of the most important specialised exhibitions in this field besides designers and models walking the ramp flaunting their creative styles.

It will also be a show of hotels and restaurants, tourism companies, beauty salons, hairdressers, spas, incense and perfume centres,

the flowers sector, photography, video, wedding and fashion accessories, wedding gifts and services, lighting, audio, promotion, production, home furnishing, and other sectors of interest suitable for family, weddings and parties in general.

SUPPORT TO LOCAL SMES

As many as 100 local and international companies have consented to be part of the major show of chic and several female entrepreneurs representing SMEs small and medium enterprises in the Sultanate of Oman will also be a part of the event.

"The participation of more companies helps increase diversity and competing with the most prominent companies not just regionally but internationally," he adds.

Daily tickets to watch fashion shows are available at the OCEC as well as via the ticket-booking link for the Muscat Nights activities between 11 am to 10 pm.

It is the show of style and fashion at weddings as it brings together the spirit of creativity, innovation and design in the sector. The exhibition will also present prizes and gifts to the visitors daily, especially those who are about to get married, according to the organisers.

