

SQU invites applications for PG studies

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), represented by the Deanship of Postgraduate Studies, has invited applications for the postgraduate programmes (higher diploma, masters' and doctoral programmes) for Omani and non-Omani students for the academic year 2022-2023, starting from Sunday until February 28. **SEE P5**



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SEEB THRASH
SIDAB,
DHOFAH EDGE
AL ORUBA



P15

VODAFONE OMAN
LAUNCHES
NEXT-GENERATION
DIGITAL SERVICES



P20

EMPHASISING
THE STATUS OF
WOMEN THROUGH
CALLIGRAPHY



MUSCAT

HM SENDS GREETINGS
TO SWITZERLAND

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent greetings to President Ignazio Cassis of the Swiss Confederation on his election as new president. His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of success to the president and the friendly Swiss people more progress and prosperity, hoping for more development of the friendship relations between the two countries.

■ CAPE TOWN

SOUTH AFRICA BIDS FAREWELL TO TUTU

President Cyril Ramaphosa lauded the late Archbishop Desmond Tutu as “our moral compass and national conscience” as South Africa bade farewell at a state funeral on Saturday to a hero of the struggle against apartheid.

“Our departed father was a crusader in the struggle for freedom, for justice, for equality and for peace, not just in South Africa, the country of his birth, but around the world,” Ramaphosa said, delivering the main eulogy at the service in St George’s Cathedral, Cape Town, where for years Tutu preached against racial injustice. **SEE P7**

Royal Decree
ratifies State’s
General Budget

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has issued a Royal Decree No 1/2022 on the ratification of the State’s General Budget for Fiscal Year 2022, after presenting the same before the Council of Oman.

Article (1) ratifies the State’s General Budget for Fiscal Year 2022 according to the tables/schedules attached to this decree.

Article (2) instructs all units of the State’s Administrative Apparatus and other public legal entities to implement the provisions of this decree, each within the scope of its prerogatives.

Article (3) says that this decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the first day of January 2022. — ONA



RO 12 billion budget unveiled; deficit record low

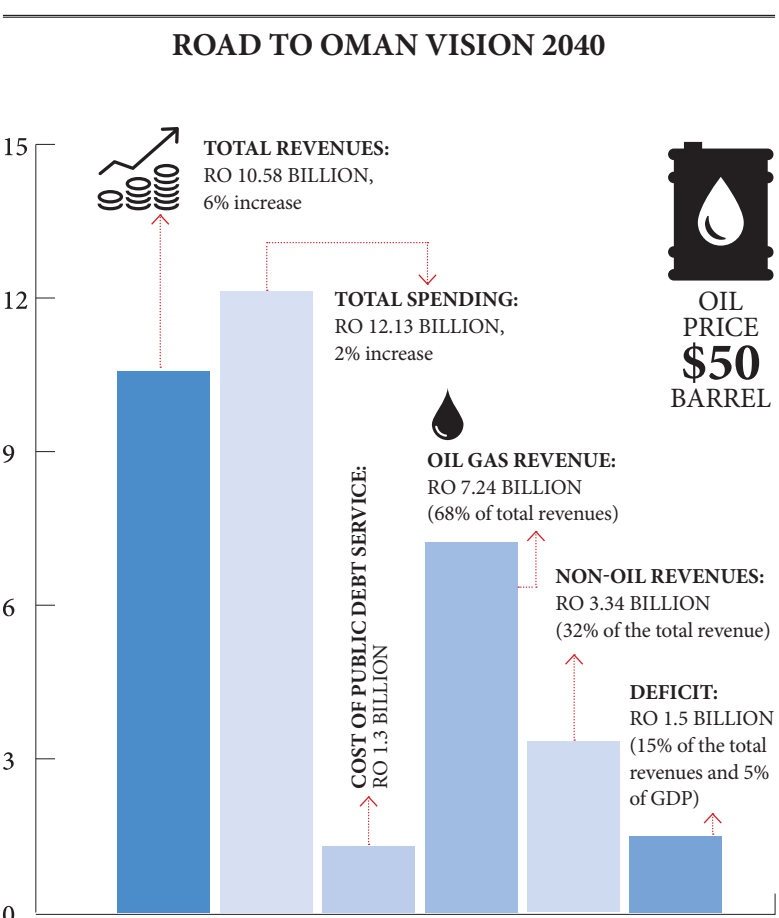
MUSCAT: Estimated total revenues for the State’s General Budget 2022 stood at RO 10.58 billion, based on the price of oil as \$50 a barrel, which is 6 per cent higher than estimated revenues for 2021.

Oil and gas revenues in Budget 2022 have been estimated at RO 7.24 billion, constituting 68 per cent of total revenues. Non-oil revenues have been estimated at RO 3.34 billion, comprising 32 per cent of the total revenue.

Total Public spending is set at RO 12.13 billion, 2 per cent higher than public spending estimated for 2021, and this includes the cost of public debt service, which stands at RO 1.3 billion.

Deficit for the 2022 Budget is estimated to be RO 1.5 billion, constituting 15 per cent of the total revenues and 5 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which falls within the range of deficit estimated in the Medium Term Fiscal Plan (MTFP).

Part of the deficit will be financed from external and internal borrowing, while the rest of the deficit, estimated to be RO 400 million, will be funded through withdrawal from the



State’s reserves.

Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, said that preliminary data point to the fact that the State’s Budget 2022 tends to register the lowest deficit since 2014, despite the fluctuation in oil prices over the past period.

The accomplishment, the minister explained, is attributed to the government’s resolve to stick to the MTFP, both at the level of

revenues and spending, with the overall aim of meeting the main objectives and increasing the confidence of lenders and credit rating agencies.

Al Habsi added that Budget 2022 was drafted in a manner that conforms with the targets and pillars of the 10th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025), the first leg in Oman Vision 2040, the country’s long-term strategy to achieve fiscal sustainability and motivate economic diversification sectors.

The minister affirmed that the most significant objective in drafting public spending estimates was to maintain spending on basic services like education, health, housing and social welfare. This is in addition to maintaining procedures and instruments aimed at improving the business climate and expanding partnership projects undertaken with the private sector, he added.

Al Habsi pointed out that, in case oil prices go up beyond the price endorsed in the budget, priority will be given to using the surplus to cut down the deficit and repay the instalments of loans.

— ONA

FULL COVERAGE ON P2-P4

Healthcare – 11%

Social welfare – 7%

Housing – 5%

Education – 17%

40% OF TOTAL EXPENDITURE FOR BASIC SERVICES

THIS YEAR’S BUDGET DEFICIT OF RO 1.5 BILLION LOWEST DEFICIT SINCE 2014

LOWER DEFICIT DUE TO THE GOVERNMENT’S RESOLVE TO MTFP

PUBLIC DEBT TO REACH 75% OF GDP NEXT YEAR



INSIDE



OMICRON DAMPENS
NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

P7



SUHAIR INDUSTRIAL CITY SIGNS
RO 157M WORTH PROJECTS

P13

6 people die as heavy rains lash Oman

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

Six people died as some governorates of the Sultanate of Oman were affected by a trough of low pressure, according to Royal Oman Police.

Following a report of a vehicle

drifting in the Wadi Surur stream in the Wilayat of Samayil, where one person was found earlier, Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority has been continuously working on cases of missing and vehicles drifting away in wadi water.

Five from one family in Al Buraimi and one individual in

Samayil died after their vehicles drifted away.

SEARCH FOR VICTIM

Search and rescue teams at the Department of Civil Defence and Ambulance are at the site to search for the second missing person.





DIVERSIFICATION TOP PRIORITY

Over the past few years, the national economy experienced frequent fiscal challenges posed by a sharp drop in oil prices, lower oil demand, high public debt, and the implications caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. These challenges have adversely affected the Sultanate of Oman's creditworthiness and borrowing cost.

Moreover, the Sultanate of Oman was recently hit by the tropical cyclone "Shaheen", which took a toll on the community and infrastructure of some wilayats (cities). However, with the efforts put by the government entities and members of society, life has returned to normal.

Therefore, the 2022 Budget draft was prepared, while taking into consideration the existing challenges, in line with the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025) which reflects the first plan of Oman Vision 2040. The fiscal sustainability and stimulus of economic diversification sectors are among the top priorities.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES OF 2022 BUDGET

The State's General Budget for FY 2022 is consistent with the objectives of the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan. The 2022 Budget aims to achieve a set of economic and social development objectives, summarised as follows:

- Maintaining prudent and sustainable levels of public spending.
- Enhancing the contribution of non-oil revenue to total public revenue.
- Giving priority to establish projects that are linked to productive sectors.
- Giving priority to complete the programme of digital transformation.
- Maintaining the level of spending on basic services.
- Redirecting government subsidies to targeted low-income households.
- Continue improving the Sultanate of Oman's credit rating and increase investors' confidence.
- Continue supporting training programmes and training

linked to jobs schemes, and boost job creation.

- Continue supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

2022 BUDGET ESTIMATES

Public revenues and expenditures have been estimated after taking into account the MTFP, as well as a set of bases and scenarios, which all aim to ensure the continuation of basic services delivery such as education, healthcare, housing and social welfare. In addition to improving the business environment and investment climate.

As a precautionary measure, the oil price was assumed at the price of \$50 per barrel in the 2022 Budget.

PUBLIC REVENUE

Revenue estimates are based on the following considerations:

The 2022 Budget assumes an oil price of \$50 per barrel.

Transferring proceeds from selling 20,000 thousand oil barrels per day to the Oil Reserve Fund.

Oil production is

projected to be 1,055 thousand barrels per day.

Therefore, aggregate revenue is estimated at RO 10,580 million in 2022. Oil and gas revenue is estimated to amount to RO 7,240 million, accounting for 68 per cent of total revenue. Furthermore, non-hydrocarbon revenue is estimated at RO 3,340 million

HYDROCARBON REVENUE

Net Oil Revenue

Net oil revenue is projected to amount to RO 4,490 million i.e. 42 per cent of total revenue, down by 19 per cent compared to the preliminary results of 2021.

Gas Revenue

Gas revenue is estimated to stand at RO 2,750 million i.e., 26 per cent of total revenue, up by 5 per cent compared to the preliminary results of 2021.

Non-hydrocarbon Revenue

The non-hydrocarbon revenue is projected to reach RO 3,340 million in 2022 i.e., 32 per cent of total revenue, up by 21 per cent compared to the preliminary figures of 2021.

Current Revenue

Sector	Expected Expenditure as end of 2021 (RO Million)
Public Service	99,614,367
Public Order & Security	287,930
Education	153,077,820
Health	121,000,000
Social Security & Welfare	9,766,553
Housing	123,747,832
Culture & Religious Affairs	14,555,009
Energy & Minerals	17,733,573
Agriculture, Fisheries & Water Resources	257,697,344

The current revenue is anticipated to amount to RO 3,160 million in 2022. Excise tax and VAT revenues are expected to stand at RO 535 million in 2022. Moreover, corporate income tax revenue is estimated at RO 465 million in 2022.

Government revenue from Oman Investment Authority (OIA) is estimated at about RO 800 million in the 2022 Budget. The remaining current revenue is projected to be around RO 1,360 million in 2022.

CAPITAL REVENUE AND REPAYMENTS

Capital revenue is expected to amount to RO 170 million in 2022, while capital repayments are anticipated to be around RO 10 million in 2022.

Public Spending:

In light of the policies adopted by the government to enhance spending efficiency and in line with the initiatives undertaken in 2021, public spending for 2022 Budget was estimated based on the following considerations:

- Expenditures of government units, including periodical allowances and 2011 batch promotion costs, taking into account the financial impact of fiscal measures.
 - Allocations for gas expenditures will be in accordance with the expected cost.
 - Allocations of electricity subsidy, taking into account the subsidy reform outcomes.
 - Allocating subsidies for water sector, sewage, and waste sector as per the estimates made by the relevant entities.
 - Subsidies allocated for the transport sector as per estimated cost.
 - Cost of public debt service in accordance with the existing loans and the planned ones over the year.
 - Allocating an amount of RO 200 million for future obligations budget-item.
- Public spending is estimated to amount to RO 12,130 million in 2022 compared to RO 12,167 million as indicated by the 2021 preliminary estimates, increasing by RO 37 million i.e. 0.3 per cent.

Expenditure Composition in 2022 Budget:

Current Expenditure: RO 10159 million (84 per cent)

Investment Expenditure: RO 900 million (7 per cent)

Subsidy and Other Expenses:

RO 1071 million (9 per cent)

Current Expenditures of Defence and Security

Current expenditures of defence and security are estimated at RO 2,965 million, accounting for 29 per cent of total current expenditures.

Current Expenditures of Ministries and Government Units

Current expenditures of ministries and government units are estimated at RO 4,300 million, in accordance with the following:

- 1) Actual needs of all government civil units.
- 2) Outcome of fiscal consolidations and government initiatives geared towards spending reduction.
- 3) Salary appropriations of government units allocated as per the occupied posts, totalling RO 3.2 billion i.e., 74 per cent of current expenditures of ministries and government units.

Spending on basic services:

The 2022 Budget is set to maintain the same level of spending on social services by 40 per cent of total current expenditure, as follows:

Education --- 17 per cent

Social welfare --- 7 per cent

Housing --- 5 per cent

Healthcare --- 11 per cent

Development Expenditures

Spending on development projects is estimated at RO 900 million in 2022 Budget, representing the estimated amount to be paid during the year as per the actual work in progress for the projects. The development projects have been reprioritised in terms of their urgency, cost, and economic and social return, using the Matrix of Projects developed by the Ministry of Economy.

TENTH FIVE-YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN (2021-2025): PROJECTS MATRIX

The Ministry of Economy has developed a matrix to identify sectoral and project priorities for the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan to ensure social and economic return. In addition to capture the repercussions that would contribute positively to the national economy and serve the social aspect. This can be illustrated as follows:

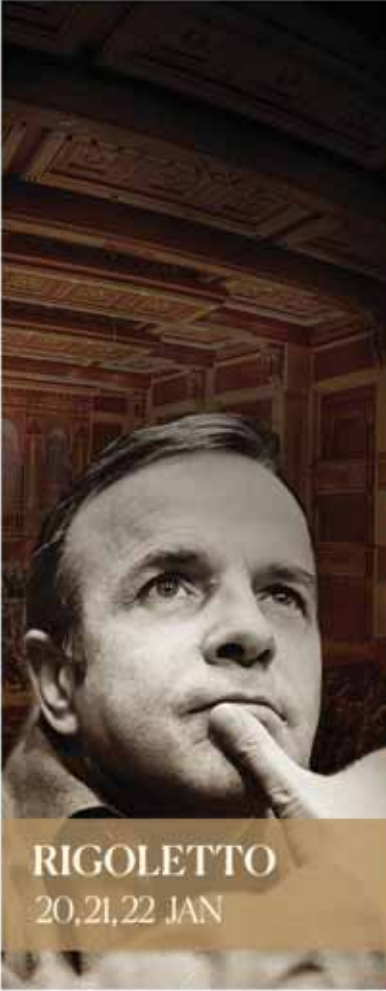
A clear mechanism for evaluating the priority of projects selection to meet the current and future requirements in line with Oman Vision 2040 and achieving the objectives of the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan.



January 2022



SABER REBAI
6,7 JAN



RIGOLETTO
20,21,22 JAN



VERDI
MASTERPIECES
23 JAN



CHRIS BOTTI
27, 28 JAN

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AIMING FOR FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY

FROM PAGE 2

Unified standards for ministries to prepare and submit the project file.

A clear and flexible methodology for projects selection in line with the strategic objectives of development.

The matrix features criteria for measuring the positive economic and social impact of the projects through the related elements. It also assesses the readiness of the units to implement the projects. Depending on the availability of full details on a project, a score is given for each criterion, and then the total scores of each project are measured according to mathematical equations. At this point, it is possible to compare the results according to the following priorities:

The Green category: High-impact projects with complete effort from the project owner — Projects are filed for approval.

The Blue category: High-impact projects with incomplete effort from the project owner — The unit is required to complete the required effort for re-assessment and approvals.

The yellow zone: low-impact projects with complete effort from the owner of the project — Projects that can be approved if financial resources are available.

The red zone: Low-impact projects with incomplete effort on the part of the owner of the project — These are considered as rejected projects.

PROJECTS BEING FINANCED OUTSIDE 2022 BUDGET

Total Investment in 2022
Energy Development Oman
Local Investment of Oman
Investment Authority
Development Budget
Investment of Oman
Investment Authority:

The investments of OIA help to fuel the growth of economic sectors and also improve the investment environment. OIA's investments are estimated to stand at RO 2.9 billion in 2022, for the following purposes:

Public Revenue Trends (2017 – 2021) (RO Billion)

Statement	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Hydrocarbon Revenue	6.2	8.6	8	6.1	8.2
Non-hydrocarbon Revenue	2.3	2.3	2.6	2.4	2.7
Total	8.5	10.9	10.6	8.5	10.9

- Expand current projects.
- Complete ongoing projects.
- Development and establishment of new projects.

Investment spending is financed through:

- Finance agencies
- PPP
- OIA affiliated companies

Sector	2021	2022
Tourism	54	193
Minerals	15	57
Logistics	32	116
Technology	18	156
Food	40	99
Fisheries Wealth	17	54
Energy	1600	1410
Services	785	802
Various Sectors	16	52
Total	2,577	2,940

ENERGY DEVELOPMENT OMAN

The investment spending of EDO for oil and gas production is estimated to be around RO 1.2 billion.

Partnership for Development Programme

Partnership for Development (PFD) Programme is a global economic tool, whereby any foreign company or contractor who has a contract with the government worth more than RO 5 million shall be obliged to carry out a strategic project or programme in the Sultanate of Oman, as per the Royal Decree

No (54/2019) and its Bylaws. The objective is to transfer advanced technology and knowledge that strengthen local manpower capacity, enhance productivity and create more jobs.

The MoF has embarked on the implementation of nine projects including: ship and boat maintenance project, a multi-sensor direct satellite reception station, and fishing research vessel. In addition to other projects to be implemented in coordination with defence and security units.

Public-Private Partnership (PPP):

The Ministry of Finance undertook a number of initial studies on certain projects to be carried out under PPP. Some of the key projects are illustrated as follows:

Education Sector:

Construction of schools (First phase):

Developing the educational infrastructure and benefiting from the private sector expertise

in designing, building and maintaining schools to meet the increasing demand for schools in various governorates. In this phase, 40 schools are planned to be constructed under PPP.

Health Sector:

Hemodialysis services project: Establishing a number of dialysis centres under PPP so as to reduce the costs borne by the Ministry of Health.

Drug Rehabilitation Centre project:

Operating and maintaining the drug rehabilitation centre at Suhar. This centre shall provide services during the treatment and post treatment.

Transport Sector:

Salalah-Thamrait road project: Implementing an additional expressway to the existing Salalah-Thamrait road. The trucks will be obliged to use this expressway with payment of crossing fee; the public can also use the expressway.

Ports Sector:

Fishing Ports in Liwa & Musannah

Developing the ports and associated lands under PPP to become multi-purposes seaports, in a manner that does not conflict with the usage of nearest seaports.

Gas Purchase and Transport
The expense of purchasing and transporting gas is estimated at RO 1,600 million in the 2022 Budget, accounting for 15.7% of total current expenditures.

As may be noted from the above table, the cost of gas purchase and transport has increased by RO 820 million in 2022 as compared with 2021 Budget, due to the following:

Gas Purchase:

After the establishment of EDO, the methodology of purchasing gas from Petroleum Development Oman's (PDO) Block 6 was changed. Accordingly, gas purchasing cost has risen. However, this also has led to an increment in gas revenue compared to the figures of 2021.

Gas Transport:

The volume of gas is expected to increase in 2022, and thus the estimated cost of gas transport increased by 2% accordingly.

Block 8 allocations:

RO 17 million was approved with the aim to enhance the production volume of Block 8.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND OTHER EXPENSES

The appropriations allocated for this budget-item are estimated at RO 1,071 million, including subsidies for electricity, water, sewage and waste sectors. In addition to subsidies for oil products, housing and development loans. These

allocations can be illustrated as follows:

Housing Aid, Social Housing Scheme and Housing Loans

In 2021, the number of households that benefited from the social housing scheme reached 1,247 households, with a total cost of RO 29,631 million. The amount allocated for such a scheme shall remain at the same level in 2022.

Oil Products Subsidy

The total appropriations allocated for oil products subsidy are estimated at about RO 35 million.

Electricity and Water Subsidy

An amount of RO 575 million has been allocated for electricity and water subsidy.

Transport Subsidy

The transport sector is planned to receive a subsidy worth RO 80 million.

Public Debt Service:

Expenses of servicing public debt are estimated to reach RO 1,294 million in 2022.

Deficit and Financing:

According to budget estimates, the fiscal deficit for 2022 Budget is projected to be around RO 1,550 million i.e., 15% of total revenue and 5% of GDP.

The deficit will be financed through external and domestic borrowing by 74% i.e. RO 1.15 billion. The remaining deficit, estimated approximately RO 400 million, will be covered by drawing on reserves.

Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021-2025): Financial Framework

The Tenth Five-Year Development Plan has significant importance as it is the first executive financial programme of Oman Vision 2040. It is also considered as the springboard towards achieving fiscal sustainability and economic growth. Therefore, the government is committed to the financial framework, particularly when it comes to improving financial indicators and reducing the deficit.

Public Spending Trends (2017 -2021) (RO Billion)

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total	12.3	13.6	13.2	12.7	12.1



Key Government Measures in 2022

Ministry of Labour

1. Ejadah, which will be implemented in January 2022, aims to develop human resources by linking incentives and rewards with the level of productivity.

Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology

- 1. Launching a unified guide for government services.
- 2. Launching the first package of electronic services through the unified government platform.
- 3. Launching the national platform for suggestions and complaints.
- 4. Initiatives and activities for space exploration.

Ministry of Economy

- 1. Follow up the implementation of strategic programmes.
- 2. Governorate Development Programme
- SMEs-related measures (2022):
 - 1- Drafting SMEs Law.
 - 2- Introducing funding regulations.
 - 3- Introducing Riyada Card regulations.
 - 4- Announcing incubators-related regulations.
 - 5- Introducing Sanad centres regulations.
 - 6- Launching group financing platforms.
 - 7- Supporting craft industry and one-person industry.

Fiscal performance

improvement measures:
The financial challenges faced by the Sultanate of Oman have prompted the government to reconsider the priorities and align the objectives in accordance with Oman Vision 2040. Therefore, the government has taken a set of measures in order to achieve fiscal sustainability while improving financial indicators and maintaining social welfare. Such measures can be illustrated as follows:

Revision of Financial Law and Executive Bylaws:

In light of modernising laws and revising the regulations pertaining to economic and financial aspects, alongside the restructuring of the State's administrative apparatus, the Financial Law and its Executive Bylaws are under revision in order to address the recent changes and to regulate the financial systems developed by the Ministry of Finance. Some of the systems include Programme-Based Budget, GFMIS and Treasury Single Account.

Public Debt Law

This law aims to manage the funding the government obtains as a loan from banks, financial institutions and individuals to finance its public expenditures. The law also aims to:

- Regulate and manage public debt operations.
- Diversify the sources of funding.
- Monitor the level of indebtedness and associated risks.
- Improve the cash flow management mechanisms.
- Government Financial System (Maliyah)

Maliyah is a modern system for managing public finance. The government units use Maliyah for planning, implementing, controlling and reporting on the State's budget. It will act as an information technology platform for the application of the rules, policies, procedures, and operations of public finance management. The features of Maliyah can be summarised as follow:

- Provide accurate, reliable, timely and consistent financial information that supports the financial and economic decision-makers in creating fiscal policies, strategies, fiscal decisions and discipline to achieve economic diversification and fiscal sustainability.

Develop a modern financial accounting and reporting system using a unified Chart of Accounts (CoA) and new budget classification which is in line with Government Financial Statistics (GFS).

Enable better cash management and effective utilisation of public funds by implementing and using cash forecasting (revenues and expenditures) and streamline treasury banking operation under the Treasury Single Account (TSA).

Programme-Based Budget (PBB)

An advanced approach of fiscal planning that identifies public spending priorities and links spending to objectives and activities. The advantages of the PBB are as follows:

- Link the national objectives of Oman Vision 2040 and targets of the Five-Year Development Plans within the annual programmes and activities of government units.
- Reflect the public policies and objectives within the budget. Link the objectives and outcomes with the required spending.
- Provide authenticated data about the government's performance.
- Connect financial planning with public policies.
- Organise government programmes and activities, and integrate the efforts to prevent duplication.
- Flexibility to allocate resources as per tasks and activities.
- Raise the efficiency of financial and administrative control.
- National Register of Government Assets
- The register is an integrated central system, seeks to take full account of government assets and draft a strategy to maximise returns. The Sultanate of Oman is among the leading countries to establish an integrated central system for managing government

assets. The register aims to:

- 1. Register and determine the actual value of government assets.
- 2. Generate more financial resources.
- 3. Centralise government assets management and enhance its efficiency.
- 4. Secure more financial resources for the state budget.
- 5. Identify the government assets for privatisation and public-private partnership (PPP).

Fee Setting Policy Handbook

The Fee Setting Policy Handbook comes as a unified and clear framework to standardise the pricing of government services, which would serve as a reference for the government units. Some other entities — such as OIA, pension funds, investment funds and free zones — can use the handbook when pricing their services.

In its first phase, the handbook was applied to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and municipalities sector, which resulted in the following:

- A reduction and cancellation of 548 services fees.
- Merging some municipal licences. This entails that similar business activities will no longer require separate licenses.
- Shifting 88 per cent of services provided by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to Invest Easy platform.

Merger of Pension Funds:

Pursuant to the Royal Decree No (33/2021) on systems of retirement and social security, a civil pension fund for public and private sectors shall be established under the name "Social Security Fund". In addition to, the establishment of a fund for military and security under the name "Military and Security Services Retirement Fund".

Main objectives:

- 1- Creating a comprehensive social protection coverage.
 - 2- A unified methodology for investment management.
 - 3- Enhancing investment capacity and efficiency.
- Common Contract
- The Common Contract is an initiative aimed at modernising the standard contracts of various government units, in accordance with the latest practices adopted by the International Federation of Consulting Engineers (FIDIC).

Highlights of Common Contract:

- Updating contract clauses as per the international practice so as to facilitate the process and save money and time.
- The Common Contract is drafted in Arabic and English in one document.
- Easy to obtain a copy of the contract via MOF's website.
- Ability to electronically fill the required data.

Central Government Procurement

- This initiative seeks to identify a central unit with the aim of integrating government procurements and contracts for all government units. The unit shall carry out the following:
- Controlling all government procurement and contracting process.
 - Enhancing purchasing power of the unit so as to be able to negotiate the quotations.
 - Establishing a direct link with the main suppliers and service providers.
 - Monitoring government inventory efficiently.
 - Reducing public expenditures and the number of staff working in procurement departments.
 - Building a close relationship with suppliers and enhancing training and support potentials.
 - Migrating to e-business for

key processes such as tendering, contracting and payment transactions.

Supply Chain Financing (SCF) Scheme

The Ministry of Finance is working with a group of banks, primarily based in the Sultanate of Oman, to provide a simple and effective financing solution to the suppliers under contract with various government units. The objective is to offer the suppliers an alternative option of getting their invoices settled in a timely manner without signing any financing agreement with the banks. The bank shall transfer the funds directly to the bank account of the supplier and then the Ministry of Finance will repay the funds to the same bank.

Tafakur Platform

An e-platform that aims to promote community participation between the government and society by receiving ideas, suggestions and solutions that will help improve public financial management and achieve fiscal sustainability. The platform targets, during the pilot phase, all employees of the MoF and the target group will expand later depending on the outcomes of the pilot phase.

Treasury Single Account

The Treasury Single Account (TSA) is a unified structure of government bank accounts, deal with government revenue and expenditure on a daily basis, thereby allowing for an optimal use of government cash resources. The TSA aims to:

- Enhance the efficiency of government cash management, by utilising the unused cash.
- Improve monitoring the implementation of the State's budget through providing accurate information on the expenditure and revenue.
- Reduce fees and costs of banking transactions.



Omicron plays spoilsport in New Year revelry



SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

The New Year took off in a subdued manner for the second year in a row following the emergence of Omicron, dashing the hopes of the end of the pandemic.

However, within the ambit of restrictions, most hotel and tourism establishments were full on New Year eve on Friday. Hotels and restaurants in Muscat and other tourism destinations in the Sultanate of Oman were packed with the allowed capacity.

Only those who had got two doses of the vaccine were allowed after checking their certificates. There was also a 50 per cent occupancy restriction.

The measures followed instructions by the authorities to the public to ring in the New Year responsibly in light of the risk posed by the highly contagious Omicron variant.

Although there was concern among the revellers who attended group parties in hotels, Covid-19

and the new variant did not dampen the festive spirit among many.

“It will be a lie if I say I have no concerns and fear about the pandemic,” said Kevin Ivens, a British national, adding, “albeit I think it’s worth to come and celebrate.”

A year ago, the newly available vaccine offered hope that the coronavirus spread may be under control by the start of 2022. Instead, the sudden arrival of Omicron has brought a surge in coronavirus cases across the globe.

“Although the fears arising from the Covid-19 pandemic and Omicron have diluted the mood, people still had a good time on New Year eve,” said John Douglas, an official with an international hotel brand in the Sultanate of Oman.

In normal circumstances, New Year eve in the capital Muscat is one of the vital celebrations, including traditional and contemporary parties with vibrant fireworks in major hotels and other premises.

“Since we adopted the pan-

demic operating procedures early on, we hosted our annual festive season buffets and a New Year gala dinner at our restaurants with special menus and musical entertainment for families,” John said. Within permitted levels, guests turned up, and most hotels across the country were full. Bookings were done in advance and last-minute reservations were not entertained.

By six in the evening, most roads in the city witnessed heavy traffic with people coming out in large numbers to enjoy the New Year, especially on the beachfront.

Royal Oman Police personnel were assigned to ensure social-distancing norms were being followed at religious places.

Churches nationwide curbed attendance in the evening services, owing to the restrictions on public gatherings. Some have cancelled physical services and opted to stream online.

Others have scattered parishioners across different venues, and changed timings.

SQU invites applications for postgraduate studies

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), represented by the Deanship of Postgraduate Studies, has invited applications for the postgraduate programmes (higher diploma, masters’ and doctoral programmes) for Omani and non-Omani students for the academic year 2022-2023, starting from today (Sunday) until February 28.

A total of 34 programmes for the doctoral degree, 69 for master’s and 4 higher diploma programmes were rolled out.

Among these is the doctoral programme in Islamic studies at the College of Education which is a new programme aimed at

enriching scientific research in the Islamic sciences and finding solutions to emergent Sharia and intellectual issues as well as meeting the university’s and the country’s need for the required specialised competencies in the field.

A master’s programme in finance and accountancy at the College of Economics and Political Sciences will be introduced for the first time with three subspecialties: finance, accountancy and Islamic finance and banking.

It is noteworthy that SQU offers a number of scholarships that are funded by foreign entities.

— ONA

Several hotels charged for Covid violations

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 1

As part of its measures to check the spread of Covid-19, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has issued violations against several hotel and tourism establishments.

The hotels include Park Inn, Barr Al Jissah Shangri-La Resort, Muscat Hills Resort, Crowne Plaza al Qurum, W Muscat, Muscat Holiday, Parkside Plaza, Golden Oasis, Al Raha, and Al Nakheel Hotel.

The ministry has ordered all establishments to reduce the number of occupants in restaurants, meeting and banquet halls, and the rest of the other facilities to 50 per cent of the total capacity.

Visitors and employees must stick to preventive measures such as wearing a mask in all facilities, maintaining social distance, and other preventive measures to avoid any legal actions that may lead to the closure of the facility.

OCCI Al Dakhiliyah honours panels

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, JAN 1

The Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) branch of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate has organised a ceremony to honour the former specialised committees of the Board of Directors. It was held under the auspices of Shaikh Rashid bin Said al Kalbani, Wali of Nizwa.

Speaking on the occasion, Eng Hamad bin Said al Rabkhi, Chairman of the OCCI in Al Dakhiliyah, said the ceremony was being held to commend the committees on their dedicated efforts. It was distinguished by the participatory work between the branch committees and the board of directors of the OCCI Al Dakhiliyah branch. This enabled the OCCI to play its role as an official representative and sponsor of the private sector, despite the exceptional circumstances experienced by the national economy and the business sector.

He said: “The work of the



Board of Directors of the OCCI and the temporary committees during this period came in line with the development goals set and envisioned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. It has been framed in the future vision (Oman 2040) with a view to strengthening the partnership between the public and private sectors. And the private sector is seen as a major driver of a diversified and sustainable economy while working to achieve a balanced development of the governorate.”

Al Rabhi added: “The committees have made efforts to advance

the economy of Al Dakhiliyah Governorate by studying the economic and investment components and advantages, then working to promote the available investment opportunities, and holding meetings with business owners in various economic sectors. Moreover, they discussed the challenges faced by companies and found appropriate solutions to them.

Shaikh Rashid bin Said al Kalbani gave away gifts to 80 people from the committees, supporters of various activities of the branch and those who excelled in their work.

AUCTION ANNOUNCEMENT

Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Company LLC (GPDC) and Wadi Al Jizzi Power Company LLC (WJPC) announce the following auctions:

SR.	Auction No.	Material to be sold	Location	Date of site visit	Last submission date
1	GPDC/2021/3	Used Materials and Cables	Al Ghubrah North	9/1/2022 to 12/1/2022	16/1/2022
2	WJPC/2021/1	Used Materials and Cables	Wadi Al Jizzi Power Plant (Sohar)	9/1/2022 to 12/1/2022	16/1/2022

Terms and conditions:

- Offers to be submitted in an envelope sealed, with red wax addressed and titled with the auction name and auction No. to the Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee without mentioning the name of the bidder.
- Offer should be dropped in the tender box at the Nama Holding reception before 1.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Sunday 16 January 2022.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the “Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee of GPDC” / “Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee of WJPC”.
- Who wins the auction or part of it commits to pay its value in cash or certified bank check in the Sultanate during a period of three days from the day of notification.
- Provide separate offers of the two locations (Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Company LLC and Wadi Al Jizzi Power Company LLC) as per site visit.
- The buyer must transfer the materials within four (4) weeks from the date of payment in Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Company location and within (6) six weeks in Wadi Al Jizzi Power Company location. In case the buyer does not transfer the purchased materials during the specified period, they will be confiscated for the benefit of the company, and the buyer will not be entitled to claim compensation and bear all resale expenses.
- The buyer bears all risks involved in materials transfer or reuse.
- The buyer can quote for any item line as per attached lists.
- Bidders can preview the materials during working hours on the dates specified above, from 9:00 am until 12:00 pm with all PPE.

To preview the materials at Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Company, please contact Mr. Ibrahim Al Hadi Tel: (0096899884074/98085311) and Mr. Ahmed Hassan at Wadi Al Jizzi Power Company Tel: (0096896666464) or Email: saif.bousaidi@GPDC.nama.om.



Location to submit the offer :Nama Holding
In Beach One Building, 3rd Floor (Units 305 & 307) Shatti Al Qurum
P.O Box 850, Post Code 116, Sultanate of Oman.
Phone Number : +968 24559200 / 277

Auction

Majan Electricity Company S.A.O.G announces for the following auction:

Auction#	Auction Title	Location	Inspection Date	Inspection Deadline	Last Date for Submission
1/2022	Selling used electrical materials	Company stores (Sohar, Alburaimi and Ibri)	03/01/2022	16/01/2022	17/01/2022

Under the following conditions:

First: Specialized companies, establishments and individuals may inspect the materials during working hours from 8:00 am to 1:00 pm by Mr. Said AL Kahali (Sohar) Tel# (91372490) or Mr. Bader AL Shamakhi (Ibri) Tel (94000795) or Mr. Mohammed AL Ghaithi (Alburaimi) Tel (93922787)
Second: Bidders should submit amount of 1000 O.R insurance as bank guarantee or a certified cheque issued by a local bank valid for 90 days from the date of submission. Insurance amount shall be reimbursed to unsuccessful bidders.

Third: Offers in the sealed envelope shall be addressed to Manager of Administration providing the title and number of the auction. Envelops shall not bear any sign that refers to the bidder’s name or identity.

Fourth: Offers shall be deposited in the tender box at the company Sohar office latest by 10:00 am on Monday 17/01/2022.

Fifth: Bidders shall pay purchasing value in cash immediately after being officially informed. Insurance fees will be taken in the bidder fails to pay within a week of the notice given.

Sixth: Bidders shall take the purchased items within seven days of auction. An extended period of maximum two weeks may be given.



Majan Electricity Company S.A.O.G
P.O Box 286, Sohar
PC 311, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: +968 2694 4444 | Fax: +968 2694 4222
Information@majanco.nama.om | www.majanco.co.om



Rains and winds lash most parts of country

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Sultanate of Oman ushered in the New Year 2022 with steady rains, heavy at times, with thunderstorms and strong wind.

Heavy rains are expected on Sunday and Monday. Precipitation will be mostly in Musandam, North Al Batinah and Al Buraimi. The rain will likely cover most parts of the country on Tuesday and Wednesday again. Precipitation is expected to be 20 to 50mm.

Since Friday there have reports from Nakhl and Samayil about flowing of wadis. Al Khod and the Seeb Dam received large amounts of water due to continuous rainfall, according to the weather forecaster at the Met Office.

“While the next two days may have lesser rain in this part, Al Batinah, Al Buraimi and Musandam might receive heavy rains on Sunday and the day after tomorrow and we are expecting the wadis to flow again and low areas can be flooded as the soil has already been affected by the four-day trough, which is also expected to continue for another four days. With 20mm of rainfall, the wadis can easily overflow,” said Jaifar bin Hamed al Busaidy, the weather forecaster at the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre.

While many wilayats in the northern part of the country received thundershowers due to

Heavy rains are expected on Sunday and Monday. Precipitation will be mostly in Musandam, North Al Batinah and Al Buraimi. The rain will likely cover most parts of the country on Tuesday and Wednesday again

trough of low pressure, the next two days, southeasterly winds (moderate to active) will continue to blow over most of the governorates, with high sea waves on the coasts of Musandam and the Sea of Oman with the possibility of dust and dust rise in desert areas.

The desert areas of the governorates of Dhofar, Al Wusta, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi are likely to witness southeasterly winds of 10-20 knots (20-40 km/h) with a decrease in horizontal visibility due to the rising of dust.

“As this trough is strong, we are expecting fresh wind in the desert area also reducing visibility in Dhofar, Al Wusta, Al Dhahirah and Al Buraimi in addition to dust rising as there has not been much rain in these areas.

“We are expecting this impact,

especially on the Adam to Thamrait road and the other desert areas where companies are located. The wind speed is expected to be 20 to 40 km,” he pointed out, adding that companies located in these spots should be cautious.

Saturday came with weather alert stating heavy thundershowers are expected over the governorates of Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Dakhiliyah and South Al Batinah.

The thundershowers were accompanied by fresh downdraft winds, hail precipitation and flow of wadis, including flash wadis. The highest amount of rain recorded in some of the monitoring stations of the Civil Aviation Authority during the past 24 hours in Bidbid was 56.2mm and Nakhl 34.6mm.

According to the latest weather analysis in the National Multi Hazard Early Warning Centre, moderate sea condition along most of the country’s coasts with a maximum wave height of 2.0 metres becoming rough during thunderstorms along the coast of Musandam Governorate and other coastal areas of the country with a maximum wave height of 3 metres.

The continued flow of clouds over the northern atmosphere of the country led to rain of varying intensity, sometimes thunder, over the governorates of Muscat, North Al Batinah, South Al Batinah,

Al Dakhiliyah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah and Musandam, as well as the governorates of North and South Al Sharqiyah.

Continuing activity and flow of convective clouds over the governorates of Musandam, North Al Batinah and Al Buraimi, which led to rains, have resulted in the flow of wadis.

6 people die

FROM P1

The Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority stressed the necessity of adhering to the preventive guidelines during the rains and the flow of valleys, and not to risk crossing the valleys to preserve the safety of lives and property. Due to the continued rain and the flow of wadis, the Royal Oman Police calls on everyone to take precautions and stay away from water gatherings and streams of wadis.

Major Mohammed al Hashami from Royal Oman Police said there had been numerous campaigns not to cross wadis, but we still continue to have these incidents.

“Why is it necessary to risk oneself and the families by challenging the wadis. It is also not the right place to gather or go sight-seeing.

“The rains will continue until Wednesday, and it is important to save oneself from these risks. There can be other wadis too that can be activated during night due to the current trough of low pressure because the low pressure will continue until January 5.”

According to Captain Munir bin Mohammed al Sinan of the Public Relations Department, there were reports of detention of individuals and vehicles in wadis following heavy rains in northern governorates.





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In brief

■ VATICAN CITY



POPE URGES WORLD TO WORK FOR PEACE IN NEW YEAR MESSAGE

Pope Francis urged the world to “roll up our sleeves” for peace in a New Year’s message on Saturday, telling the faithful to keep positive while working to build a better society.

Marking the 55th World Day of Peace, the head of the world’s 1.3 billion Catholics devoted his Angelus address to encouraging a stop to violence around the world, telling the assembled crowd at Saint Peter’s Square to keep peace at the forefront of their thoughts.

“Let’s go home thinking peace, peace, peace. We need peace,” said the pope, following his Angelus prayer.

■ KATRA/SRINAGAR



NEW YEAR INDIAN STAMPEDE AT SHRINE KILLS 12

Twelve people were crushed to death in a stampede at an Indian religious shrine in the early hours of Saturday as tens of thousands of pilgrims massed to offer prayers, officials said. The disaster unfolded in darkness on the packed route to the Vaishno Devi shrine in Indian-administered Kashmir, visited by millions every year as one of Hinduism’s most revered sites.

“People fell over each other... It was difficult to figure out whose leg or arms were tangled with whose,” survivor Ravinder said.

“I helped pick up eight bodies by the time ambulances arrived after about half an hour. I feel lucky to be alive but am still shaking with memory of what I saw,” he said.

■ LONDON



QUEEN APPOINTS CAMILLA TO BRITISH ORDER OF GARTER

Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II said on Friday she was appointing her daughter-in-law Camilla, a member of the ancient Order of the Garter, in an apparent boost to her royal standing.

The monarch announced she was adding Camilla, the wife of the heir to the throne Prince Charles, to the royal members of the Order, who currently include her children Charles, Anne, Andrew and Edward and her eldest grandson Prince William — but not their spouses.

The inclusion of Camilla, who married Charles in 2005, comes as she has taken on more prominent royal duties in recent years and has seen her public approval rating grow.

Omicron dampens worldwide New Year celebrations

PARIS/LONDON: The Omicron coronavirus variant dampened New Year festivities around much of the world, as cities from Paris to Kuala Lumpur cancelled civic celebrations, but London threw a last-minute party on television and Cape Town suddenly lifted a longstanding curfew.

The midnight hour passed in Paris without a planned fireworks display or DJ sets, as city officials cancelled events planned on the Champs-Elysees following the advice of a scientific panel that declared mass gatherings would be too risky.

Elsewhere around the globe, events were scaled back or cancelled outright, as with the traditional fireworks over the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur. In the Netherlands, where outside groupings of more than four people are banned, police dispersed several thousand people who had defiantly gathered at Amsterdam’s central Dam Square, ANP news agency reported.

But in London, where a fireworks display and light show had been cancelled in October, officials announced on Friday the spectacle would come to life on the television screen, as Big Ben rang in the New Year for the first time since 2017 following a restoration.

“I’d encourage everyone to enjoy New Year’s in a sensible and cautious way, and the best way to do so is by watching the London show on TV,” London Mayor



People gather at the Espana square during New Year’s Eve celebrations, amid the Covid-19 surge, in Ronda, Spain, on Saturday. — Reuters

Sadiq Khan told Sky News ahead of the event.

BBC images of the fireworks showed very light vehicle traffic and virtually no in-person spectators.

Earlier, Britain published a study of a million cases that found those with Omicron were around a third as likely to need hospitalisation as those with the previously dominant Delta variant. The results were “in keeping with the encouraging signs we have already seen,” said Susan Hopkins, Chief Medical Adviser at the UK Health Security Agency.

Even so, many countries have

The sudden arrival of Omicron has brought a surge in coronavirus case counts to countries around the world. Global infections hit a record high over the past seven-day period

reimposed restrictions to prevent healthcare systems from being overwhelmed.

The sudden arrival of Omicron has brought a surge in coronavirus case counts to countries around the world. Global infections hit a

record high over the past seven-day period, with an average of just over a million cases detected a day worldwide between December 24 and 30, up some 100,000 on the previous peak posted on Wednesday, according to Reuters data.

Deaths, however, have not risen in kind, bringing hope the new variant is less lethal.

In the wake of encouraging data, Cape Town abruptly lifted a curfew just in time for the New Year, after South Africa became the first country to declare its Omicron wave had crested — and with no huge surge in deaths.

— Reuters



Mourners gather around the Hollywood Walk of Fame star of actor Betty White in Los Angeles, California, on Friday. — Reuters

Betty White, doyenne of US television, dead at 99

LOS ANGELES: Actress Betty White, who made US television audiences laugh for more than seven decades, starring on popular sitcoms “The Golden Girls” and “The Mary Tyler Moore Show,” died on Friday at age 99.

The pioneering Emmy-winning comedienne enjoyed one of the longest careers in showbiz history: she began regularly appearing on television in 1949 and had a voice role in “Toy Story 4” in 2019.

“Even though Betty was about to be 100, I thought she would live forever,” her agent Jeff Witas told *People* magazine in a statement.

“I will miss her terribly,”

TMZ, citing law enforcement sources, said she died at her home on Friday. The cause of death was not immediately revealed.

The news sparked an outpouring of tributes, with President Joe Biden tweeting, “Betty White brought a smile to the lips of generations of Americans. She’s a cultural icon who will be sorely missed.” — AFP

EU moves to label nuclear, gas energy as ‘green’

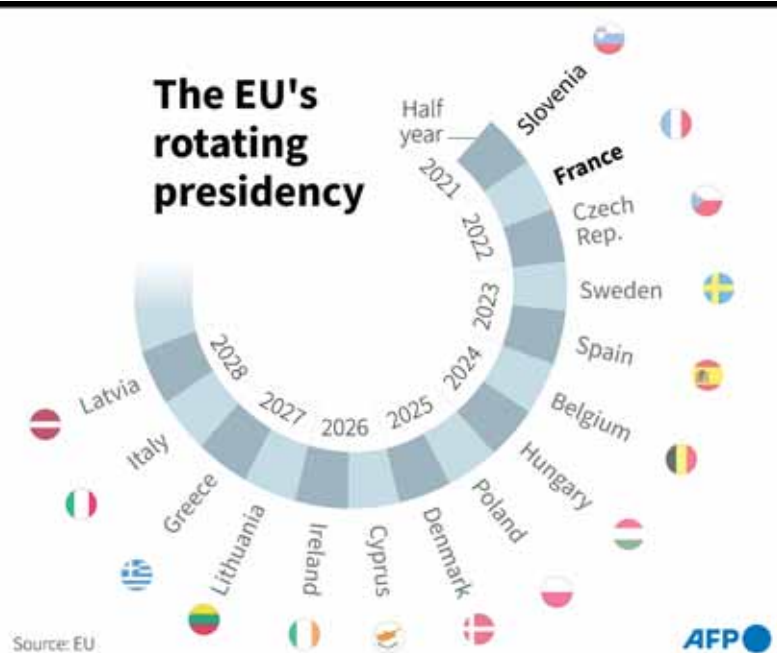
BRUSSELS: The European Union has drawn up plans to label some natural gas and nuclear energy projects as “green” investments after a year-long battle between governments over which investments are truly climate-friendly.

The European Commission is expected to propose rules in January deciding whether gas and nuclear projects will be included in the EU “sustainable finance taxonomy”.

This is a list of economic activities and the environmental criteria they must meet to be labelled as green investments. By restricting the “green” label to truly climate-friendly projects, the system aims to make those investments more attractive to private capital, and stop “greenwashing”, where companies or investors overstate their eco-friendly credentials.

Brussels has also made moves to apply the taxonomy to some EU funding, meaning the rules could decide which projects are eligible for certain public finance.

A draft of the Commission’s proposal, seen by Reuters, would label nuclear power plant investments as green if the project has a plan, funds and a site to safely dispose of radioactive waste. To be deemed green, new nuclear plants must receive construction permits before 2045.



Investments in natural gas power plants would also be deemed green if they produce emissions below 270g of CO2 equivalent per kilowatt hour (kWh), replace a more polluting fossil fuel plant, and receive a construction permit by December 31, 2030. Such plants must meet other conditions including that they are technically equipped to burn low-carbon gases.

Gas and nuclear power generation would be labelled green on the grounds that they are “transitional” activities — defined as those that are not fully sustainable, but which have emissions below industry average

and do not lock in polluting assets during the shift to clean energy.

The Commission could not immediately be reached for comment.

EU countries and a panel of expert advisers will scrutinise the draft proposal, which could change before it is due to be published later in January. Once published, the proposal could be vetoed by a majority of EU countries or the European Parliament.

The policy has been mired in lobbying from governments for more than a year and EU countries disagree on which fuels are truly sustainable. — Reuters

A new year, a new You



Dr Hamed al Sinawi
@alsinawi

Dr Hamed al Sinawi is a senior consultant psychiatrist at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

In the new year, many of us plan to adopt a new behaviour or abandon another. Such changes could be related to lifestyle such as adopting healthy eating, regular physical exercise or stopping smoking. These are called new year resolutions and many people make them at the beginning of the year as an attempt to motivate themselves to be a new version for the new year.

To understand how change works, psychologists developed the six stages of change that an individual goes through when he or she adopts a new behaviour. These stages vary from person to person according to willpower and the type of the behaviour to be changed.

These stages are:

1. Precontemplation

At this stage, the individual has no intention to change as he may not be aware there is a problem, denies it or minimises its impact behaviour, like the smoker who convinced himself that the health warnings about the danger of smoking are exaggerated and that he can stop smoking any time he wants.

2. Contemplation, the stage of thinking about change:

This stage is also known as the postponement stage, as the individual understands his need for change, but he hesitates and thinks about things that discourage him from changing his behaviour.

3. Preparation during which the individual begins to gather information and develop a practical

WHATEVER YOUR NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS, MAKE SURE THAT THEY ARE REASONABLE GOALS THAT ARE SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE, ACHIEVABLE AND REALISTIC

plan. If he wants to stick to regular exercising, for example, he would register in a gym and organise his time so that he can go regularly. This stage usually lasts for several weeks.

4. Action or implementation stage:

Here the individual begins to implement the plan and is committed to it and with time he is excited to achieve the results,

this stage usually lasts for several months.

5. The stage of maintaining the new behaviour:

After a period of continuing in the implementation phase, the individual begins to think about how to maintain the new behaviour to become a part of his daily life. This stage is considered critical because if the individual does not adhere to the new behaviour, he may retreat from it and give in to temptations.

6. The final stage:

After a period, the individual adopts the new behaviour and becomes part of his or her daily routine. This stage requires a lot of commitment and not returning to the old behaviour.

Some psychologists add a stage of relapse where the person stops the new behaviour and goes back to his previous one, like the smoker who goes back to smoking or the person who adopts healthy eating then goes back to consuming unhealthy meals. This stage does not happen to everyone, yet it's important to be aware of so one can slip into it and experience the frustration that comes with it.

Finally, whatever your new year resolutions, make sure that they are reasonable goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and can be achieved in the time period that you specify, be aware of the challenges that will face you and be ready to deal with them to achieve success, God willing.

France scraps plastic wrap for fruits and veg

JULIEN NGUYEN DANG

A ban on the use of plastic to package a range of fruit and vegetables came into force in France on Saturday, to the dismay of the sector's packaging industry.

Environmentalists have long campaigned against single-use plastics as pollution worsens globally while President Emmanuel Macron has backed the move defending a "pragmatic" approach.

The October decree covers for example the sale of under 1.5 kg of apples.

However, the full legislation will not be applied until 2026, allowing firms to adapt, including on the sale of red fruits considered fragile.

Six months has also been granted to use up existing plastic packaging stocks. "We were never consulted," complained Laurent Grandin, head of the fruit and vegetable sector's Interfel association.

He said the costs were "insurmountable" for small companies who would have to keep using plastic to protect exports, notably to Britain, a major client for apples.

Pomanjou produces up to 40,000 tonnes of apples annually in the Loire valley and has over the last three years introduced 100 per cent cardboard packing.

However packing costs have as a result soared 20 to 30 per cent, said company representative Arnaud de Puineuf.

Big supermarket group Casino said it will now sell tomatoes in cardboard packaging and provide customers with paper or cellulose bags. The packaging companies say the October 8 decree caught them by surprise, particularly the ban on recycled plastics.

"We have client firms... who will have to stop their fruit and vegetable packing activity, even though they have been working on alternatives using less plastic or recycled plastic for several years," said a statement from the Elipso association that represents manufacturers.

Elipso and Polyvia, a union covering 3,500 firms making packaging, have appealed to France's State Council, which has jurisdiction over administrative disputes, against what they say is a distortion of European markets as the ban applies solely to France.

But Armand Chaigne, director of industrial markets at packaging firm DS Smith, sees the benefits, notably for cardboard manufacturers.

"It is estimated that in Europe, out of the eight million tonnes of plastic produced per year for single-use packaging, 1.5 million tonnes could already be removed," he said.

"That represents about 70 billion units of single-use plastic packaging", or "about seven billion euros (\$7.9 billion) of additional turnover potential for cardboard."

— AFP

THE FULL LEGISLATION WILL NOT BE APPLIED UNTIL 2026, ALLOWING FIRMS TO ADAPT, INCLUDING ON THE SALE OF RED FRUITS CONSIDERED FRAGILE

Turn kids' boredom into biggest asset



Dr Nisma Haris
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DR NISMA HARIS
IS A WELLNESS ADVISER

"I am bored," as parents and guardians, this is the most ubiquitous statement we hear from our children. At times, the situation becomes so overwhelming that we land in self-doubt, feelings of not doing enough for our children or being unable to engage them in interesting stuff; engulf us. Nonetheless, we do not realise that boredom is actually good for our kids and it is here that it opens up the new gateways towards exploring their creative skills.

As soon as our kids come to us and tell that they are getting bored, we get into action and start navigating ways to engage them up, but the results turn out to be dissenting with either they are no more fascinated in what they are being told to do or they deny doing a particular activity. We try to figure out ways for their boredom but actually, they should be doing this themselves. A child's brain has immense creative potential and boredom is the key to unlocking this potential. We just need to assist them in discovering their creativity and this is the preliminary step towards curbing their boredom.

When a child learns and gets this guidance to put their imagination into practice, it helps to transform

their personalities onto a completely next level. A child's mind is an unexplored sea of creative depths and imaginations. When tapped in the right ways, this boredom can turn out to be their biggest asset.

Giving kids their smart devices as a remedy to their boredom is a big mistake. This instantly kills their imaginative power. However, this sounds the most convenient. Of course, we cannot deprive them of their gadgets but never give them an instant fix to their boredom. Exposing them to the virtual world triggers their little brains in deconstructive ways which are way beyond their mental capacities to handle. Screen addiction is something that we are all well aware of and this usually develops over time when we resort to devices as a solution to boredom.

So, how do we help them handle their boredom? Firstly, accept that boredom is okay. Life is not about entertainment or amusement all the time. As parents, we need not rush to enrol them in coding classes or soccer because they have nothing to do after school. Let them sit and watch outside the window, let them do nothing for a while. Let them be observant of the world around them. Let them splash

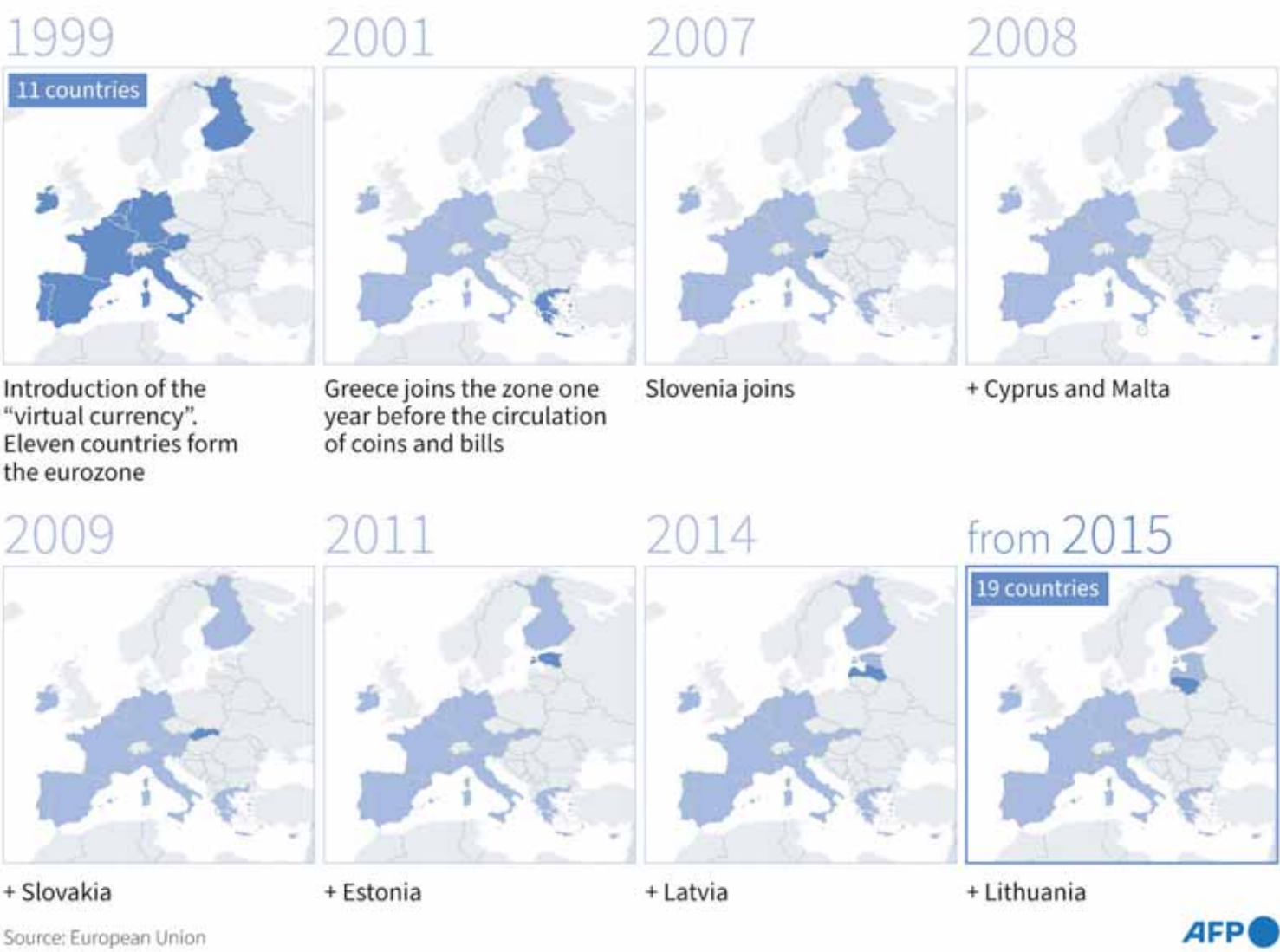
colours and come up with their little masterpieces or let them have some hands-on crafts. We need not fill all their time and minds with activities that they have no space left to dewire themselves.

This is the most essential part of their learning process, how to be self-sufficient and self-controlled in life when they are faced with non-interesting assignments later in their student life or repetitive tasks at their workplace. They should know how to come up with their solutions when life gets monotonous or unexciting at times.

Psychoanalyst Adam Phillips wrote that the "capacity to be bored can be a developmental achievement for the child." Boredom is a chance to contemplate life, rather than rushing through it, he said in his book *On Kissing, Tickling, and Being Bored: Psychoanalytic Essays on the Unexamined Life*. "It is one of the most oppressive demands of adults that the child should be interested in, rather than take time to find what interests him. Boredom is integral to the process of taking one's time," added Phillips.

So next time when your child gets bored you know what to do!!

The expansion of the eurozone



Macron takes EU reins as election looms

VALERIE LEROUX AND
ADAM PLOWRIGHT

France takes over the rotating presidency of the European Union on Saturday, affording President Emmanuel Macron the chance to pose as the EU's de facto leader in the run-up to national elections in April.

The 44-year-old has never made any secret of his ambitions to be the motor for further European integration, serving over the last four years as a dynamic sidekick to the more steady German chancellor Angela Merkel in Europe's power couple.

With Merkel now retired and the timely gift of the rotating presidency of the EU Council from January 1, Macron has announced an ambitious agenda for the 27-member bloc that could also serve his domestic campaign for re-election.

The centrist, who made his Europhile views a key part of his political campaign when winning the presidency in 2017, is hoping it will again serve him in elections scheduled for April 10 and 24. "The EU presidency gives him a welcome platform to put his European record to the forefront and differentiate himself from his rivals and bring new proposals, new ideas to the table," said Claire Demesmay, an expert at the Marc-Bloch think-tank in Berlin.

Strutting on the international stage has also long been a popular move for any French president.

"The French like nothing more than the image or impression of France being 'at the controls,'" said Pierre Sellal, a former French diplomat at the French mission to the European Union.

But although the first French presidency since 2008 offers opportunities for Macron, it is also seen by observers as holding risks.

His agenda to make Europe "powerful" — in defence, technology or its own border security — risks being overshadowed in the short term by the accelerating Covid-19 health crisis.

Sebastien Maillard, director of the Jacques Delors Institute, a pro-EU think-tank based in Paris, says Macron will also face pressure to deliver after having ramped up expectations.

"He can't get to the first round (of the presidential election) on April 10 without having obtained some results from the European presidency," Maillard said. "That's the challenge for him, but it can also be a real opportunity." — AFP

He can't get to the first round on April 10 without having obtained some results from the European presidency

SEBASTIEN
MAILLARD

Jacques Delors Institute



A TRADITION SURVIVES

People compete in the traditional annual wheelbarrow race, which is believed to date back to the early 1300s when the Lord of the Manor encouraged residents to scour the countryside to survive a particularly harsh winter, in Ponteland, Britain, on Saturday. — Reuters

What Will You Do... in 2022?



Ray Petersen
r.j.petersen52@gmail.com
The author is a media consultant

MOST PEOPLE HAVE EXPERIENCED A MIXTURE OF CONCERN, INCONVENIENCE, DISTRESS, FEAR, AND THE ENTIRE GAMUT OF EMOTIONS, AND WHAT IS NEEDED NOW IS FOR THEIR LEADERS TO MAINTAIN THEIR COURSE

I am no Nostrodamus, God knows I sometimes can't see what is staring me straight in the eye, but mankind, let alone you, me, our families, and friends, need this to be a better year don't we? Just to keep our sanity, to keep a meaningful smile close, and to ensure that joy and laughter are something more than memories. Maybe 2022 will be special if...

... the global population, governments and societies, continues down the pathway of vaccinations and boosters, neither ridiculed nor inconvenienced by the impertinent and protuberant anti-vax lobby. Most people have experienced a mixture of concern, inconvenience, distress, fear, and the entire gamut of emotions, and what is needed now is for their leaders to maintain their course.

... the governments of the world will hold their nerve in the face of what are sure to be further variants of Covid-19, with accelerated reproduction rates like Omicron demonstrated, but according to science, with increasingly effete consequences as the global vaccination protocols achieve their objective. I agree that it's not particularly palatable that vaccinations for all are needed, but what other answer is there? ... the aforementioned 'anti-vaxxers' will respect the thoughts, opinions and beliefs of others in the communities and societies in which they live. The question is surely,

not whether the anti-vaxxers are right or wrong, but that they are so vehement in seeking to impose their opinions and beliefs on others. Anarchy, you see, has more than one face.

... our governments can exercise a smidgen of compassion, and not demand too much of their constituents in the aftermath of the pandemic. Having spent so much on Covid-19 measures, vaccines, and in supporting businesses and commerce throughout the pandemic to survive, governments will be in a torrid fiscal deficit situation, and the temptation will be to reduce some of that deficit quickly to restore some sanity to their budgets quickly. However, to tread softly may be wiser.

... you can share your life and your wisdom. For a start, articulating yourself, is empowering and transformative, and it will help you rise, phoenix-like, from this two year 'funk' that has been the pandemic. So many, particularly those in positions of leadership and management, shun openness, and cache their insights for fear of relinquishing their insights. Don't you know? Sharing your wisdom doesn't diminish your eminence in the eyes of others, but augments it.

... you offer more to your work than it asks of you. It has been such a tumultuous couple of years you can be forgiven perhaps for returning to work and just wanting to 'settle-in,' and 'take

things quietly for a while,' letting 'things' return to 'normal,' and I can have some empathy for that approach. However, the truth is that many businesses and organisations, private and governmental, will be 'running on fumes' for a couple of years as they seek to recover. Don't leave yourself vulnerable...

... we can have some blessed relief from hackers. It's almost as if the financial institutions and social media platforms have an acceptance of hackers and hacking built into their 'bottom line.' Well, that may be fine for them, but what about for the poor schmuck in the street who has their credit card, bank account, or emails hacked. Society didn't ask for a cashless society, it has been foisted upon us, and the consequences imperil us day by day, its up to you guys to fix it! ... there are some more good movies and television series around to distract us from this loathsome pandemic reality. I have recently watched a new movie called "Just Look Up," and it is amazing, as a somewhat clunky and obvious satirical parody of America. Particularly its response to such issues as former president Donald Trump (the send-up of nepotism is worth the admission alone), the pandemic, global warming, the abuse of executive power, media sycophancy, political indifference, obscene wealth, and 'idiocracy.' It's awesome! And where is the next Game of Thrones coming from?

The democratic threat to democracy



Kemal Dervi
The author is an economist and former head of UNEP

TODAY'S LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES ARE MORE LIKELY TO SUCCEED TO ILLIBERAL MAJORITARIANISM

US President Joe Biden's recent Summit for Democracy came at a time when democracy appears to be in retreat. Autocratic leaders such as Chinese President Xi Jinping are claiming that their systems can weather pandemics, deliver economic growth, and ensure security more reliably than liberal democracies can. China's stellar economic performance over three decades is used to bolster that claim. But when assessing the current challenge to democracy, one must distinguish between two types of autocratic models.

First, there are regimes such as China's, where the Communist Party's leadership and power cannot be contested. As was the case in the Soviet Union, the only elec-

tions are Party elections (such as for politburo membership). The competitive nature of these intra-party elections has changed over time. Now that Xi seems to have sufficient personal power to control the outcomes, elections are merely a mechanism to install his allies in key positions.

There is a big difference between rule by one person and rule by one large, self-perpetuating party that allows for some degree of internal "democracy" (the original Leninist model). Even when they occur behind closed doors, relatively free intra-party debates can produce wiser decisions and reflect the wishes of a larger share of the society.

But an even more relevant distinction is between autocracies

without open, contestable elections, and autocracies where opposition parties exist and participate in elections, however flawed they may be. In the latter case, the autocrat claims absolute power to rule when he (it is almost always a man) wins a nationwide election, but he also acknowledges the possibility that he would have to relinquish power following an electoral loss.

The "democratic" narrative that underpins this form of autocracy has its roots in an extreme interpretation of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (rather ambiguous) concept of the "general will." In the hands of an autocrat, the general will supposedly reflects the common interest of the entire population, implying that a majority of

citizens can make choices for the community as a whole without regard to the views and rights of minorities. Among the more vocal national leaders espousing this "majoritarian" doctrine today is Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Hungarians, in his view, have signalled their preference for illiberal democracy through elections. Not only is there democracy in Hungary, Orbán loudly proclaims; the term needs no modifiers.

Illiberal majoritarian democrats naturally reject principles such as checks and balances and the separation of powers (most notably an independent judiciary), viewing an electoral victory as wholly sufficient to justify their quasi-absolute rule. Former US

president Donald Trump's political narrative after the 2016 election followed this script. While he regretted that he did not have absolute power despite having triumphed over Hillary Clinton, he did not argue against citizens' right to choose their leaders through competitive elections, as a Leninist would. Rather, he wanted to turn his election victory into a licence to rule free from the constraints of a "liberal" system of government.

Intriguingly, even as they proclaim the superiority of autocratic governance, illiberal democrats depend on electoral victories for their legitimacy. Trump's claim that the 2020 election was "stolen" reflects this need.

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sport

Seeb thrash Sidab, Dhofar edge Al Oruba

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 1

Seeb, Al Suwaiq, Al Nasr, Al Rustaq, Dhofar, Nizwa, Sur and Fanja advanced and secured spots to quarterfinals of the 2021/2022 of HM Football Cup.

The draw of the last eight round will take place on Sunday at Seeb Stadium at 13:00.

Seeb thrashed the neighbours Ahli Sidab 8-0 to book ticket for the last-eight in style. With the huge triumph, Seeb sent a strong message to all the teams on chasing for their fourth title after they won the last cup in 1998.

Sultanate of Oman's national football player, Abdulaziz al Maqbali netted three goals (hat-trick), Marwan Taeab (two goals) and one goal by Mohsin al Ghassani, Eid al Farsi and Amjad al Harthi.

Salalah giants Dhofar moved to the next stage of the coveted cup competition as they stunned four-times winner Al Oruba 4-3 at Al Saada Stadium.

Omar al Malki was the star in Dhofar as he showed a top performance and scored all the winner's goals.

Despite guests leading in first half by 2-1, the hosts heroes managed to bounce back strongly in the second half and registered the victory to advance in quarterfinal.

In other fixtures, Al Suwaiq crashed out Oman club 2-1 at the Seeb Sports Stadium. Essam al Subhi and former Sultanate of Oman's team captain Ahmed Kanu netted the hosts goals which confirmed runner-up attendance in the next round of the top domestic competition.

Seeb thrashed the neighbours Ahli Sidab 8-0 to book ticket for the last-eight in style. With the huge triumph, Seeb sent a strong message to all the teams on chasing for their fourth title after they won the last cup in 1998

Al Nasr scraped past fighting Al Nahdha 1-0 at the former's home in Al Buraimi Sports Complex. Said al Ruzaiqi scored the winner after the perfect assistance from Saad Suhail.

The four-times winner, Sur, upset Bahla 4-3 in penalties as the regulation time ended in 1-1 draw at Sur Sports Complex.

At Al Rustaq Sports Complex, Rustaq players managed to book their ticket in the last-eight round as they won the neighbours Al Musannah 6-5 in penalties.

The regulation and extra times ended in a 1-1 draw. Al Musannah's player Hamood al Saadi received a red card in the second extra half. The Southern Batinah team will be chasing up for the first title in this season.

Nizwa knocked out two times winner Saham in 4-3 penalties as the regulation time finished in a goalless draw at Nizwa Sports Complex.

The nine times winner, Fanja, was the last team that joined to the quarterfinal of the prestigious competition after edging Salalah 7-8 in penalties as the regulation time ended in a goalless draw.



OHA friendly club tournament with Sri Lanka concludes



MUSCAT: Oman Hockey Association (OHA) concluded the friendly quartet hockey matches between Sultanate of Oman club and Sri Lankan club teams, under the auspices of Basil bin Ahmed al Rawas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth, at the hockey ground of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher.

Ahli Sidab and Suhar, the two teams that have qualified for His Majesty's Hockey Cup final, and Sri Lanka's Colombo and the military team, took part in the championship which was held in commemoration of 40 years of diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Sri Lanka.

On the final day, Suhar beat Colombo 9-1. The military team held Ahli Sidab to a 4-4 draw in the final before the military team won the match 6-4 through penalty shootout.

CONWAY HITS CENTURY ON RETURN TO PUT NZ AHEAD

WELLINGTON: Devon Conway celebrated his return from injury with a sparkling 122 on Saturday to propel New Zealand to 258-5 against Bangladesh on the opening day of the first test in Mount Maunganui.

Bangladesh claimed three wickets in the final session but world test champions New Zealand will be confident of a 300-plus score when Henry Nicholls resumes on 32 with Rachin Ravindra joining him on Sunday.

“It might deteriorate over time but I think tomorrow the wicket would be really nice to bat on,” Conway told reporters after the day’s play.

“Hopefully we as a team can capitalise on that.”

Electing to field, Bangladesh got an early breakthrough when Shoriful Islam dismissed Tom Latham, who is leading New Zealand in the absence of injured regular skipper Kane Williamson, in the fourth over.

Conway, who had been sidelined with a hand injury suffered during last year’s Twenty20 World Cup, helped the hosts weather the tricky morning session with his 138-run stand with Will Young.

“The two of us decided that we needed to be as patient as possible and identify the Bangladesh bowlers who were bowling really well in that period,” Conway said.

Young made 52 before running himself out but Conway could not



New Zealand's Devon Conway plays a shot on day one of the first Test against Bangladesh in Mount Maunganui. – AFP

be denied his hundred.

The left-hander pulled Taskin Ahmed for a single to bring up his second century in his fourth test match, taking his helmet off and raising his bat in celebration

before embracing batting partner Ross Taylor.

“To have Ross Taylor out in the middle when I achieved that milestone, it’s a very special feeling,” Conway said of the

retiring stalwart.

“It’ll be one of those things that will last in my memory for a very long time.”

Taylor, who will quit test cricket after the two-Test series

against Bangladesh, made 34 before becoming Shoriful’s second victim.

Conway’s patient innings, which included 16 boundaries and a six, came to an end when

“It might deteriorate over time but I think tomorrow the wicket would be really nice to bat on. Hopefully we as a team can capitalise on that

DEVON CONWAY
NZ batsman

SCOREBOARD

NEW ZEALAND	
T Latham c Liton b Shoriful	1
W Young (run out)	52
D Conway c Liton b Mominul	122
R Taylor c Shadman b Shoriful	31
H Nicholls (not out)	32
T Blundell b Ebadot	11
Extras (B-1, LB-3, W-2, NB-3)	9
Total (For 5 wks, 87.3 overs)	258
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-139, 3-189, 4-227, 5-258	
Bowling: Taskin 20-5-61-0, Shoriful 20-5-53-2, Ebadot 15-3-53-1, Mehidy 27-7-72-0, Shanto 2-0-10-0, Mominul 3-0-5-1	

Mominul Haq had him caught down the leg side.

Ebadot Hossain dismissed Tom Blundell with the final delivery of the day to lift the spirit in the touring camp.

— Reuters



Samay Barka, Blazers win volleyball titles

MUSCAT: Samay Barka clinched the men’s volleyball title in the Injaz Private School volleyball tournament.

In the final, Samay Barka beat Roman team by two sets 20-18, 20-15. In the women’s final, Blazers beat Slashers 20-17, 20-18, 15-13.

The tournament was organised by Khalil Balushi and Khalid Balushi with the participation of 14 teams.

The men’s and women’s volleyball tournament has been held in Injaz Private School, Ansab.



Khushi powers Ruwi, Sachin lifts Darsait on rainy day

MUSCAT: Oman star Mohammed Naseem Khushi’s 13-ball 41 not out and pacer Kaleemullah’s superb 3 for 22 powered Ruwi Rangers to a 16-run victory against Amerat Royals decided by Duckworth/ Lewis system in a rain-hit D20 Cricket League game at Oman Cricket Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

The highlight of Ruwi’s 177 for 7 was Khushi’s incredible hitting at number seven, smashing 5 sixes and 2 fours to lift the team’s total. Khalid Kail and Gustav Burger were the other notable scorers, contributing 40 each. Bilal Khan was the pick of Amerat bowlers, taking 3 for 25 whereas Mehran Khan and Rafi Ullah bagged two wickets each.

Amerat’s chase was hit by rain and the side was found to be 16 runs short of the required total in 7 overs when the game was stopped at 54 for 4. Kaleemullah’s three early blows kept Amerat in check, turning the game in Ruwi’s favour before it started pouring.

Brief Scores (D20): Ruwi Rangers 177 for 8 in 20 overs (Mohammed Naseem Khushi 41 - 2x4, 5x6, Khalid Kail 40 - 4x4, 2x6, Gustav Burger 40 - 4x4, 1x6, Bilal Khan 3-25, Mehran Khan 2-28, Rafi Ullah 2-41) beat Amerat Royals 54 for 4 in 7 overs (Vinayak Shukla 15 - 2x6, Kaleemullah 3-22) by 16 runs (D/L).

RAVINDA HELPS DARSAIT TO VICTORY

In the day’s first D20 League game at the same venue, Sachin’s Kumar’s excellent all-round show and Ravinda K’ratne’s brilliant 61 not out off 38 helped Darsait Titans to a comfortable 6-wicket win over Ghubrah Giants.

Mohammed Imran Latif topscored with an unbeaten 53 off 36 as Ghubrah posted 130 for 5 on the board. Shehbaz Naser batted well too, scoring 39 off 31. Sachin was quite impressive with the ball, taking 3 for 16.

Darsait surpassed the total comfortably, scoring



133 for 4 in 14.2 overs thanks to top knocks by Ravinda and Sachin (26 off 20).

Brief Scores (D20): Ghubra Giants 130 for 5 in 16 overs (Mohammed Imran 53 - 1x4, 5x6, Shehbaz Naser 39 - 2x4, 3x6, Sachin Kumar 3-16) lost to Darsait Titans 133 for 4 in 14.2 overs (Ravindra K’ratne 61 - 10x4, 1x6, Sachin Kumar 26 - 3x4, 1x6) by 6 wickets.

Results of matches played on Thursday:

Brief Scores (D20): Darsait Titans 145 for 6 in 20 overs (Ravindra K’ratne 48 - 2x4, 3x6, Khurram Khan 47 - 4x4, 3x6, Ganesh Chandrashekhar 2-31) beat Qurum Thunders 88 all out in 15.1 overs (Shoaib Khan 61 - 6x4, 3x6, Ahmed Fayyaz Butt 3-14, Amanpreet Singh 3-14) by 57 runs.

Brief Scores (D20): Azaiba XI 68 all out in 19.1 overs (Hammad Mirza 34 - 2x4, Adnan Ul Haq 2-18, Hemalkumar Tandel 2-20) lost to Amerat Royals 68 for 1 in 5.2 overs (Prathik Athavale 26 - 4x4, 1x6, Rafi Ullah 19 not out - 3x6) by 9 wickets (D/L).

Spain, Argentina secure easy wins at ATP Cup

SYDNEY: Spain and Argentina both won their ATP Cup ties with some ease as men's professional tennis returned for the 2022 season in the lucrative team tournament at Sydney's Olympic Park on Saturday.

Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut and Pablo Carreno Busta made light of the absence of Rafael Nadal with contrasting victories over Chileans Cristian Garin and Alejandro Tabilo.

Carreno Busta was forced to come from 0-3 down in both sets, and again from 1-3 in the decisive tiebreak, before overcoming tricky left-hander Tabilo 6-4 7-6 (4) in the first match of the year on Ken Rosewall Arena.

Bautista Agut then steamrollered world number 17 Garin 6-0 6-3 to give the Spaniards an unassailable lead in the Group A tie before Alejandro Davidovich Fokina and Pedro Martinez made it a 3-0 sweep with a tough 7-6(3) 4-6 10-7 win over Marcelo Tomas Barrios Vera and Alejandro Tabilo.

"It was very early on the first day of the year to play tennis," said Bautista Agut, the world number 19. "Today was a good start for me, I played a very solid game, I felt had a good rhythm, a good speed on the ball, I'm really happy."

Federico Delbonis earlier made light work of Aleksandre Metreveli with a 6-1 6-2 win at the Sydney Super Dome to give Argentina a 1-0 lead in their Group D tie against Georgia.

Diego Schwartzman then trounced Nikoloz Basilashvili by the same score before Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni beat Zura Tkemaladze and Saba Purtseladze, again 6-1 6-2, in the doubles to complete the 3-0 win.

In the evening session, Greece fell to a 2-1 loss to Poland as world



Spain's Pablo Carreno in action during his group stage match against Chile's Alejandro Tabilo. — Reuters

number four Stefanos Tsitsipas pulled out of his singles match with Hubert Hurkacz due to a niggling right elbow issue.

Kamil Majchrzak gave Poland the lead with a comfortable 6-1 6-4 win over Michail Pervolarakis

before world number nine Hurkacz swept aside Tsitsipas' replacement, Aristotelis Thanos, 6-1 6-2.

"I was expecting to play Stefanos and I was preparing tactics with my coach and Marcin

(Matkowski), so it was difficult when I found out," said Hurkacz.

"I'd never played (Thanos) before, or seen him play. He had a big serve and fortunately I was returning quite well and put pressure on him."

Tsitsipas, however, returned for the doubles rubber, partnering Pervolarakis to claim a hard-fought 6-4 5-7 10-8 win over Hurkacz and Jan Zielinski.

In the other Group A encounter, Filip Krajinovic and Nikola Cacic

Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut and Pablo Carreno Busta made light of the absence of Rafael Nadal with contrasting victories over Chileans Cristian Garin and Alejandro Tabilo

helped Serbia, who are without world number one Novak Djokovic, earn a 2-1 victory over Norway after downing Casper Ruud and Viktor Durasovic 7-6(3) 6-3 in the doubles decider.

The two teams had shared the singles rubbers, with Krajinovic overcoming Durasovic 6-2 7-5 in the opening match before world number eight Ruud saw off a spirited challenge from Dusan Lajovic 6-3 7-5 to level things up.

"It was a high-quality match from the beginning until the end," said Ruud.

"Near the end I got a bit nervous... I haven't been playing matches for four or five weeks now, so it is a bit difficult to get that rhythm going."

The third edition of the \$10 million tournament has 16 teams divided into four groups playing at two venues at Sydney's Olympic Park.

The absence of Djokovic, Nadal and Roger Federer for various reasons has robbed the event of some sparkle, but 14 of the world's top 20 players are in action as they prepare for the start of the Australian Open on January 17.

Daniil Medvedev, second in the world rankings behind Djokovic, will represent champions Russia in their opening Group B tie against France on Sunday. — Reuters

DeRozan buzzer beater lifts Bulls, LeBron hits 43 in win

WASHINGTON: Chicago's DeMar DeRozan sank a three-pointer at the buzzer to lift the Bulls over Indiana 108-106 on Friday, stretching their NBA win streak to six games, while LeBron James scored 43 points to spark a Los Angeles Lakers romp.

DeRozan added six assists, three rebounds and three steals while scoring 13 of his game-high 28 points in the fourth quarter as the Bulls improved to 23-10, matching Brooklyn for the Eastern Conference lead.

"I looked up at the clock, I said, 'I've got to make something happen,'" DeRozan said. "I just tried to get enough space to get it up. As soon as it left my hand it felt good."

DeRozan rated the 28-foot game-winning shot among his best buzzer beaters.

"I rank it up there," DeRozan said. "It was one of those games where it felt like nothing was going our way. It felt like we was getting beat up."

"But we grinded it out and won it on a big shot. It was a hell of a win to pull out."

The Bulls, missing coach Billy Donovan due to Covid-19, have thrived despite adversity.

"It's credit to our hard work," DeRozan said. "For our team to be able to hold all those things off and, at the end of the year, to be on top of our conference speaks volumes

I looked up at the clock, I said, 'I've got to make something happen,' DeRozan said. 'I just tried to get enough space to get it up. As soon as it left my hand it felt good'

DEMAR DEROZAN
Chicago Bulls

to what type of team we are."

In the NBA's final game of 2021 and the first game for James since turning 37 on Thursday, the four-time NBA champion delivered a season-high point total on 16-of-26 shooting, going 5-of-10 from 3-point range to lead the Lakers over visiting Portland 139-106.

James enjoyed his 67th career game with 40 or more points, with 27 points and 10 rebounds at halftime.

He contributed 14 rebounds, four assists, two steals and two blocked shots without a turnover in 29 minutes for the Lakers, seventh in the Western Conference at 18-19.

Lakers guard Russell Westbrook delivered his NBA-best ninth triple double of the season, and fourth in a row, with 15 points, 13 rebounds



Chicago Bulls guard Zach LaVine (8) blocks the shot of Indiana Pacers guard Duane Washington Jr. (4) in the second half at Gainbridge Fieldhouse. — USA Today Sports

and 12 assists.

Boston's Jaylen Brown and Marcus Smart each scored 24 points and Robert Williams had a triple double with 10 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists to power the Celtics over Phoenix 123-108.

The visiting Suns fell to 27-8, half a game behind Golden State

to stand second in the Western Conference, while the Celtics, whose 46 points off the bench were twice what Phoenix scored, improved to 17-19.

Miami's Jimmy Butler returned from a sprained ankle to score 37 points while Turkish rookie centre Omer Yurtseven had 10 points and

13 rebounds to spark the Heat to a 120-110 victory at Houston.

NO FANS AT RAPTORS WIN

With new Covid-19 regulations in Ontario keeping fans from attending, Toronto got 31 points and nine assists from Fred VanVleet in his return from the

virus to beat the Los Angeles Clippers 116-108.

O G Anunoby added 26 points and Pascal Siakam added 25 and a career-high 19 rebounds plus seven assists for the Raptors.

A video tribute to Spaniard Serge Ibaka, a former Raptor star, played to silence in the empty arena.

The Raptors and Clippers each have four players sidelined by Covid-19 while the NBA has about 120 players out in health and safety protocols.

Utah's Donovan Mitchell scored 39 points, Croatian Bojan Bogdanovic added 24 points and 12 rebounds and Frenchman Rudy Gobert had 14 points and 16 rebounds in the Jazz's 120-108 home victory over Minnesota.

Atlanta's Trae Young scored 35 points and passed out 11 assists while Clint Capela added 18 points and 23 rebounds to power the Hawks over host Cleveland 121-118. The Cavaliers had 35 points off the bench from Kevin Love.

Memphis guard Ja Morant scored 30 points to power the Grizzlies over visiting San Antonio 118-105 while Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 23 points to lead Oklahoma City over visiting New York 95-80.

Latvian Kristaps Porzingis scored 29 points and grabbed nine rebounds to lead Dallas in a 112-96 victory at Sacramento. — AFP



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Suhar Industrial City signs RO 157m worth projects



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 1

Suhar Industrial City — part of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) — signed land leases for the establishment of four key projects worth investments totalling RO 157 million during December 2021.

These new investments will contribute to, among other things, the manufacture of metal clamps; iron and steel casting; metal smelting, rolling, extrusion and refining; the provision of commercial, residential, recreational and logistics facilities, green spaces and public facilities and services.

The announcement comes as Suhar Industrial City adds a seventh phase to its sprawling complex on the North Al Batinah coast. Infrastructure for the seventh is due for completion in Q2 2022.

Fiscally prudent 2022 State Budget unveiled with lowest deficit since 2014

POSITIVE TRENDS: This year's budget deficit of RO 1.5 billion is well within the range projected in the Medium Term Fiscal Plan (MTFP): Ministry of Finance

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 1

The Omani government unveiled a fiscally prudent Annual State General Budget for 2022 with revenues totalling an estimated RO 10.580 billion based on an assumed price of \$50 a barrel (versus \$45/barrel for 2021).

The contribution of Oil & Gas is estimated at RO 7.24 billion, constituting 68 per cent of total revenues, while non-oil revenues will account for the remaining 32 per cent (RO 3.34 billion), the Ministry of Finance noted in its Budget statement issued on Saturday.

Total public spending is set at RO 12.13 billion, which is two per cent higher than the corresponding figure for 2021. This will include an allocation of RO 1.3 billion towards the cost of servicing the country's public debt.

The deficit of RO 1.5 billion, representing 15 per cent of total expenditure [about 5 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP)], is well within the range projected



in the Medium Term Fiscal Plan (MTFP).

Part of the deficit will be financed from external and internal borrowings, while the rest of the deficit, estimated to be RO 400 million, will be funded through withdrawals from the State's reserves.

In a statement, Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance, said that preliminary data point to the fact that the budget deficit for

2022 is set to be the lowest deficit since 2014.

Al Habsi credited the lower deficit to the government's resolve to adhere to the roadmap outlined by the MTFP, both at the level of revenues and spending, with the overall aim of meeting the main objectives and increasing the confidence of lenders and credit rating agencies.

The Minister of Finance explained that the Budget 2022

was drafted in a manner that it conforms with the targets and broad goals of the 10th Five Year Plan (2021-2025), representing the first phase of Oman Vision 2040, the country's long-term strategy to achieve fiscal sustainability and motivate economic diversification sectors. He stressed spending levels will be maintained towards basic services such as education, health, housing and social welfare.

This is in addition to maintaining efforts to bolster the business climate in the country and expanding partnership projects undertaken with the private sector.

Any surplus accruing from oil revenues rising above the assumed oil price benchmark will be prioritised towards slashing the deficit and cutting the country's public debt, he added.

(With inputs from ONA)

Muscat Stock Exchange ends in positive territory

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 1

The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) 30 Index closed in the positive territory after having fallen for four consecutive years, from 2017 through to 2020, according to investment advisory firm Ubhar Capital (U-Capital).

As is the case with its Gulf peers, the Sultanate of Oman's economic prospects are closely dependent on oil price movements, and this correlation is also visible in the country's stock market performance, it said.

In 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic roiled the global economies and led to a 21.5 per cent drop in Brent crude price, the MSX 30 Index fell 8.1 per cent year-on-year (YoY) in 2020. However, countries around the globe reopened gradually,



supported partially by the vaccination drive, resulting in an economic growth rebound, amid elevated oil prices as well as improved demand outlook.

The Omani economy is also

recovering and accordingly, its nominal GDP during 9M21 jumped 12.7 per cent YoY. A pickup in the economic activity has also positively impacted businesses and MSX-listed

companies have registered an increase in their net profits during 9M21 on a YoY basis worth about 5 per cent, largely supported by then financial and industrial sectors.

These developments have resulted in the appreciation of the MSX 30 index which rose 12.87 per cent year-on-year (YoY), said U-Capital.

"Going into 2022, the Omani stock exchange is expected to continue moving in an upward trajectory, given the expectations that the Sultanate's economy will improve further. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has forecasted Sultanate of Oman's real GDP to grow by 2.9 per cent in 2022 vs an expected 2.5 per cent in 2021.

Continued opening of the economy, rising vaccination coverage, and stimulus and initiatives undertaken by the government in the recent past are expected to lead to an acceleration in the economic activity," the investment advisory firm remarked.

A probable recovery in

the stock market will also be conducive to the revival of Initial Public Offer (IPO) activity, says U-Capital. "While there are no public announcements yet, MSX may see more IPOs in 2022 after registering an IPO of Oman REIT Fund at the start of 2021 and another IPO of Oman Reinsurance (OMANRe) towards the end of 2021 and NIL in 2020. For instance, in July 2021, unconfirmed reports said Oman state energy company OQ is considering selling its partial/full stake in its drilling unit by floating it on MSX.

Similarly, before the pandemic struck, there were talks of the government offloading its stake in some electricity distribution companies. Some of these plans might see the light of day in 2022 in case the overall economic and financial situation turns out as expected."

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MUSCAT: The K5's stunning design and exceptional profile draw instant attention. With its power-packed performance, the K5 uses every opportunity to rise above the ordinary and make every experience, outstanding.

The K5's powerful and angular design language represents another chapter of boldness and passion for the brand. From the side, the K5's low-slung and fastback silhouette confirms the impression it was made to excite, highlighted by a chrome garnish that spans the roofline and wraps around the rear glass.

A number of other exterior design traits give the K5 an unexpected level of visual impact. Giving the K5 its stunning looks are features that include LED Headlamps, LED Daytime Running Lights, LED Front Fog Lamps, LED Rear Fog Lamps, 17" Alloy Wheels and Dual LED Headlamps.

Enhancing on-road experiences in the K5 are features like Auto Cruise Control, Auto Light Control, LED Front Fog Lamps, LED Rear Fog Lamps, LED Rear Combination Lamps, Power Windows, Electric Folding Mirrors, Keyless Entry System and more.

In terms of performance, the K5 makes a fine mark with a 2.0L MPI engine dishing out 150 HP and 19.6 KG.M. Torque. This is paired to a 6-speed Automatic Transmission.

Harmonising the open layout of the cockpit is a newly designed infotainment

display that seamlessly stretches into the instrument panel, creating a futuristic, three-dimensional layout and driver-centric space.

Creating an inviting and comfortable interior are a range of features that include Tinted Glass, Tilt & Telescopic Steering, Radio with USB, Audio Remote Control, Driver's Seat Height Adjuster, Rear AC Vents, Leather AT Knob and more.

While the K5 does its bit to increase the excitement on every journey, its range of advanced safety features ensure you make the most of your experiences.

The K5 is equipped with Driver and Front Passenger Airbags, Anti-Lock Braking System (ABS), Electronic Stability Program (ESP), Tyre Pressure Monitoring System (TPMS), Front and Rear Parking Assist System and Electric Parking Brake (EPB) with Auto Hold.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in the Sultanate of Oman, provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers.

Excellent product attributes and unmatched facilities easily ensure their absolute satisfaction, every mile of the way. No wonder then that Reliable International Automotive has been ranked amongst the top Kia distributors worldwide and has been honoured with prestigious accolades including the 'Good Partnership' award, 'Family Like Care Service' award and 'Kia 'Distributor of Distinction' award.

MSX closes 2021 higher by 12.87%

MUSCAT: The MSX30 Index ended the week higher by 0.11 per cent. All sub-indices ended lower except for the Services Index which rose by 1.07 per cent week-on-week. The Financial & Industrial sub-indices closed lower by 0.34 per cent and 0.23 per cent, respectively. MSX Shariah Index closed lower by 1.35 per cent.

This week also marks the end of the year 2021 for the Muscat Stock Exchange, which has closed higher by 12.87 per cent year-on-year (YoY), reversing its annual losing streak since 2016.

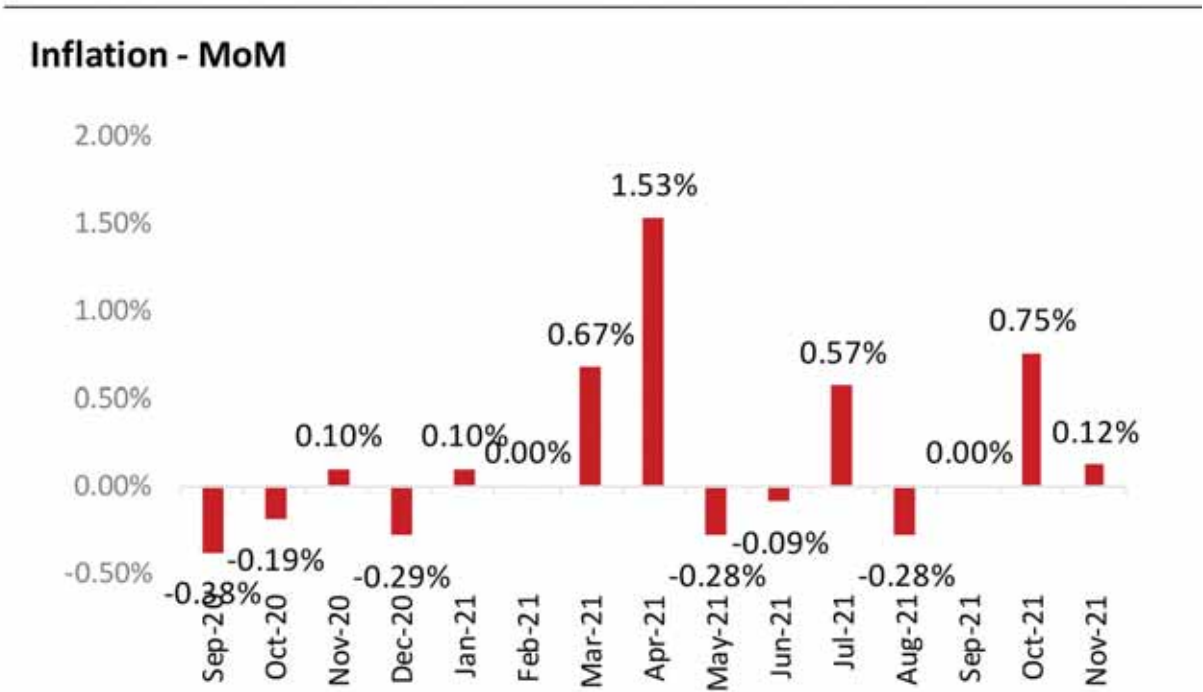
During the week, Ooredoo Oman announced that it has entered into a Roaming Pact with Vodafone Oman. The 3-year agreement will enable Vodafone Oman to use Ooredoo Oman's national roaming services.

During the week, Oman Arab Bank disclosed that it will redeem its Perpetual Subordinated Bonds issued on December 29, 2016.

The bank had issued Perpetual Subordinated Bonds OAB PERPET. SUB (OABI) for RO 30 million on December 29, 2016, at interest rate of 7.75 per cent pa which is listed in the MSX Bonds market.

Pursuant to 6.8(b) (Bank's Call Option) of the terms and conditions of the bonds, the bank is hereby issuing an irrevocable notice to the holders of these bonds that it will redeem all the bonds on January 29, 2022 (the redemption date) at their principal amount together with the interest accrued to but excluding the redemption date.

Following the redemption, the bonds will be delisted from MSX bonds market.



Sources: NCSI

The bank had earlier issued RO 96.25 million worth of Tier Perpetual bonds in June this year at a coupon rate of 7.625 per cent per annum, most likely to replace the issuance of 2016.

The bank's Capital adequacy ratio at end-9M21 stood at 17.74 per cent, while Tier 1 Capital ratio stood at 16.9 per cent. The inflation rate of consumer prices in the Sultanate of Oman increased by 2.8 per cent during November 2021 compared to the same month in 2020, and the rate increased by 0.12 per cent compared to October 2021, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion issued a decision to deduct a percentage of budgets of establishments and companies that are allocated to

corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes and channel the sums to Oman Charitable Organisation (OCO).

The decision (205/2021) states that this percentage will enable OCO to play a stronger role in providing charity services to the entitled social segments.

A utility-scale green hydrogen project due to be launched in the coming years at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm is anticipated to yield 1 million metric tonnes per annum (mtpa) of green ammonia when it is fully built, according to the venture's key partners.

Hypot Duqm — a partnership of OQ (the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman) and DEME Concessions (the renewable energy and offshore marine infrastructure arm of Belgium's DEME Group) — is set to be the first of many

world-scale, green hydrogen projects slated to come on stream in the country over next couple of decades.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and Fisheries Development Oman (FDO) Company celebrated laying the foundation of the tuna fishing vessels at the Indian Ocean.

The vessels, owned by Al Wusta Fishery Industries, aim to catch 20,000 tonnes of different tuna fish annually in the first phase. The catch will enable the Sultanate of Oman to get its share of the living aquatic resources in the international waters of the Indian Ocean.

Fisheries, which is one of the vital sources of national income for the Sultanate of Oman, is the second source of national income after oil.

(Courtesy: U-Capital)

Al Nukhba enhances premium banking portfolio

MUSCAT: In a bid to deliver more innovative and value-added services to its premium customers, ahlibank offers 'Al Nukhba' banking account, with a range of exclusive benefits.

Al Nukhba brings with it an advanced and personal banking experience that keeps pace with customers' lifestyles and expectations.

"Al Nukhba account aims to provide many exclusive privileges and benefits to our premium customers. The account reflects our commitment to truly understand the individual needs of our customers and accordingly enhance our product and service offerings. Our premium banking customers can take advantage of a range of financial and non-financial privileges that suit their banking needs and enhance the value of their wealth,"



Suhaila al Busaidi, Head of Premium Banking, ahlibank, said.

Muneer al Balushi, AGM, Head of Retail Distribution, says, "At ahlibank, we recognise that premium customers need special solutions to manage their accounts. In this context, we work as partners for our customers by offering

distinctive and innovative offers that live up to their expectations. We are also aware of the growing need for smart solutions that keep pace with today's premium lifestyles and evolved choices. The market and customer insights that we gather help us understand customers' feedback and work towards addressing them, which enhance our position as one of the most preferred bank in the Sultanate of Oman."

Al Nukhba account holders can conduct their banking transactions in dedicated Al Nukhba service centres, enjoy free SMS, Internet and mobile banking services, 24-hour call centre support. A dedicated relationship manager is available at all times to provide the highest level of services that meet the banking needs of this category.

Chevrolet Traverse: Most spacious and comfortable SUV

MUSCAT: Offering the ultimate in space, convenience and style, the Chevrolet Traverse resonates with large families, drawn by its 3-row configuration that can accommodate eight passengers in plush comfort.

Roominess aside, this popular offering from the renowned Chevy stable also comes with bold, refined looks, advanced connectivity technologies, high-class entertainments and top-of-the-line safety features – trappings that are unmatched for a mid-size SUV in its segment.

With EMI starting as low as RO 225 for SLT trim which has features like leather seats and panoramic sunroof standard, the Traverse offers great value for

money.

From its expansive size to its striking looks, every facet of the revamped Traverse is designed to impress. With an overall length of 204.3 in, width of 78.6 in and height of 70.7 in, the SUV exudes regal strength.

These purposeful proportions are supplemented by the brand's premium cues such as chrome accents, LED signature lighting and D-Optic LED headlamps.

Standard with the Traverse is a 3.6L V6 engine with nine-speed automatic transmission, delivering 305 horsepower and 260 Nm of torque.

A key feature is the new Traction Mode Select, which allows the driver to make real-



time adjustments to the vehicle's driving mode to account for varying road conditions.

If the exteriors are inspirational, the interiors are luxuriously comfortable and accommodating. With its longer

wheelbase, the Traverse has few peers in its segment. The cabin is ergonomically optimised to enhance convenience and versatility, both in terms of passenger volume and cargo room.

Third-row legroom is the most spacious in its segment. The Traverse is also designed and equipped to keep passengers connected and entertained on the road.

Latest connectivity technologies include available 8-inch-diagonal MyLink infotainment systems designed to support Apple CarPlay. Passengers also have access to USB charging ports in all three seating rows, available wireless charging and steering wheel-mounted phone and audio controls.

As with all Chevrolet models, safety takes top priority. Traverse comes fitted with a comprehensive suite of safety technologies. Available features include

Surround Vision, D-Optic LED headlamps, Lane Keep Assist with Lane Departure Warning, Front Pedestrian Braking, Rear Cross Traffic Alert, Side Blind Zone Alert and Rear Seat Reminder.

"Ample space, comfort and safety combine to make the Chevrolet Traverse a favourite with families whose lifestyles include weekend getaways or extended trips into the countryside," says Mandeep Singh, General Manager, exclusive distributors of Chevrolet in the Sultanate of Oman.

"Coupled with a very attractive pricing, it is great value for money." Customers can check out the stylish Traverse at any of OTE Group's Chevrolet showrooms around the Sultanate of Oman.



Oil posts biggest annual gain since at least 2016



The sun sets behind an oil pump outside Saint-Fiacre, France. — Reuters

NEW YORK: Oil prices fell on Friday but were set to post their biggest annual gains since at least 2016, spurred by the global economic recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic slump and producer restraint, even as infections reached record highs worldwide.

Brent crude futures settled down \$1.75, or 2.2 per cent, at \$77.78 a barrel. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures dropped \$1.78, or 2.31 per cent, to \$75.21 a barrel.

Brent ended the year up 50.5 per cent, its biggest gain since 2016, while WTI posted a 55.5 per cent gain, the strongest performance for the benchmark contract since 2009, when prices soared more than 70 per cent.

Both contracts touched their 2021 peak in October, with Brent at \$86.70 a barrel, the highest since 2018, and WTI at \$85.41 a barrel, the highest since 2014. "This year was a story of global recovery for petroleum products," said John Kilduff, a partner at Again Capital Management in New York.

"The oil market continues to be highly reactive to developments on the pandemic front — we're not out of the woods yet, but we are close to pre-pandemic demand levels."

Global oil prices are expected to rise further next year as jet fuel demand catches up. "We've had Delta and Omicron and all manner of lockdowns

and travel restrictions, but demand for oil has remained relatively firm," said Australian brokerage firm CommSec's Chief Economist Craig James. "You can attribute that to the effects of stimulus supporting demand and restrictions on supply."

However, after rising for several straight days, oil prices stalled on Friday as Covid-19 cases soared to new pandemic highs across the globe, from Australia to the United States, stoked by the highly transmissible Omicron coronavirus variant.

US health experts warned Americans to prepare for severe disruptions in coming weeks, with infection rates likely to worsen amid increased holiday travel, New Year celebrations and school reopenings following winter breaks.

A survey of 35 economists and analysts forecast Brent crude would average \$73.57 a barrel in 2022, about 2 per cent lower than the \$75.33 consensus in November.

It is the first reduction in the 2022 price forecast since the August poll. With oil hovering near \$80, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, Russia and allies — together called Opec+ — will probably stick to their plan to add 400,000 barrels per day of supply in February when they meet on January 4, four sources said. — Reuters

Vodafone Oman launches next-generation digital services

New positioning: Prominent telecom brand unveils first-of-its-kind '77 launch offer' with attractive global features

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 1

Vodafone Oman announced on Thursday the launch of its service operations in the Sultanate of Oman, under the patronage of His Highness Sayyid Azzan Kais Tarik al Said.

"Connecting for a better future is our company's purpose. We set out to be the pioneers of digital innovation and sustainable growth in our community," said Bader Zidi, CEO of Vodafone in Oman.

"Our main objective is to advance digital progress, initially by bringing next-generation 5G network and cloud service and then subsequently going into ecosystems that reach far beyond telecommunication."

Vodafone is positioned as Oman's premier technology company, digitalising lifestyles and society."

Vodafone brings the best of the world to the Sultanate Oman in a relevant and uniquely Omani way. Even before the launch, meaningful in-country value was delivered through employment (95 per cent Omanisation) and an amazing local partnership ecosystem across key sectors. The company's focus is on giving opportunities to small and medium enterprises and the country's youth.

Diego Massidda, CEO of Vodafone Partner Markets and Vodafone Carrier Services, said: "We are delighted to welcome the Sultanate of Oman to our global Partner Market family. Consumers will now benefit from unmatched global Vodafone services such as roaming, international calling



Our main objective is to advance digital progress, initially by bringing next-generation 5G network and cloud service and then subsequently going into ecosystems that reach far beyond telecommunication

BADER ZIDI
CEO, Vodafone Oman



and next-generation digital applications."

Vodafone's brand positioning, under the slogan, "Together We Can", emphasises how people, connectivity and technology can address the challenges faced individually and as a society. It demonstrates the company's profound belief that the partnership between technology and society can build a better future.

"With our launch, we are redefining the way people

experience communication by eliminating customer service pain points in the industry. Big Data Analytics and extensive market research tell us that customers want radically different, innovative and transparent products.

I am excited to unveil our 77 launch offer, the first-of-its-kind offering with attractive global features to benefit our customers," said Jan Holzberg, Commercial Director of Vodafone Oman.

Vodafone's exclusive launch offer includes 77GB of data, 777 local voice minutes and 777 local SMS for a period of 77 days. Customers can enjoy the benefits in the Sultanate of Oman and on Vodafone networks worldwide at no extra cost.

The full period of 77 days is available for a one-time payment of RO 9. The offer is valid until January 31, 2022.

Vodafone is now available across the Sultanate of Oman through the My Vodafone Application on Google Play Store and the App Store and in more than 3,500 outlets across the country. The full list can be found on www.vodafone.om

Vodafone Oman was established through a strategic partnership between the Oman Future Telecommunication Company and Vodafone International, one of the largest providers of mobile, fixed, broadband and digital TV services.

In 2021, the Company obtained a Class I Licence to establish and operate public mobile telecommunications services in the Sultanate of Oman, becoming the third telecom operator in the local market.

Sweden's Maha Energy to drill 8 wells in Omani Block 70

KEY GOAL: Potential farm-down of parts of Mafraq field to be finalised in Q1

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Swedish upstream Oil & Gas firm Maha Energy has announced that it plans to drill as many as eight wells during 2022, targeting the Mafraq heavy oil reservoir in Block 70 in the central part of the Sultanate of Oman

The announcement came in a preliminary '2022 Capital Plan' published by the Stockholm-headquartered international energy firm over the weekend.

Maha Energy made its maiden foray into the Sultanate of Oman's upstream hydrocarbon sector in October 2019 when it signed an Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) with the Omani government,



represented by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals for Block 70.

The relatively small 639 sq km concession, previously held by Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), includes the promising shallow, undeveloped Mafraq

heavy oil field.

Of the eight wells envisaged for drilling in Block 70 this year, two will be appraisal wells designed to acquire reservoir data, the company said, noting that the wells are unlikely to be placed on

test production. The remaining six wells are proposed to be horizontal pilot wells that will test the Mafraq reservoir's deliverability.

Additionally, a temporary Extended Well Test (EWT) package is proposed to be

Of the eight wells envisaged for drilling in Block 70 this year, two will be appraisal wells designed to acquire reservoir data

procured and constructed to process any output during the well testing of the pilot wells, according to the company.

Significantly, a potential farm-down of parts of Block 70 will be progressed early in 2022, Maha Energy said. A farm-down takes place when a licensed exploration company sells a share of its interest in a hydrocarbon asset to one or more companies, thereby enabling the latter to participate in the investment costs and technological challenges of producing hydrocarbons from that asset.

"A non-binding term sheet has been signed that contemplates a potential farm-down of Block-70. This farm-down is expected to close during Q1 2022 and all potential production from Block-70 assumes this farm-down occurs," Maha Energy stated.

Per the terms of the EPSA pact with the Omani government, Maha Energy is the operator of Block 70 with a 100 per cent working interest.

However, in the event of a commercial discovery of oil or gas, the six-year agreement can be upgraded into a 15-year production licence extendable for a further five years.

According to Maha Energy, the Mafraq reservoir, located at a depth of around 430 metres, is estimated to contain between 185-280 million barrels of original oil in place (OOIP). The company also has an operational presence in Canada, United States and Brazil.

Climate M&A will shift from risk to opportunity

Climate-change dealmaking is about to get a lot more legit. Green-tinged transactions more than tripled in value in 2021 to \$164 billion by early December, per Refinitiv, though there's no standard definition for what merits the colour. There has, though, been a dearth in genuinely environmentally useful tie-ups. Expect more to emerge.

Some transactions claiming a climate rationale are just ecological virtue signalling. Santos boss Kevin Gallagher argues his firm's recent \$6 billion embrace read more of Oil Search will help to "successfully navigate the transition to a lower carbon future", yet he'll increase fossil-gas drilling more than 45 per cent to get there.

Special-purpose acquisition companies, meanwhile, dominate the eco-friendly deals list, topped by multi-billion-dollar swoops for electric-vehicle makers Polestar and Lucid.

These, though, are more capital-raising public listings — albeit by the SPAC door — than mergers.

Climate-risk avoidance has been the biggest driver for the past two years, like the \$50 billion creation of carmaker Stellantis. Ditto BHP's \$16 billion oil-and-gas sale to Woodside Petroleum and offloading of coal assets, or Anglo American's Thungela Resources coal miner spinoff. These mitigate corporate exposures. They don't tackle overall greenhouse-gas emissions.

That'll be the next big M&A thing. It may involve, for instance, upstart electric-vehicle makers like Lucid, Polestar or Rivian Automotive combining.

Large environmental companies like \$66 billion Ecolab and \$22 billion Xylem have a history of making bolt-on acquisitions. They're potential prey as well as predator for conglomerates like Danaher and Honeywell. Software could be in the mix too: \$61 billion Autodesk in February bought H2O data-infrastructure specialist Innovyze for \$1 billion.

Such capabilities could interest green-reeping tech giants like Microsoft or Alphabet.

Financial institutions need environmental data, too. Some 450 joined the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero, but few have all the resources to assess client portfolios in detail.

— Reuters

Some transactions claiming a climate rationale are just ecological virtue signalling



MOON CRUISIN'

The Carnival Vista cruise ship sails during a Super Pink Full Moon in Miami Beach, Florida. Christmas shows cancelled, planes unable to take off: the Omicron variant of the coronavirus has multiplied the problems for the US economy and could contribute to a shortage of workers and even higher prices in the country. "We are starting to see the first signs of the impact of the Omicron on the economy," mainly in the service sector such as bars and restaurants, Oren Klachkin, an economist at Oxford Economics, said. — AFP

3 tips to start a fashion collection



STEFANO VIRGILLI
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THE WORLD IS "FLOODED" WITH GARMENTS OF ALL SORTS. FROM THE CHEAPEST TO THE MOST EXCLUSIVE LUXURY BRANDS, ALL STRIVE TO BE AS APPEALING AS POSSIBLE

Starting a fashion collection is not an easy task. The world is "flooded" with garments of all sorts. From the cheapest to the most exclusive luxury brands, all strive to be as appealing as possible.

But what are the principles upon which one can start and launch successfully a fashion brand? This is the question that *Oman Observer* reader Priya asked me on LinkedIn.

She was unsure about her distribution strategy. So I suggested that she first worked at market research, figuring out what type of opportunities are available. The Sultanate of Oman has a standardised traditional outfit.

This could be seen as a limitation for a foreigner wanting to start a new clothing line. Definitely, if we were to look at the mere numbers, the largest majority of the Omani nationals, are less inclined to buy non-traditional clothes, especially now that travel opportunities have severely been limited.

However, there is a flip side of the coin. Priya could find a small niche market with a strong demand for non-traditional clothes, due to scarcity of alternatives.

She told me that she had already

designed some female garments with floral patterns and natural prints.

So we agreed that the majority of her customers could be a mix of cultures, although the Indian community could be her primary target for the initial distribution in the Sultanate of Oman.

Moreover, she came up with a brand name, combining her initials with a Hindi word. Having cleared the market questions with Priya, here were some generic rule of thumb principles that could be applied to any fashion brand: A good way to address entry level market as well as those clients willing to pay more for a premium feeling, is to launch both a pret-a-porter and a couture collection.

These are both French words that refer loosely to "ready to wear" and "bespoke".

By doing so, fashion brands can be appealing to different segments of the market. For example, 'D&G' is the more affordable collection of Dolce e Gabbana. The same goes for 'Armani Jeans' and Giorgio Armani, 'CK' and Calvin Klein, etc.

The definition of "fashion design" is a bit of an oxymoron. Fashion itself is linked to seasonal styles, thus mutable, while design is not.

For example the famous Barcelona Chair, which belongs to Design, was designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich in 1929, and still perfectly palatable for architect in 2022. But clothes produced in 1929 would look awkwardly outdated if wore today.

Thus, fashion stylist (a more appropriate term) should come up with bite size collections in line with current trends. Conceptualising and producing evergreen accessories and clothes is a goal that only a handful of fashion stylist have ever managed to achieve.

Niches create loyal customers willing to pay more. I speak as a consumer here. There is one particular brand of shoes that I fancy. This month I bought my 5th pair. I find this particular brand, the most comfortable.

Similarly petite or plus size women, can find in a niche fashion brand the type of clothes that can hardly be found elsewhere.

To conclude, Priya should aim for a niche to build brand recognition. Perhaps limiting her collection to a handful of colours at first, so that customers will soon identify her style.

(The writer is a member of the International Press Association)

The selective Sovietisation of American capitalism



AMAR BHIDE

The author, a Professor of Business at Tufts University, is completing a book on Knightian uncertainty

Likening today's capitalist economies to the communist bloc of yesteryear may seem far-fetched.

What could the free market possibly have in common with Soviet-style central planning? In fact, the comparison increasingly offers useful insights into what has become of the winning side since the end of the Cold War.

Consider the "soft budget constraints" that socialist state-owned enterprises (SOEs) used to enjoy and that turned out to be one of the main reasons why Soviet-bloc economies failed. Similar financial conditions are becoming pervasive in capitalist America.

As the Hungarian Marxist apostate János Kornai famously argued, SOEs could ignore losses and consumer preferences because they could always count on the state to keep them afloat.

Kornai's thesis was popular with the Chinese reformers of the 1980s: seeking to make SOEs more responsive to the market, they "hardened" companies' budget constraints.

By contrast, capitalist America seems to be on the same misbegotten path as the Soviet economies.

Though it is starting from a different place, the result is the same. Budget constraints are softening, and capital is increasingly being funneled towards the fashionable and the well-connected fantasists and schemers.

To be sure, borrowing can, up to a point, energise capitalist enterprises. Contrary to what one reads in introductory economics textbooks, real-world consumers' budgets aren't capped, and venturesome consumers can borrow to pay for the next new hot item. By consuming beyond their

means, they boost the demand for iPhones and Teslas, creating incentives for innovators.

Likewise, Tesla and other upstart businesses often rely on external funding, not profits, to advance their innovations, just as governments issue bonds to help pay for highways, bridges, harbours and airports. Savers also benefit.

Instead of stuffing surplus cash into mattresses, they can profitably cover the financing needs of consumers, businesses and governments. But too much financial flexibility can be toxic.

Though individuals, businesses and governments can reasonably predict next month's wages, revenues and tax receipts (respectively), they can only guess at their capacity to meet obligations many years from now.

The more optimistic one's forecast, the greater one's willingness to spend beyond one's

current means or invest more than just one's retained earnings.

In principle, financiers' due diligence should impose countervailing limits on this overextension. But estimating creditworthiness and investment returns is not an exact science, and competition in the financial sector can produce a race to the bottom as borrowers flock to the most lenient creditors.

Savers who are too sensible to speculate have fallen behind. So, too, have the businesses that resisted the temptation of cheap money.

Under current conditions, their less prudent competitors can pay more for scarce employees and other resources.

What kind of reckoning capitalism faces — or when — is impossible to predict.

In the end, Kornai's Hungary failed slowly, not suddenly. It and other Soviet-style economies that

fed the "investment hunger" of favoured SOEs kept shop shelves bare of the goods that consumers wanted and that less-connected producers might have supplied.

In the absence of wartime or 1970s-style price controls of the kind imposed by president Richard Nixon, such shortages and rationing regimes seem unlikely in the capitalist West.

The current inflationary surge may yet subside as supply-chain bottlenecks ease, while the US Federal Reserve forestalls another financial meltdown.

But staunchly defending stock markets simply extends the state-sponsored misallocation of capital.

And, unfortunately, the current crop of central bankers seem to lack the resolve that enabled the late Paul Volcker to harden financial constraints when he led the Fed four decades ago.

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features

Emphasising the status of women through Calligraphy

Omani women calligraphers opened their first collective exhibition at Bait al Zubair. It was the result of a relentless pursuit towards success and it is unique...**P20**



CONSERVATION

READ



THE HANDMAID'S TALE
BY MARGARET ATWOOD

The Handmaid's Tale was published in 1985. The book, set in New England in the near future, posits a Christian fundamentalist theocratic regime in the former United States that arose as a response to a fertility crisis.

Rare leopard captured in northern Iraq

AN ENDANGERED LEOPARD captured in Iraq's mountainous north had its hind leg amputated on Friday following a trap-inflicted wound. The Persian leopard, taken in a day earlier in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region near the border with Turkey, had injured two people, said Colonel Jamal Saado, head of the environmental protection police in Dohuk

province. Residents of a village near the town of Zakho lost around 20 sheep before realising a leopard was attacking their flocks, he said. The big cat sustained a wound to its back leg when it was caught in a shepherd's trap, but managed to escape before villagers helped police track it down. Saado said the leopard was given anaesthet-



ic before it was captured. "We had two or three similar cases in Arbil province" several years ago, he said,

adding that an animal of the same subspecies had previously been found dead near a village in Dohuk province.

Persian leopards are a panther sub-species native to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and the Caucasus. They are extremely rare and have been listed as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Fewer than 1,000 are believed to exist in the wild, with another 200 in captivity. Veterinarian Soleiman Tamr, who conducted the amputation at Dohuk zoo on Friday, said the animal weighed around 90-100 kilograms (200-220 pounds). "We will monitor it for a long time," said the vet, who also heads an animal protection society in Iraqi Kurdistan. "If it can't be returned to the wild, it will live at the zoo," he said. — **AFP**



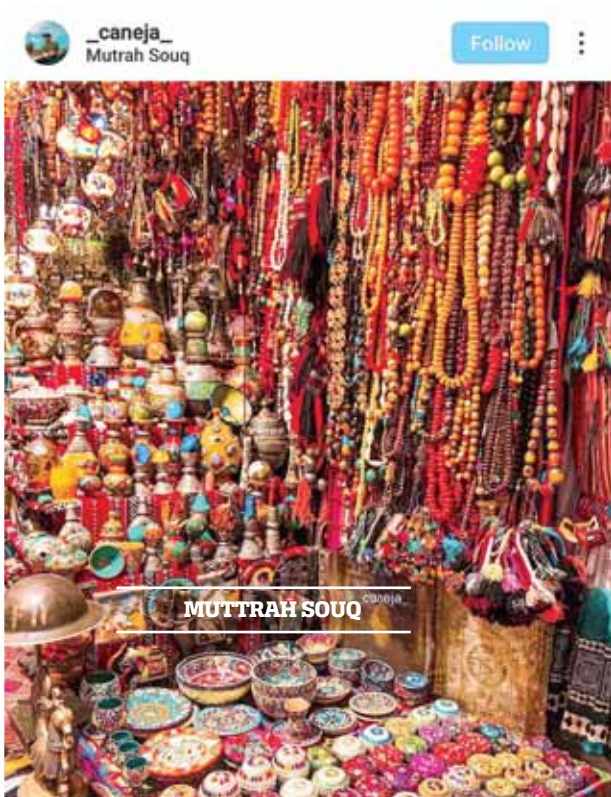
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FEATURE

Britain's Black doll makers rush to meet demand for diversity

BRITISH ENTREPRENEUR Jodi Vernon never intended to become a toy maker. But after her daughter Clarke was born, she struggled to find Black dolls that represented her family in toy shops packed with white-skinned, blue-eyed figures.

The last straw came when she went into a second-hand shop in London and was offered a goliwig doll — a 19th century-era caricature inspired by Black-faced minstrels that has long been considered racist.

"I just wanted something I could put in the buggy that was representing her," Vernon, 31, said.

She created Clarke's Closet, an online shop selling Black rag dolls and accessories, in 2014.

"All these toy stores don't understand that they're missing a big trick — there are so many Black women and Black parents wanting a Black doll for our children," Vernon said.

Mattel, one of the world's largest toy companies, has been selling Black dolls for decades, and there is a growing market for a more diverse range.

About 14% of people in England and Wales are Black, Asian, mixed-race or from other ethnic minority groups, according to the latest official data from the 2011 census.

"Children learn through play, and if they're not represented in schools, stores or in their homes, they won't be able to embrace themselves as

much," Vernon said.

At a time of social reckoning about entrenched racism around the world, Black toy makers are stepping up to offer more representative options.

Vernon's handmade designs range from a giggling mermaid sporting purple dreadlocks to women with African fabric head wraps. She also has a Christmas range including a Black Sugar Plum Fairy and Father Christmas.

Doreen Lawrence, another toy entrepreneur, also saw a gap in the market for her It's Reuben range of Black and mixed-race dolls with afro hair.

"In the same way we have Barbie and Ken, we can have Ruby and Reuben," she said.

WHITE FEATURES

Lawrence, a former teacher, started developing her line after she struggled to find diverse dolls for her classroom play-group sessions.

She bought a carton of Black dolls from China, and they sold out instantly on eBay. That early success spurred her to start making her own.

But it has been a struggle — and an extra expense — to get the details of her dolls right.

Even in China, where much of the world's manufacturing is based, she found the sculptors working on the moulds for her designs included typically white features such as narrow noses as standard.

Thomson Reuters Foundation



CLIMATE

'It's no more': Philippine surfing paradise wiped out by typhoon



RESORT AND BAR owners on a Philippine island popular with surfers and tourists were expecting a bumper Christmas holiday after Covid-19 restrictions finally eased. Then Super Typhoon Rai wiped them out.

The strongest storm to hit the archipelago this year cut a swathe through Siargao, a tropical paradise known for its sandy beaches, big waves and relaxed vibe.

Packing wind speeds of 195 kilometres (120 miles) per hour as it made landfall on the island last Thursday, Rai uprooted palm trees, shredded thatched roofs, smashed wooden buildings, and toppled power poles.

The widespread destruction left the island — voted the best in Asia by Conde Nast Traveler readers this year — unrecognisable.

"The day after the storm, we went outside and we were like 'wow, this is Siargao now, it's no more,'" Claudine Mendoza, 27, a sous chef at a beachfront resort, told AFP.

"Even Cloud Nine is no more, it was really devastated," Mendoza said, referring to the island's surf break where a wooden boardwalk — a favoured selfie spot for tourists — was swept away by the typhoon.

The storm is a bitter blow for tourism operators, hitting them a week before the Christmas holidays when many Filipino families typically head to the country's famed beaches and dive spots.

Pandemic travel restrictions decimated visitor numbers to the island in the past two years, leaving many resorts, cafes, souvenir shops and tour guides struggling to survive.

But domestic tourism began to pick up in recent months as the government relaxed rules to boost economic activity — though



it kept a ban on foreign travellers entering the country.

"Everyone was so happy, the island was lively again," Mendoza said. "Then suddenly the storm came."

Now, business owners face expensive repairs or having to start from scratch, and their employees an uncertain future.

Some are wondering if it is even worth trying to begin again.

"This typhoon is much worse for us than the pandemic — the pandemic didn't cause any (structural) damage," said resort owner Anton Alvarez.

"We think we have the capacity to rebuild but there's no point in rebuilding if it's just us — we need the whole of Siargao to rebuild."

What will happen now? With electricity across the island knocked out, there is no signal or internet, which has hampered efforts of disaster agencies to assess the full extent of the death and destruction caused by the storm.

At least 375 people were killed on the islands hit by Rai, national police have reported — including 167 in the region that includes Siargao.

Farmers and fisherfolk have also seen their livelihoods destroyed, and thousands of families left homeless.

Elka Requinta, a marketing coordinator on Siargao, said the strength of the typhoon caught everyone by surprise.

"We didn't expect it to be this bad," said Requinta, 36.

"You have locals who were hit because I don't think there was a call for any evacuation from the government."

It could take months for power to be fully restored to the island, making it difficult for business owners to talk to their partners and investors about the future.

Alvarez said he would like to reopen his resort within 12 months, but admitted that was "pretty optimistic".

"What will happen now?" asked Mendoza. "We don't know." — AFP

COLUMN



Rasha Al Raisi
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Winter in Kitzania

THIS WINTER WAS A BUSY one in Kitzania. When the weather started getting cooler, it was time to start our Winter in Kitzania yearly ritual that both humans and cats looked forward to: taking out warm blankets, cushions and spreading them all over the garden.

Due to cyclone Shaheen's rain this year, the top shelves on which the cats slept were rotted. These were replaced with huge plastic chopping boards as suggested by Mom and executed by Sham the cleaner. Surprisingly, they fitted well — despite my initial doubts — and we placed tubs stuffed with blankets on top of them. Although the job sounds easy yet it's not, being constantly surrounded by the Kitzanians not only supervising our work, but even trying out different tubs and blankets to see which one they like best, not to mention the few who actually mark their chosen territories — with our arms and legs being caught in the delightfully warm stinky spray.

This yearly ritual also attracts visting cats who choose to spend the night in the warmth of Kitzania's blankets. A couple of weeks back, we had a dog raid that killed one of our cats and injured the other badly. The funny thing is that none of the two cats were staying with us that Friday early morning.

Both were in different neighbours' houses that happened to have their main gates wide open. The pack came to the first house — our next-door neighbour's — and upon hearing their barking and ruckus I woke up and went straight to the balcony to check. I started clapping and shushing which made them leave the house — and thus the cat they were chasing — and go immediately to the other house across the road, where they caught and killed another cat while I stood helplessly wondering and praying that it's not one of my own.

In the early morning, I went looking for the body to find it dumped in the wadi. It was Mama Cat who came regularly to eat in Kitzania and stayed with the neighbours. The injured cat from the first house was none other than our five-year-old Rumana who came two days later with two holes on her thighs — where the dogs had grasped and tried pulling her if it wasn't for my last-minute interference. I managed to lock her in the bathroom and take a closer look at the bite wounds. Needless to say, they were horrible and filled with maggots. The next day, I took her to the vet where they took an x-ray to check for broken bones and any internal injuries. Luckily, she didn't sustain any which meant that all she had were flesh wounds.

Rumana's wounds were cleaned and sutured within a week. She was ready to come home where she stayed indoors for a week before letting her out. Now she's back to her usual self, patrolling the garden and making sure that visiting cats are kicked out after eight. As for now, I'm busy catching Kitzanians for their annual vaccine, which is a challenging task in planning and executing. Also, I feel sorry for the vets who'd have to deal with the few nasty ones that turn into mythical creatures hissing and attacking.

So far, I managed to vaccinate a few which is not too bad. One sad news to end this article with is of the loss of Sharah, the kitten I found on the 18th of November street in July. She simply disappeared, which is heart-breaking yet inevitable when keeping outdoor cats. From all of us in Kitzania, we wish you a happy new year!

Rasha al Raisi is a certified skills trainer and the author of *The World According to Bahja*. rashabooks@yahoo.com



Emphasising the status of women through Calligraphy

Mai al Abri

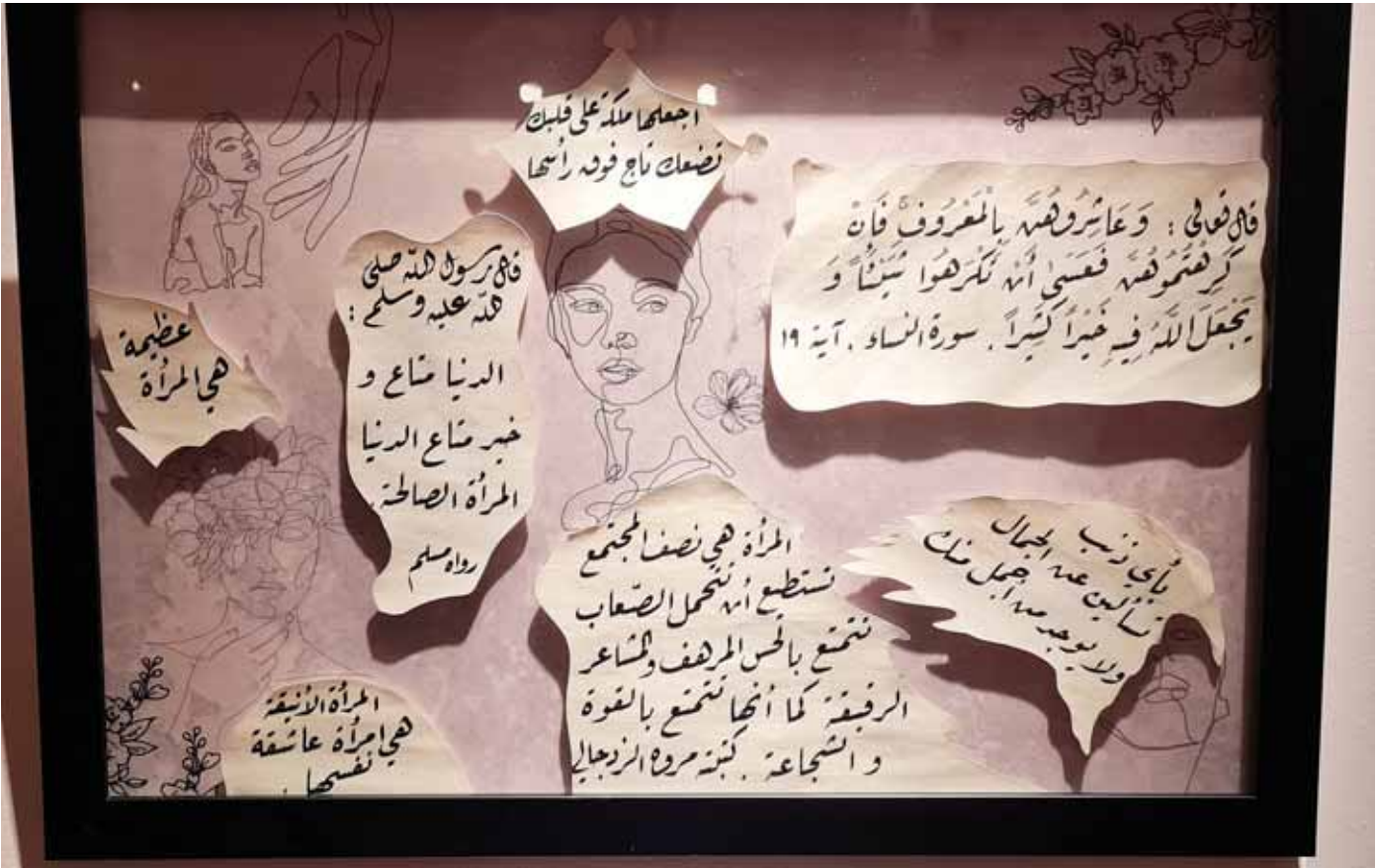
Omani women calligraphers celebrated the opening of their first collective exhibition at Bait al Zubair last week. The Omani Women Calligraphers Exhibition was the result of a relentless pursuit towards success and it is unique, as it is the first private exhibition for Omani women calligraphers. The artworks and the displayed paintings express the status of women and their role in various fields. Around 36 calligraphers participated in the exhibition with 40 classic paintings in various types of Arabic script (thuluth, Naskh, Diwani, Al-Diwani Al-Jall, Al-Raq'a, Kufic, Farsi).

The exhibition also contains artworks from Islamic ornamentation and the art of gilding. The exhibition presents the role of the Omani woman calligrapher in society and the integration of her activity with the activities of other Omani women to ensure their continuity.

The exhibition also aims to spread the culture of Arabic calligraphy and Islamic decoration, in addition to uniting all individual and collective efforts and initiatives that seek to preserve Arabic calligraphy from extinction.

These Omani women calligraphers have stories behind their success in this field. Reasons that some of us see as normal in the course of life as Iman al Abri describes. She said that her greatest achievement in her life would be coming together as a mom and a calligrapher. "Becoming a mom humbled my perspective towards myself, my life and my hobby. I know becoming a mom may seem like a normal season of life for a lot of people, and while it is hard, I acquired power through it".

"The journey of rediscovering myself began. I found solace in



doing work with my hands once again through calligraphy. Then, I slowly started to find the balance between being a mother and my work, in that it was no longer a separate thing, but rather that it was one thing altogether".

While Shifa al Abri believes that through this talent she can

express her thoughts and feelings together.

"It is a way to demonstrate one's self. In this exhibition, we tried to highlight some of the achievements of the Omani women and shed light on their roles in life, the roles that are obvious to everyone".

Stressing on the importance

of learning in this process, Mithaq al Kalbani says "My love for calligraphy has been with me for as long as I can remember. I made a commitment to myself to maintain a balance of self-care and pursuit of knowledge as I carved out pockets of time to dedicate to creative learning. I signed up for classes and multiple private lessons with accomplished masters to improve my skills. Learning never stopped. I am still always learning. To achieve success, I sought highly skilled instructors who could mentor me and help me to achieve my higher goals of excellence.

It is worth noting that the exhibition that will last one week, was inaugurated by Dr Rahma al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation and the presence of HH Alya bint Thuwaini al Said Chairman of Board of Directors of the Omani women Association in Muscat.

