



Oman’s role crucial in keeping regional peace: IPU President

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“As representatives of our people, we will defend them and commit governments to achieve those recommendations and results. The international parliament will follow up on the implementation of these agreements, and parliaments, on their part will approve them and follow up on their implementation. The completion of the procedures for approval by parliaments must be pursued faster, as we not only want formal agreements but seek to implement them in practice.”

On the efforts of the Inter-

Parliamentary Union to support participation of young people and women in the electoral process, the president of IPU indicated that involvement of youth in political decision-making is important as parliaments should represent the views of people from different age groups in different countries.

Stressing the importance of working as parliaments to combat international conflicts and stop wars, he said, “When we talk about the war in Ukraine, it is essential to establish channels of dialogue between Russia and Ukraine to end this conflict.

Otherwise, not just the Russian and Ukrainian people will suffer, but the consequences will affect the entire world and the economies will suffer.”

He also said that peace in Yemen is important. “Coexistence between both sides in Yemen is essential because they both are from Yemen, and they need to understand that they need to live together. People sometimes have different ideas, political perspectives, and religions, but they must coexist. We have to make them understand that only through peace we can have development and a better country.”

Shura and IPU look to enhance cooperation

MUSCAT: Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura received Duarte Pacheco, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), at the council’s premises, on Monday.

They reviewed ways of enhancing cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and the IPU and achieving more coordination in efforts aimed at supporting international peace and security.

The Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura commended the great role undertaken by the IPU and its support to the national parliament across the world as well as its keenness on supporting human rights, its constant endeavours to support sustainable development goals and its attempts to resolve current international issues.

Al Maawali briefed the guest about the stages of development of the Shura experience in the Sultanate of Oman and the specialisation assigned to it in



accordance with the Basic Statute of the State.

The president of the IPU praised the renaissance witnessed by the Sultanate of Oman under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik which was reflected in the development of Shura, and the presence of the Council of Oman in various international parliamentary events. He pointed to the active participation of the Council of Oman in discussions at the events organised by the IPU

based on the vision adopted by the Sultanate of Oman and the principles of its foreign policy. He added that the Council of Oman recorded positive attitudes towards many issues including ending wars and conflicts and tackling climate change. He indicated that his first visit to the Sultanate of Oman would open the doors for coordination and cooperation between Majlis Ash’shura and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the upcoming stage. — ONA

Oman and Netherlands ink MoU on green energy

SHARM EL-SHEIKH: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, and the Netherlands, represented by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy, on Monday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in the field of green energy.

The signing took place on the sidelines of Oman’s participation in the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for 2022 (COP27) — hosted by Egypt and lasting from November 6 to 18.

The MoU reflects the advanced relations between the two countries

and their desire to enhance cooperation in the field of green energy.

The MoU encourages the two countries to support their respective companies operating in the field to identify export and import checkpoints for green hydrogen, associated fuel sources and raw material — serving as a gateway to Europe.

The MoU, which explores potential interests in industries within the value chain of green hydrogen, also encourages interaction between the various bodies responsible for implementing the Energy Policy to help exchange expertise, knowledge



and information about green hydrogen.

Meanwhile, World Leaders Summit began in the Arab Republic of Egypt and it will include speeches

and discussions on climate issues, in the presence of about 120 heads of state and governments, international personalities and experts.

Oman’s pavilion at the UN COP27 climate summit saw a number of discussion sessions on climate change and measures undertaken to reduce carbon emissions

Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, represents Oman in this global event.

Today, the summit will include six meetings on three topics,

namely “equitable transition to implementation”, “food security”, and “innovative financing for climate and development”. Tomorrow, the leaders’ summit will include three more sessions on investing in the future of energy: green hydrogen, water security, climate change and the sustainability of vulnerable communities.

Oman’s pavilion at the summit saw a number of discussion sessions on climate change and measures undertaken to reduce carbon emissions based on the national strategy for an orderly transition to a carbon neutral plan, green economy and investment in clean energy fields. — ONA

Tender

مدائن

madayn

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O)
11/2021/PEIE/HQ-11 (RE-TENDER)	CONSULTANCY SERVICES TO PREPARE THE GUIDE OF DESIGN & BUILD FOR DEVELOPMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE & BUILDINGS FACILITIES AT MADAYN'S INDUSTRIAL CITIES	21-11-2022	15-12-2022	CONSULTING OFFICES	FIRST	50
5/2022/PEIE/HQ-5	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR UTILITIES GAP ANALYSIS AND COST ESTIMATION FOR BOTH, REHABILITATION WORKS OF EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE AND PROPOSED FACILITIES PHASE (1-6) IN SUHAR INDUSTRIAL CITY	21-11-2022	15-12-2022	CONSULTING OFFICES	SECOND AND ABOVE	100

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of 1% of the Tender value validity for (90) days, and addressed to The Chairman of Tender Committee mentioned in above tenders.

1. **Tender Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at eTendering System.

2. **eTendering System Inquiry:** All correspondence pertaining to the eTendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om and +968 24402200.

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

No Document can be accepted as Manual except Original Tender Bond. Scan Copy of Tender Bond needs to be attached in system and original needs to be deposited before Bid Opening.

Madayn is not bound to accept the lowest or any other Offer and has the right to cancel these tenders and the tenderers have no right to claim for any compensations.

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Oman promotes tourism at World Travel Market 2022 in London

LONDON: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, is taking part in the World Travel Market 2022 in London.

Oman’s delegation is headed by Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Tourism Under-Secretary.

The ministry’s participation aims to highlight and promote Oman’s tourism potentials and capabilities in an event that brings together tourists from all over the world to discuss developments in the sector and to strike partnerships.

As many as 26 tourism and hotel establishments are participating through Oman’s corner in the event to promote tourism in Oman. The World Travel Market is participated by 3,000 private and public establishments from 160 countries.

The three-day event includes 75 conferences and discussion panels to discuss developments in the travel and tourism sector all over the world.



Participating in the World Travel Market also aims to support the recovery of the tourism sector in Oman, which proved its ability and

flexibility in dealing with different variables and international challenges. The tourism sector in Oman is witnessing a noticeable growth

in the number of visitors, hotel revenues and occupancy rates, as well as an increase in newly created job opportunities in the sector. — ONA



Information minister receives European journalists

MUSCAT: Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, received here on Monday a number of journalists and media persons representing news agencies, TV channels and newspapers from the European Union.

Welcoming the guests, the Minister of Information outlined the role of Oman's media institutions and the message of balance and rationality that they disseminate. He spoke about Omani media's objectiveness when dealing with different domestic and international events and issues.

The meeting covered various economic aspects, notably the encouraging investment climate in Oman, including entrepreneurship-friendly laws and incentives, ports, airports,

free zones, logistic hubs and tourism facilities, backed by natural resources and modern establishments.

Dr Abdullah said that commercial exchange forms an integral part of Oman's history. He underscored the role of commercial exchange in propagating Oman's culture in Africa and Asia.

The meeting also touched on the status accorded to Omani women and empowering factors, including a set of comprehensive rights and the designation of an annual day for women to celebrate their accomplishments at all levels.

The EU media team, hosted by the Ministry of Information, will meet a number of Omani officials and visit key economic projects and tourism landmarks. — ONA

Oman's programme for World Cup reviewed

MUSCAT: An introductory meeting was held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Monday between officials of Oman Programme's Steering Committee for the Fifa World Cup Qatar 2022 and a number of media persons from several European countries, who are hosted by the Sultanate of Oman represented by the Ministry of Information.

The meeting reviewed the programme and the incentives offered to fans, including tourism packages prepared in cooperation with the relevant establishments. It also outlined promotional campaigns of the programme, among them the "Half Time For Oman" competition, which

targets audiences from outside Oman.

The competition was launched via social media platforms to offer opportunities to win free holidays in Oman, notably through the national travel operator "Visit Oman" platform, organised in cooperation with Oman Air. The competition offers the participants an opportunity to explore Oman's unique heritage and tourism landmarks.

The meeting also explored preparations related to the World Cup Fans Festival scheduled to be held at OCEC during the time of the championships. The programme includes live shows of World Cup matches and other activities. — ONA

'INITIATIVE IS THE TRUE REFLECTION OF THE SULTANATE OF OMAN'S STAND AS A PEACE-LOVING NATION TO THE WORLD'

Oman to launch 'Sustainable Development for All'



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The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA), will launch the 'Sustainable Development for All' initiative on November 16, coinciding with the celebration of the International Day for Tolerance, according to the ministry.

At a press briefing attended by Dr Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al Harrasi, Minister of Information; Dr Mohammed bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, said, "The initiative is the true reflection of the Sultanate of Oman's stand as a peace-loving nation to the world."

"This initiative falls within the ideals of 'Humanity' and 'Message of Peace' aimed at promoting mutual acceptance and peaceful coexistence among societies and different groups through "scientific, cultural and artistic activities or areas of communication," Dr Mohammad bin Said al Maamari, Minister of Awqaf and Religious Affairs (MoARA) told the Observer.

Message of Peace initiative: The initiative is in conformation to the Sultanate of Oman's approach to spreading the culture of peace and harmony and as a reflection of its principles of promoting values of tolerance, coexistence and understanding. The idea was first mooted in 2010, and the ministry

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worked to create an international exhibition that reflected the culture of harmony and tolerance in the Sultanate of Oman and worked to promote dialogue between various religions and sects in the world. This was complemented by the Sultanate of Oman's well-established experience in religious tolerance, mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence, and thus, the initiative of 'Oman's Message of Peace' was born to the world.

The exhibition titled 'Oman's Message of Peace' received national and international acclaim ever since it was launched, and by 2022, the total number of exhibitions presented worldwide reached a total of 136 exhibitions, including 96 international expos and 40 local expos in the country.

Over the past years, the exhibition has been hosted in

various institutions worldwide, such as ministries, universities, colleges, schools, libraries, museums, government organisations, private and civic centres, as well as the headquarters of the United Nations and Unesco. Conferences, meetings, and various events were held as part of the exhibition, all of which were focused on human harmony and promoting the message of the Sultanate of Oman in the international community.

The international conference 'Human Consensus and Sustainable Development for All' include four pillars from its very idea to implementation, they are:

- 1) The human continuum, civilised communication, support for sustainable development efforts and advancing sustainable development
- 2) Practical models in common human values, cultural diversity
- 3) The role of women in promoting common human values and sustainable development.
- 4) The role of youth in consolidating common human values and pioneering sustainable development.

He added that the programmes and events accompanying the celebration of the World Day for Tolerance 2022 include a programme called 'Sound of the Picture', in which a group of Omani and international youth and people

of different beliefs participate aimed at training young people on an effective dialogue between religions and cultures through the use of photography.

Meanwhile, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, affirmed that the international conference 'Humanitarian Harmony and Sustainable Development for All' reflects innate human values and the State's permanent approach in Oman. This approach is a constant feature inherently tangible in Omani media content that is based on the concept that the value of fraternity, harmony and peace collectively form solid grounds of human development in its comprehensive sense.

During the press conference, the Minister of Information pointed out that Oman's Message of Tolerance and Peace has extended to cover the issues of climate and the relationship between humans and nature. This goal is embodied in protecting the environment and avoiding damaging it.

As many as 20 young men and women from different countries and backgrounds will engage in practical training in dialogue and cultural communication, as well as an activity for children with the participation of a group of Omani and resident children of different nationalities that provide an artistic experience for them by involving them in Drawing paintings expressing the values of coexistence and understanding.

Flights operating at Muscat Airport returning to pre-Covid levels

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Oman Airports has been working with the relevant agencies such as the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT), and the Royal Oman Police (ROP), to offer incentives to airlines or travel companies as operations were gradually returning to pre-Covid levels.

In a statement issued on Saturday, Oman Airports said that it has been witnessing an increase in the number of passengers and air traffic since the opening of the Muscat Airport's passenger terminal building in 2018.

"At the beginning of 2020, the number of airlines operating at

Muscat International Airport was 32, and that figure has returned after two years of restrictions to spread the Covid-19 pandemic heavily limited the flight travel in the country."

Oman Airports also underlined the expansion of the budget airline, SalamAir, internationally and locally, which contributed to the rise in the number of air passengers.

The number of inbound passengers through airports in the Sultanate of Oman recorded an increase of 187 per cent to 4,907,599 until the end of July, while the number of outbound passengers increased by 127 per cent compared to the same period the previous year.

The Muscat Airport has been

Salalah Airport receives first Romanian flight

SALALAH: A flight of Romania charter airline HiSky landed here on Monday with 116 tourists on board as part of the winter tourism season programme in the Governorate of Dhofar.

In line with the programme, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, is implementing a set of tourism events and activities aimed at attracting local and international



tourists. The activities include the Frankincense Season in late November and the Empty Quarter

Festival in the Niyabat of Al Shahr in the Wilayat of Thamrait.

— ONA

configured to accommodate more than 56 million passengers in later stages to accommodate future travel movement to and from

the Sultanate of Oman, which will naturally be accompanied by several incentives, including the visa-free facility to the nationality

of 103 countries.

Earlier speaking to the Observer, Aimen al Hosni, CEO of Oman Airports, told the

Observer, "The predictions are that the air traffic will return 60 to 60 per cent of the pre-pandemic levels this year, 70 to 80 per cent by 2023 and full 100 per cent by mid-2024-25. Countries with a huge domestic network are likely to perform better in the aviation sector."

According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI), there has been an increase in the number of international and domestic flights at Muscat Airport by 114.8 per cent, as the number of flights reached 34,556 flights by the end of July 2022, while 4,251,173 passengers used the airport, compared to 16,084 flights and 1,647,724 passengers in 2021.



Exceptional collection of Early Bronze Age silver jewellery found in Saham



The discovery in a tomb in Al Batinah of a silver ring likely made in Mesopotamia (Iraq) using silver from Anatolia (Türkiye) for an individual linked with Indus Civilisation (Pakistan and Western India) foreign trade, shows the complexity of commercial and cultural interactions in Eurasian prehistory

DR DENNYS FRENEZ
ITALIAN EXPERT

MUSCAT: An international team led by Prof Kimberly Williams (Temple University, Philadelphia USA) has presented an important discovery at the international conference of South Asian Archaeology and Art held in Barcelona (Spain).
The joint Omani-American team headed by Prof Nasser al Jahwari and Prof Khaled Douglas from Sultan Qaboos University and Prof Kimberly Williams from Temple University (USA), excavates an Early Bronze Age site at Dahwa, Wilayat of Saham of North Al Batinah Governorate with the support of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, has recovered an exceptional collection of silver jewellery in a prehistoric sites of the third millennium BCE.
The collection included parts of necklaces such as beads, spacers, and several rings.
Interestingly, one of the silver rings had a stamp with the image of an Indian bison (Bos gaurus), a characteristic motif found in the Indus Valley (or Harappa) Culture that indicated the merchants were active



in interregional trade. This image was relatively uncommon in the Indus Valley but quite frequent on Indus-related circular stone seals in Iran, Bahrain, Mesopotamia and Oman. In fact, it was already found in Oman engraved on stamp seals made from local softstone at Salut and Al Moyassar. However, this is the first time this image was found on a metal finger ring.
MORE INTRIGUING
According to Prof Jonathan Mark Kenoyer, an expert on ancient technologies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA), “seal rings were considered typical of much later periods, but this discovery confirmed that Bronze Age peoples were much more ingenious and technically advanced than previously thought; they introduced at a very early stage administrative solutions that allowed economic growth in the later millennia.”
What makes the discovery even more intriguing, is that the jewellery — sampled

and analysed using an innovative non-destructive technique by Dr Randall Law and Dr Sean Scott, material scientists from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA) — was found to have been made using silver that most likely came from Anatolia (Türkiye).
According to Dr Dennys Frenez, an Italian expert in ancient trade between the Indus Valley and Oman and a collaborator of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, “the discovery in a tomb in Al Batinah of a silver ring likely made in Mesopotamia (Iraq) using silver from Anatolia (Türkiye) for an individual linked with Indus Civilisation (Pakistan and Western India) foreign trade, shows the complexity of commercial and cultural interactions in Eurasian prehistory, which can definitely be regarded as the prototype for modern global exchanges.”
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEYS
The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism

has launched archaeological surveys and excavations for the 2022/2023 season in the form of 28 programmes distributed over various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. The programmes are implemented in cooperation with local and international scientific institutions.
They include the archaeological site of Dibba, where the ministry is carrying out archaeological excavations. The archaeological site dates back to the Iron Age and it was discovered 10 years ago, in cooperation with an Italian mission from Sapienza University. The current season is the last in the excavation of the mass grave code-named “CG2”.
Surveys and excavations will also be carried out at the Qamira site in the Wilayat of Dhank in the Governorate of Al Dhahirah. The site is one of the most important Bronze Age sites located on the ancient copper trade route, as evidenced by the huge stone buildings located on the road’s path. — **ONA**



Philippine prisons chief accused of ordering journalist murder

MANILA: Philippine police accused the country's prisons chief on Monday of ordering the killing of a prominent radio journalist whose death sparked international alarm.

Radio personality Percival Mabasa, 63, who went by the name "Percy Lapid" on his programme, was shot dead in a Manila suburb on October 3 as he drove to his studio. Police allege Bureau of Corrections director general Gerald Bantag, who is currently suspended from duty, was behind the murder along with his deputy security officer Ricardo Zulueta.

The alleged gunman, Joel Escorial, surrendered to authorities last month out of fear for his safety after police broadcast images of his face captured on security footage, officials said previously.

"He (Bantag) will probably be the highest official of this land ever charged with a case of this gravity," Justice Secretary Crispin Remulla said.

Then-president Rodrigo Duterte appointed Bantag as director general of the Bureau of Corrections in September 2019. Bantag allegedly ordered the murder of Mabasa following the "continued expose by the latter of the issues against the former



Philippines' Secretary of Interior Benjamin Abalos Jr. (R) gestures with Justice Secretary Jesus Remulla (L) during a press conference announcing suspects in the killing of radio journalist Percival Mabasa, at the Department of Justice in Manila on Monday. — AFP

on his show", Eugene Javier of the National Bureau of Investigation told reporters, reading from a statement.

Weeks before he was gunned down, Mabasa aired allegations of corruption against Bantag on his late-night radio show. Bantag told DZRH broadcaster last month that he had nothing to do with the killing.

Bantag and Zulueta have also been accused of ordering the killing of Cristito Villamor Palana, a prison inmate who allegedly

passed on the kill order to the gunman. Palana was suffocated with a plastic bag by members of his own gang, Javier said.

Criminal complaints have also been filed against 10 inmates over that killing. Prosecutors at the Department of Justice will decide if there is enough evidence to file charges in court.

Jonathan De Santos, chairman of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines, welcomed the "good development" in the case, but warned there was a long way

to go. "As we have seen it takes a decade or more to secure a conviction," De Santos said.

Mabasa was an outspoken critic of former president Duterte, who waged a deadly drug war that killed thousands of people, as well as the policies and aides of his successor Ferdinand Marcos.

He is the second journalist to be killed since President Marcos took office on June 30.

Bringing to justice everyone involved in the murder was an "acid test" for Marcos's commitment to human rights, said Phil Robertson, deputy Asia director for Human Rights Watch.

"But putting Mabasa's killers behind bars should also be the start of a comprehensive effort, not a one-off case because the victim happened to be a prominent, Manila-based journalist," he said.

Mabasa's brother Roy said he believed there were "more masterminds" behind the killing.

While the Philippines is ranked one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists, such murders rarely happen in Manila. Radio broadcasters outside the capital were often the target. A Manila-based analyst said Mabasa's murder was likely personal, rather than political. — AFP

■ SECURITY FOR G20



Indonesian military personnel gather for security preparations ahead of the G20 Summit, in Denpasar on Indonesia's resort island of Bali on Monday. — AFP

India's musical instruments exports touch \$13 billion

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

The sale of Indian music instruments witnessed huge growth in the global market in recent years. The international musical instruments market was valued at around \$13 billion in 2021 and is estimated to grow by about \$15.2 billion by 2028. India exports most of its musical instruments and accessories to the United States of America, Germany and Japan. In the year 2020-2021 (April-November), India exported musical instruments worth \$19.39 million, India's Prasara Bharati (PBNS) cited Facts and Factors.

In a recent tweet, Piyush Goyal, Indian Minister of Commerce, endorsed the demand factor for Indian musical instruments by citing another number, 3.5 times rise in April-September 2022.

The current export, according to sources in the Indian Ministry of Commerce, has risen to Rs 172 crore, compared to the same period in 2013-14. "Eight years ago, the exports of musical instruments were worth Rs 49 crores," Piyush Goyal said in his tweet.

Germany, Japan, and the US are the countries, which received the majority of India's musical instruments and accessories, as between April and November 2020 and 2021, India exported musical instruments valued at \$19.39 million, said the PBNS report. The point to be noted is the time when the demand for Indian music instruments was the highest in the global market.



It was the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Music probably was the best companion for people in isolation during the disturbing days of the pandemic.

Taking advantage of the availability of time and, more importantly, to keep constructively engaged, people opted for online classes. Orders for online musical instruments during Covid-19 lockdowns and restriction periods were very high. This is reflected in the high demand for Indian musical instruments. It was easy for educators to offer lessons online while the overall sale demand reflected the growth of the market. Technical advancement is also a boom factor for the music instrument sector. This gave the Music composers liberty to "tune in sound with more control in electronic music devices, customise and personalise instruments."

Overall, all these developments helped in the high demand for music and musical instruments.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed happiness over this.

Myanmar hot-air balloon festival returns with a bang after Covid

PYIN OO LWIN, Myanmar: Thousands of people have gathered in the hills of central Myanmar for the annual Tazaungdaing light festival that marks the end of the rainy season with a fiery night-time display of exploding hot-air balloons.

The celebrations in the former British hill station of Pyin Oo Lwin have not been held for two years because of the Covid pandemic and unrest following a military coup.

But on Sunday night rival teams began launching 76 aerial artistic creations that will take flight over the next five days, competing for marks in aesthetics, teamwork, height reached and time spent in the air. Their balloons were propelled upwards about 100 metres using the heat from a fire



A dancer performs a traditional dance during the Tazaungdaing Lighting Festival at Pyin Oo Lwin Township in Mandalay. — AFP

before fireworks inside exploded, obliterating months of work in a spectacular burst of lights across the inky sky.

The festivities are a rare respite from the economic misery and violence wracking much of the country almost two years after the

military's power grab.

"We are holding our festival here but we are sorry for what is happening elsewhere," said Aung Myat Thu, 37, who spent months working with friends on their balloon.

"When we were preparing for the competition, we all worked alongside our worries."

The hot-air balloons featured an array of artwork from images of Buddha to traditional motifs, with one made in the shape of a polar bear. Some participants hooked dozens of red, white and yellow candles to their balloons before releasing them into the chilly night air to huge cheers.

Crowds ambled between stalls at a temporary fairground while traditional dancers performed. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BUKOKA

Tanzania pays tribute to crash victims

Grieving Tanzanians paid emotional tribute on Monday to 19 people killed when a passenger plane plunged into Lake Victoria in the country's deadliest air crash in decades.

The Precision Air flight from the financial capital Dar es Salaam crashed on Sunday morning while trying to land in the northwestern city of Bukoba. Police blamed bad weather for the accident.

Prime Minister Kassim



Majaliwa was among hundreds of people who gathered at Kaitaba Stadium in Bukoba, with Muslim and Christian clerics leading prayers for the dead as onlookers wiped away tears.

JAKARTA

Indonesia child deaths rise to 195

Indonesia said on Monday the number of child deaths from kidney failure or damage linked to harmful substances found in syrup medicines has risen to 195.

The Southeast Asian country has seen a spike in cases of acute kidney injury (AKI) since August, prompting a probe and subsequent ban on all liquid medicine sales. More than 320 cases of AKI have been recorded in provinces across the country and 27 patients are still in hospital, health ministry



spokesman Mohammad Syahril told a press conference.

Most of the children affected are under the age of five. The new death toll is up from 133 deaths confirmed on October 21.

BEIJING

China virus cases at six-month high

China reported its highest daily Covid caseload in six months on Monday, despite grinding lockdowns that have heavily disrupted manufacturing, education and day-to-day life.

Beijing quashed hopes that its strict zero-Covid policy — in which spot lockdowns, quarantines and mass testing are employed to quash outbreaks — might be relaxed anytime soon. But a torrent of lockdown-related scandals where residents have complained of inadequate



conditions, food shortages and delayed emergency medical care have chipped away at public confidence. The country logged more than 5,600 new Covid cases on Monday.



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In brief

■ MOSCOW



BUSINESSMAN ADMITS US ELECTIONS 'INTERFERENCE'

Influential Russian businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, who is linked to President Vladimir Putin and sanctioned by Washington and European countries, admitted on Monday to interfering in US elections.

"Gentlemen, we interfered, we are interfering and we will interfere," Prigozhin, who has been accused of running a "troll factory" to influence the outcome of votes in several Western countries, said in a statement quoted by his team. "Carefully, precisely, surgically and the way we do it, the way we can," Prigozhin quipped.

Prigozhin said Russia was interfering in the US midterm elections.

■ NAIROBI



KENYA AIRWAYS CANCELS 'MOST FLIGHTS'

Kenya Airways cancelled most flights on Monday as a pilots' strike entered its third day, with thousands of travellers stranded and the government threatening disciplinary action if staff don't return to work.

The pilots launched the strike at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport at 06:00 am (0300 GMT) on Saturday, defying a court order against industrial action and leaving thousands of passengers stranded.

"Due to the ongoing unlawful industrial action by Kenya Airline Pilots Association (KALPA), most of our flights have been cancelled," the carrier said in a statement.

■ SAN FRANCISCO



MUSK DEFENDS PAID BLUE BADGE PLANS FOR TWITTER

Twitter's new owner Elon Musk defended his much-criticised launch of a paid subscription service to verify user accounts. "Widespread verification will democratise journalism & empower the voice of the people," he tweeted, responding to concerns from associations, advertisers, and even the United Nations, who fear a surge of hate speech and misinformation on the network.

Under the new plan, users paying \$8 per month for the platform's subscription service, Twitter Blue, would receive the network's famous blue checkmark that signals a verified account.

Smallholder farmers in Africa and South Asia get \$1.4bn climate boost

SHARM EL SHEIKH, Egypt: Small-scale farmers in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia reeling from global warming impacts got a \$1.4 billion philanthropic boost on Monday to help them adapt to a world increasingly impacted by climate change.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant, distributed over four years, is earmarked for scaling up regional innovations that build resilience against drought, heat waves and extreme flooding amplified by a warming world, said an announcement at the COP27 climate summit in Egypt's Red Sea resort of Sharm el Sheikh.

Extreme weather has ravaged crops and reduced yields this year across four continents.

Organisations representing some 350 million family farmers, meanwhile, released an open letter to world leaders on Monday warning that global food security is at risk unless governments boost finance for small-scale production, and calling for a shift from industrial agriculture toward more diverse, low-input methods.

"The surge in hunger over the last year has exposed the fragility of a global food system" ill-equipped for climate shocks, the letter from 70 organisations representing farmers, fishers and forest producers said.

"Building a food system that can feed the world on a hot planet must be a priority for COP27."

Nearly a hundred world leaders are kicking off the two-week UN summit in Egypt to speed the greening of the global economy and increase financial flows to developing countries where climate impacts are already shaving GDP points off their economies.

Agriculture forms the backbone of many African economies, employing on average over 50 per cent of the labour



A picture shows the entrance of the Sharm El Sheikh International Convention Centre, in Egypt's Red Sea resort, on Monday during the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference. — AFP

force and accounting for a third of total African gross domestic product.

SMALLHOLDERS

At least two billion people worldwide depend on smallholder farms for food and income, but currently only two percent of global climate finance helps them adapt to climate change predicted to deepen food and economic crises over the coming decades.

"The effects of climate change have already been devastating, and every moment the world delays action, more people suffer, and the solutions become more complex and costly," said Gates Foundation CEO Mark Suzman.

"Leaders must listen to the

voices of African farmers and governments to understand their priorities and respond with urgency."

The money will be channelled to so-called climate-smart agriculture projects, including new digital technologies, innovations in livestock farming, and — working with the UN's International Fund for Agriculture Development — support for women smallholder farmers, Suzman said.

A "weather intelligence platform" developed with the Kenya Agriculture and Livestock Research Organisation, for example, will allow farmers to better anticipate climate threats, with potentially crop-saving updates delivered via cellphone

text messages.

"More funding is necessary to ensure agricultural and technological innovations are widely available to vulnerable communities," Bill Gates, who is not attending the summit, said in a statement. Analysts welcomed the new funding stream, but cautioned that much broader support was needed.

"The Gates Foundation initiative is important and timely, with COP27 being dubbed the 'Africa COP,'" Elizabeth Robinson, director of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, said.

"But the scale of the problem is such that governments, private sector and international

organisations all need to increase their commitments to food security." Overall, there is an annual \$41 billion adaptation "finance gap" in Africa, according to the Global Center on Adaptation, based in Rotterdam.

Claire McConnel, a food and agriculture expert at climate policy think tank E3G, said philanthropic funding and public finance can play an "important role" in leveraging private sector investments for adaptation.

"Partnerships with African farmers' organisations and research institutes based on the continent will be key to ensuring investments meet farmers' needs and money is spent effectively and efficiently," she said, commenting on the announcement. — AFP

Greta says she's ready to hand over megaphone



Climate activist Greta Thunberg

STOCKHOLM: Four years after launching her "School Strike for the Climate", Swedish activist Greta Thunberg is ready to pass the baton to those on the front lines of climate change, she said in an interview on Monday.

"We should also listen to reports and experiences from people who are most affected by the climate crisis. It's time to hand over the megaphone to those who actually have stories to tell," the 19-year-old told Swedish news agency TT. After urging the public in recent years to "listen to the science", Thunberg said the world now needed "new perspectives".

In the past four years, Thunberg's one-person strike outside the Swedish parliament has evolved into to a massive global movement engaging millions of youths and unleashing a torrent of debate on the dangers of climate change.

Thunberg said she initially believed an urgent debate on the climate was needed to save the world for future generations. But over time, she said, she has come to understand that the climate crisis is already having devastating

consequences on people's lives.

"So it becomes even more hypocritical when people in Sweden for example say that we have time to adapt and shouldn't fear what will happen in the future", she said.

Thunberg has previously said she would skip the COP27 talks starting on Monday in Sharm El-Sheik, slamming it as a forum for "greenwashing".

She told TT her talks with world leaders have left her

pessimistic about their ability to make progress on the issue.

"Some of the things world leaders and heads of state have said when the microphone is off are hard to believe when you tell people", she said.

In the past four years, Thunberg's one-person strike outside the Swedish parliament has evolved into to a massive global movement engaging millions of youths and unleashing a torrent of debate on the dangers of climate change

"Like, 'If I had known what we were agreeing to when we signed the Paris Agreement I would never have signed,' or 'You kids are more knowledgeable in this area than I am'", she said.

"The lack of knowledge among the world's most powerful people is shocking".

Thunberg, who is in her final year of high school in Stockholm, said meanwhile she hasn't yet decided what she will do after she graduates. "We'll see. If I had to choose today, I would choose to continue my studies. Preferably something that has to do with social issues", she said. — AFP

Preserving Omani culture, one date at a time



Sandhya Rao Mehta

The writer is Associate Professor, Dept of English Language and Literature Sultan Qaboos University

As the 8th Oman Date Palm Festival is being celebrated at the Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, it is an apt moment to consider the importance of preserving intangible cultural artifacts which are part of a living heritage.

Dates in Oman are not just part of the past but continue to play an important part in the economic life of the country today. Oman ranks among the top 10 producers of dates in the world with “8 million palm trees yielding more than 250 indigenous varieties,” according to NPR.

Date palms are also famously known for being used in various ways, with protective shades made from the fronds, hand fans and baskets being made out of the

leaflets and its fibre being used to make rope.

There have been many studies on the variety and quality of Omani dates, as well as on identifying new processing and packaging techniques suitable for export. An aspect which has been less focused on is the importance of preserving the culture surrounding date cultivation and its role in continuing Omani heritage. This is part of intangible cultural heritage.

UNESCO defines intangible cultural heritage as “oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, knowledge and practices... or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts”. Date farming is one such example of cultural heritage which must be

DATES ARE KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN PLANTED AND USED FOR OVER 6,000 YEARS, WITH THE EARLIEST EVIDENCE IN DRAWING AND MANUSCRIPTS BEING FROM 2400 BCE. THE CULTIVATION OF DATES GIVES AN INSIGHT INTO OMANI CULTURE AND HISTORY

documented in order to preserve it for posterity.

Other examples of ICH (Intangible Cultural Heritage) in Oman include Harees, the wheat dish, Al Heda’a, the oral tradition of calling out to camels, and the intricate work of making khanjars.

Dates are known to have been planted and used for over 6,000 years, with the earliest evidence in drawing and manuscripts being from 2400 BCE. The cultivation of dates gives an insight into Omani culture and history.

As is well known, guests are invariably welcomed with an offering of dates and kahwa, Omani coffee. The process of cultivation itself is an inclusive process, often involving the entire family, and even the village.

Studies have shown that farmers are keen on sharing the art of cultivation and harvesting to the new generations, often taking children with them to show the intricacies of the process.

As part of preserving cultural

heritage, there are also studies which explore customs surrounding the various stages of production – from planting to harvesting. Observers note how everyone cooperates and share in the hard work of climbing the trees, plucking the dates and drying them.

Once harvested and processed, dates continue to play an integral part of Omani social life – be it weddings, festivals or just everyday routine. Known to be nutritious and an antioxidant, it is finding a way into modern kitchens in newer forms as well.

As we continue to enjoy eating dates in all forms, documenting its story will add to the available knowledge on it and preserve it for future generations.

African cities look to mass transit to ease growing pains

Tade Balogun times his commute like a military operation. Each day, the Lagos consultant leaves home before dawn, arrives for work early and takes a nap before starting his day.

He then stays until 9 pm -- that way, he escapes the chaos and gridlock that can transform his 29-kilometre drive into a three-hour nightmare.

By the time he gets home, Balogun says, his daughters are fast asleep. But, he adds wryly, his blood pressure has remained in the safety zone: “Lagos traffic can cause a health hazard.”

Balogun’s trek highlights the plight of Nigeria’s economic hub and other fast-growing African cities as the world’s population reaches the eight billion mark in the coming days.

In a metropolitan area sprawling across nearly 1,200 square kilometres, much of which has been informally settled, Lagos’s 20 million people struggle each day with notoriously poor infrastructure, except for a few wealthy enclaves.

Arguably the worst problem is transport, for the city is dependent on roads -- and they are a choke of cars, trucks, motorbikes and packed yellow Danfo minibuses, along with hawkers who weave in between the unruly lanes of traffic.

Seeking to change this, the Lagos State government has drawn up ambitious plans, including a new airport and a mass transit network of trains, buses and ferries.

“For the economy of any city to thrive, your transport system must be adequate, efficient,” Lagos metropolitan transport authority chief Abimbola Akinajo said.

“It is a big part of what we need to get right in order for the city to function right.”

DELAYED TRAIN NETWORK

But experts say the funding and logistical challenges of this blueprint are mountainous, and some wonder whether some basic questions have been asked.

“We have to understand, what is Lagos?

Whether Lagos as a state, Lagos as a metropolis, or as a megacity,” said Muiyiwa Agunbiade, a University of Lagos urban development professor.

“If you don’t know the population, it’s difficult for us to plan for the people.”

Delivering big transport projects on time and on budget is a headache almost anywhere in the world. But in Lagos’s case, a much-trumpeted city rail network has been delayed by more than a decade. Akinajo acknowledged funding and implementation problems had snarled the scheme but insisted a part of one rail line would be finished this year and start taking passengers by early 2023. — AFP

The Israel we knew is gone



Thomas L. Friedman

The writer is an American political commentator and author

Imagine you woke up after the 2024 US presidential election and found that Donald Trump had been reelected and chose Rudy Giuliani for attorney general, Michael Flynn for defence secretary, Steve Bannon for commerce secretary, evangelical leader James Dobson for education secretary, Proud Boys former leader Enrique Tarrio for homeland security head and Marjorie Taylor Greene for the White House spokesperson.

“Impossible,” you would say. Well, think again.

As I’ve noted before, Israeli political trends are often a harbinger of wider trends in Western democracies — off-Broadway to our Broadway. I hoped that the national unity government that came to power in Israel in June 2021 might also be a harbinger of more bipartisanship here. Alas, that government has now collapsed and is being replaced by the most far-right coalition in Israel’s history. Lord save us if this is a harbinger of what’s coming our way.

The coalition that Likud leader Bibi Netanyahu is riding back into power is the Israeli equivalent of the nightmare US Cabinet I imagined above. Only it is real — a rowdy alliance of ultra-Orthodox leaders and ultranationalist politicians, including some outright racist, anti-Arab Jewish extremists once deemed completely outside the norms and boundaries of Israeli politics. As it is virtually impossible for Netanyahu to build a majority coalition without the support of these extremists, some of them are almost certain to be Cabinet ministers in the next Israeli government.

As that previously unthinkable reality takes hold, a fundamental question will roil synagogues in America and across the globe: “Do I support this Israel or not support it?” It will haunt pro-Israel students on college campuses. It will challenge Arab allies of Israel in the Abraham Accords, who just wanted to trade with Israel and never signed up for defending a government there that is anti-Israeli Arab. It will stress those US diplomats who have reflexively defended Israel as a Jewish democracy that shares America’s values, and it will send friends of Israel in Congress fleeing from any reporter asking if America should continue sending billions of dollars in aid to such a



NETANYAHU IS POISED TO FORM A GOVERNMENT WITH ALLIES ONCE SEEN AS COMPLETELY OUTSIDE THE NORMS AND BOUNDARIES OF ISRAELI POLITICS

government. You have not seen this play before, because no Israeli leader has “gone there” before.

Netanyahu has been propelled into power by bedfellows who: see Israeli Arab citizens as a fifth column who can’t be trusted; have vowed to take political control over judicial appointments; believe that Jewish settlements must be expanded so there is not an inch left anywhere in the West Bank for a Palestinian state; want to enact judicial changes that could freeze Netanyahu’s ongoing corruption trial; and express contempt for Israel’s long and strong embrace of LGBTQ rights.

We are talking about people like Itamar Ben-Gvir, who was convicted by an Israeli court in 2007 of incitement to racism and supporting a Jewish terrorist organization. Netanyahu personally forged an alliance between Ben-Gvir’s Jewish Power party and Bezalel Smotrich, the leader of the Religious Zionism party, which turned them (shockingly for many Israelis) into the third-largest party in the country — giving Netanyahu the allies Likud needed to win a parliamentary majority in this week’s election.

Smotrich is known for, among

other things, suggesting that Israeli Jewish mothers should be separated from Arab mothers in the maternity wards of Israeli hospitals. He has long advocated outright Israeli annexation of the West Bank and argued that there is “no such thing as Jewish terrorism” when it comes to settlers retaliating on their own against Palestinian violence.

Netanyahu has increasingly sought over the years to leverage the energy of this illiberal Israeli constituency to win office, not unlike how Trump uses white nationalism, but Netanyahu never actually brought this radical element — like Ben-Gvir, who claims to have moderated. As more of Netanyahu’s allies in Likud split with him over his alleged criminal behavior and lying, however, Bibi had to reach further and further out of the mainstream of Israeli politics to get enough votes to rule and pass a law to abort his own trial and possible jail time.

Netanyahu had fertile political soil to work with, the Yediot Achronot Israeli newspaper columnist Nahum Barnea explained to me. There has been a dramatic upsurge in violence — stabbings, shootings, gang warfare and organized crime — by Israeli Arabs against other Israeli Arabs, and Israeli Arab gangs and organized crime against Israeli Jews, particularly in mixed communities. The result is that, “like in America, ‘policing’ has become a huge issue in Israel in recent years,” said Barnea — and even though this upsurge started when Netanyahu was previously prime minister, he and his anti-Arab allies blamed it all on the Arabs and the national unity Israeli government.

— The New York Times

Dreams come true...

It is not enough to dream, but there must be an element of visualisation and action in that direction no matter how small the step is.

The small steps add up and creates a path before we even realise it. A few days ago I would have thought I have just been inspired by some good words I read somewhere. But not this time.

It was in November 2018 when we went to a corporate function to celebrate the achievements and there I saw her - she was playing music on a white piano. She seemed to create a zone of her own. People have always fascinated me and it is like reading a new book. And here she was - amazingly comfortable in her own world. After all this was the world she had been seeking since she was three years old. It was soon an music organ and the white piano has been in her possession for three years, she had said in 2018 while interviewing her and the video of which you can still see @omanobserver.

She had explained how she was never trained professionally which meant she could not read the musical notes and learnt to play by the ear. But it had been her passion for the music that led her to stay dedicated practicing music and her family support that led her to become Zara the pianist from Oman.

In our interview she had said that she was gaining stages as she was a pianist and during the wedding celebrations organised for women there is a requirement for female musicians and this gave her opportunities.

Fast forward and the pandemic arrived unannounced and stayed long enough for people to get accustomed to loneliness, leave alone celebrations and gatherings and music. But one person continued to perform and she used the social media as her stage and now has 125,000 followers on her Instagram account @zara.pianist.

Today she is an international pianist, music producer and arranger. She is currently in Qatar performing,



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

ONE OF THE CRUCIAL INGREDIENTS TO SUCCESS IS FOCUS AND SOMETIMES TO STAY FOCUSED ONE HAS TO BE A BIT OBSESSED

where the world spot is on with the Fifa World Cup round the corner. These are the success stories that make you believe in dreams.

One of the crucial ingredients to success they say is focus and sometimes to stay focused one has to be a bit obsessed. The talent is not enough, need to develop skills and only practice can get us to that stage and once there it is only focus that can keep us there, which by the way is a challenge because distractions are just too many. But you know what is interesting? Once again it is the mind that turns out to be the strength and weakness.

This goes on to prove how important is mental health. So when we do that extra push up and look at the extra calories that have gone into the food maybe it is time we thought of what's on our mind and what we are thinking about.

MENTAL HEALTH

The 'Not Alone' campaign on mental health is on and the reason the team chose to do this month is because of the strong sense of belonging that has generated this month. When one does not have a sense of belonging can you imagine what the mind would be like?

There are people who live in conflict areas and still relate to the ancestral land just through songs. People who are now in tents at camps can only pass on to their children their memories about their original homes and land. These songs stir emotions and feelings even if they have not seen them and might never know if they will walk there again.

And the same only an expatriate will know the sentiments they have for a land where he/she has been for years and the memories and the love they have for the land they are in. These are sentiments many might never be able to acknowledge or know how to express. However, 'Not Alone' campaign has taken into consideration that sentiment and emotions and ensured that the other nationalities will also be part of the campaign on mental health.

A BALANCING ACT!



A flamingo feeds on a beach, north of Kuwait City, on Monday. – AFP

Biden says democracy at stake as Republicans eye ‘red wave’

SAUL LOEB AND OLARTE

President Joe Biden pulled out the stops on Sunday to mobilise US voters in defence of democracy, hoping to counter a Republican “red wave” in this week’s midterms that could help set Donald Trump on a course back to the White House.

“If you all show up and vote, democracy sustained, not a joke,” the 79-year-old told a rally in upstate New York — historically Democratic territory — with two days to go until Tuesday’s vote.

“This is your generation’s moment to defend it. To preserve it. To choose it,” Biden told the audience at St Lawrence University, turning solemn as he recalled last year’s assault on the US Capitol by Trump supporters refusing to accept defeat. At the southern end of the Atlantic coast, in Miami, Trump held a competing rally in support of Florida Republican candidates -- but his own political future was more front and centre.

“I will probably have to do it again,” teased the 76-year-old, sporting his iconic red hat — urging supporters to “stay tuned” for his final campaign rally, on Monday night in the Midwestern state of Ohio. Carrying signs saying “Again!” the crowd yelled back “Four more years!” — the length of a US

POLLS IN THE FINAL STRETCH PUT REPUBLICANS AHEAD IN THE FIGHT FOR THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, AND ALSO SHOW THEM GAINING MOMENTUM IN KEY SENATE RACES

presidential term. Polls in the final stretch put Republicans ahead in the fight for the House of Representatives, and also show them gaining momentum in key Senate races as voters seek to take out frustration over four-decades-high inflation and rising illegal immigration.

Tens of millions of Americans have already cast early ballots, but bringing out the vote on Tuesday will likely prove decisive. With all 435 seats in the House of Representatives up for grabs alongside a third of the 100-member Senate and a slew of state posts, Democrats were putting a brave face on their prospects — but the latest polls have put them on the defensive.

“This is going to be a wake-up call to President Biden,” predicted Glenn Youngkin, the Republican governor of Virginia, saying his camp was offering “common-sense solutions” to everyday issues like inflation and crime.

US midterm elections are typically seen as a referendum on the president in power, whose party tends to lose seats in Congress, particularly if -- as with Biden — the president’s approval rating is under 50 per cent.

Worryingly for Democrats, a

new NBC News poll found that fully 72 per cent of voters believed the country is headed in the wrong direction, to 21 per cent who saw it as being on the right track.

In swing state Pennsylvania, Republican Senate candidate Mehmet Oz on Sunday hammered on that message to rile up a crowd at his rally. “How many of you are worried about America right now?” he asked the crowd in the Pittsburgh suburbs, receiving a round of applause.

The theme resonated with Paul Nelson, 80, a longtime Republican from suburban Philadelphia who sees two priorities for America: bring inflation down and tighten



US President Joe Biden poses for a selfie with supporters during a rally for Democratic candidates in Bronxville, New York, on Sunday. – AFP

up border controls with Mexico to counter drug smuggling.

“If Republicans can take over the Congress,” said Nelson, wearing a baseball cap decorated like the US flag, “then we get a president like Trump. We will be back to where Trump ended.”

With the former president doubling down on voting conspiracy theories, and several candidates in his camp casting doubt on the upcoming midterm results, party chair Ronna McDaniel sought to assure voters that Republicans will accept the outcome — even if they lose.

“They will,” she told CNN on Sunday, when the question was

put to her directly.

Biden has repeatedly called out Trumpists’ growing embrace of election conspiracy theories as a cause for deep concern, warning at a rally in Philadelphia that “democracy is literally on the ballot” and calling it “a defining moment for the nation.”

But there is little indication that Biden’s dire warnings have turned the tables in his favour, with polls suggesting Democrats have struggled to convince voters on kitchen-table issues central to the election.

Democrats have pushed back against the narrative of an inevitable Republican takeover of Congress.

“We’re going to hold this majority,” congressman Sean Patrick Maloney, who heads the Democratic congressional campaign arm, told NBC, saying Biden unfairly received a “bum rap” for inflation and too little credit for successes like job growth.

But Biden’s choice of destination on Sunday — to support New York’s Democratic governor, Kathy Hochul, who faces an unexpectedly strong Republican challenge to re-election — is a sign of just how nervous his camp has grown.

— AFP

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OMAN TROUNCE LEBANON IN WAFF OPENER



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 7

Oman Olympic football team began their campaign on a positive note as they trounced Lebanon 4-2 at the West Asian U-23 Championship which is underway in the Jeddah city in Saudi Arabia late on Sunday.

In another Group A match, Lebanon and Qatar played a goalless draw in the opening round on Thursday.

Oman's victory meant that the team topped Group A with three points while Qatar and Lebanon are placed in the second and third places respectively.

Oman will meet Qatar on Wednesday in a tight clash to decide the toppers of the group.

Despite the results of the forthcoming match, Oman boys confirmed their spot for the semifinals as the top two teams in each group will advance to the semifinals. Then, the winners in semifinals will compete for the title while the losers will play the third and fourth play-off fixture.

Against Lebanon, Al Faraj al Kiyoumi opened the scoring

account for Oman in the tenth minute while Saleem Salim doubled the result from a penalty. Nasser al Rawahi scored a brace in the 41st and 62nd minutes to make Oman's scoresheet as four goals. The goals for Lebanon came from Mohammed Sadiq in the 75th minute and two minutes later Said Saad scored the second goal to make it 4-2.

National head coach Akram Habreesh affirmed that Oman are taking part in this prestigious Asian event with a target of clinching the title. Oman U-23 players team managed to show strong performance in the opener and the team will chase for the same in Wednesday's fixture against rivals Qatar, he added.

In Group B, Syria registered a crucial 2-1 win over hosts Saudi Arabia. Syria suffered a 2-1 loss against Bahrain in their first match. Saudi Arabia will meet Bahrain on Wednesday in a strong game. The semifinal fixtures are scheduled to take place on Saturday while the concluding match and third and fourth play-off match will be held on November 15.

New FIH chief promises strong effort to boost hockey

HOCKEY 5s WORLD CUP IN OMAN TO USHER IN NEW START FOR GAME: IKRAM

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, NOV 7

Newly elected head of International Hockey Federation (FIH), Tayyab Ikram, promised a strong effort to boost the popularity of hockey across the world.

"I am committed to furthering hockey within the countries that are not as prominent on the international stage," the top hockey administrator from Macao, told *Oman Daily Observer* in an exclusive interview.

Ikram said he would streamline the FIH efforts to improve hockey infrastructure in countries those lacking it.

"The FIH will require more finances to turn these aspects into reality. So we need to market the sport more effectively and find various revenue options to back the

developmental goals," the Pakistan-born official said.

Mentioning the immediate challenges before him, Ikram pointed out that the new projects, which is needed to boost the profile of the sport, always come with a financial bearing.

"Regarding new projects, you need to think out of the box financially. But we are trying to improve. The FIH is in the process of creating some resources by developing some new partnerships and involving various stakeholders."

Tayyab opined that the five-a-side format of hockey will be the next big thing for the game in the coming years.

"The five-a-side hockey will be an exciting format of the game that will earn a lot of fans across the world with its eye-catching style. Oman will host the inaugural



Hockey5s World Cup in Muscat."

Ikram was elected as the FIH president after beating Marc Coudron of Belgium 79-47 in the voting conducted by the FIH Congress on Saturday.

"Of the 126 votes submitted by the member National Associations, Tayyab Ikram of Macao attained

resigned on July 18," an FIH statement said.

"Hockey is my passion, hockey has changed my life and I'm thankful to hockey and the hockey family for this. I express my gratitude to all of you for the confidence you've given me today. I promise you that I will carry the message of solidarity and bring the FIH together," Tayyab said after winning the vote.

GREAT ACHIEVEMENT FOR OMAN

Ikram said it was a great achievement for the Sultanate of Oman to get the hosting rights for the Hockey5s World Cup in January 2024.

"It is a new project of FIH. It was only played in Youth Olympics. I think it is not only Oman, but the GCC and Asia, that is honoured to host with this exciting format of

hockey."

"As the president of FIH, I personally congratulate His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, for this great undertaking to bring the world together for Hockey 5s World Cup."

"I deeply appreciate the support from the Oman government and Oman Hockey Association."

Ikram, also the chief executive of Asian Hockey Federation, wished the Oman Hockey Association and its chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma all success in hosting a memorable World Cup in Muscat.

"I am confident that the Oman Hockey Association team under the chairmanship of Dr Marwan al Juma will be able to deliver a memorable first edition of Hockey 5s World Cup. I promise all the support from the FIH and wish them all the best."



Oman body builders bag 4 medals in Spain

BARCELONA: Oman National Bodybuilding and Physique Team collected two gold medals, one silver and one bronze medal in the World Bodybuilding Physique Championship here from November 1 to 7.

Al Muhannad al Maawali snatched the first gold medal for Oman in the Physique category (182cm), while Muneer al Luwaihi added another gold in the Muscular Physique category. Za'em al Fazari earned Oman

a silver medal in the Classic Bodybuilding category, as Omar al Maskari added a bronze medal in the Body Building category (90) kg.

Besides AlMaawali, AlLuwaihi, Al Fazari and Al Maskari, Oman's team included Abdullah bin Said al Jabri, Imad bin Abdulhameed al Balushi, Ghanim bin Salim al Maamari, Mohammed bin Ali al Ajmi, Malik bin Issa al Kasbi and Mu'ayad bin Tariq al Balushi.

— ONA

IAS, Zawawi post close wins in Premier division



Mansoor Mazher (L) and Sufyan Yousuf (R) of IAS

MUSCAT: IAS CT beat Majees CT by a wicket and Zawawi Powertech beat Renaissance by 7 runs in the Premier Division of Oman Cricket's Season 2022-23 powered by Muscat Pharmacy.

In the first match, electing to bowl first, IAS CT got their first wicket in the first over of the game.

Although, Khurram Khan and Karan Kannan had different plans to take the IAS bowlers to the alley. Khurram Khan scored a blistering 130 with 12 fours and 3 sixes well supported by Karan Kannan scoring 62 runs with 8 boundaries and a six. Courtesy of the 158 run stand between the two, Majees ended up with 269 on the board losing 8 wickets.

Waseem Akhtar was the lone armer claiming 4 wickets for 41 runs.

In reply, IAS too lost their first wicket in the first over but Sufyan Yousuf's match defying innings of 88 off 108 balls with 8 fours and 2 sixes turned the ship towards IAS.

Mansoor Mazher's blitz of 56 with 3 boundaries and 3 sixes including one six in the end to chase down 269 was the show-stopper for IAS. Karan Kannan and Sahil Shaik claimed 2 wickets each.

In the second match, Renaissance elected to bowl first against newcomers Powertech.

Powertech got off to a stable start but kept losing wickets with just 100 with 5 down at halfway.



Imran Ayoob of Powertech

Imran Ayoob held the helm of the Powertech innings scoring sublime 62 off 73 balls with 4 fours and 1 six to get Zawawi's total to 233 for 9 wickets in 50 overs.

Aqil Khan, Sufyan Mahmood and Asif Khan bagged 2 wickets each.

In reply, Powertech kept taking wickets at regular interval to restrict Renaissance by 7 runs from chasing their target. Hammad Mirza was the highest scorer notching 46 off 53 balls. Imran Ayoob was the key wicketeer claiming 5 wickets by conceding just 39 runs.

BRIEF SCORES

Majees 269-8 in 50 overs (Khurram Khan 130 (141b) 12x4, 3x6; Waseem Akhtar 4-41) lost to IAS 271-9 in 50 overs (Sufyan Yousuf 88 (108) 8x4, 2x6; Karan Kannan 2-41) by 1 wicket.
Zawawi Powertech 233-9 in 50 overs (Imran Ayoob 62 (73) 4x4, 1x6; Aqil Khan 2-36) beat Renaissance 226 all out in 48.2 overs (Hammad Mirza 46 (53) 2x1, 1x1; Imran Ayoob 5-39) by 7 runs.

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, NOV 6

Two first-half goals by Mohamed Salah brought Liverpool their first league win of the season away from home. The three points gained at the expense of Tottenham Hotspur kept their hopes alive for playing in European competitions next season. They had lost their previous two league games against bottom-of-the-table Nottingham Forest and Leeds.

Liverpool manager, Jurgen Klopp said: "This was big, absolutely big. It was a tough game for everybody, a brilliant first-half, with good football and world-class goals, then Tottenham coming back, taking a lot of risk. It became pretty direct, they switched the sides, crossed the ball early and that makes it very difficult."

He spoke about Salah's goals: "When you look back in five or six years, we'll remember Mo as one of the best strikers you ever saw because his numbers will be insane. It wasn't my plan to celebrate like that but I got carried away as our fans have had to travel a lot in the league and this was the first three points."

The first half was totally in Liverpool's favour. Had Tottenham delivered a second-half performance in the first 45 minutes, the result might have been different. They were a far more spirited side and put pressure



on the opposition throughout the half with Liverpool largely on the retreat.

Liverpool were quick to take the lead when Darwin Nunez, in the 11th minute, passed the ball to Salah in the penalty area who

took one touch to control the ball and then struck it left-footed and low into the corner.

Spurs were unlucky soon after when a shot from Ivan Perisic hit the goalkeeper Alisson and struck the right post. Then in the

18th minute, Ryan Sessegnon was pushed in the box by Trent Alexander-Arnold but the referee ignored Tottenham's appeal for a penalty.

Five minutes before the break, Liverpool doubled the lead. Following a long kick by Alisson, Eric Dier headed the ball to back-pass to his goalkeeper Hugo Lloris, but he put the ball into Salah's path. The Egyptian sprinted past a defender before lifting the ball over the advancing Lloris for his 14th goal of the season in all competitions.

Spurs manager, Antonio Conte made a double change in the 69th minute, bringing on Matt Doherty and Dejan Kulusevski who both combined almost straightaway to pass to Harry Kane and the striker brilliantly put a right-footed shot into the far corner. Thereafter, despite exerting relentless pressure, Spurs could not find a deserved equaliser.

Conte said: "We have just started a process. After one year, we have made a lot of improvement. If someone thinks we are already ready to win I have to be honest and tell you it will be really, really difficult. I can't promise at this moment to win trophies. We are far from it."

He added: "I continue to ask for time and patience. For me, the passion and enthusiasm is my fuel. I need to have this, it's very important for me."

Oman Oxy team emerge champions of Fifco World Corporate Cup

WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, NOV 7

Oman Oxy football team won the Fifco World Corporate Champions Cup 2022 after an exciting 1-0 victory over the Bangladeshi team Band Holding in the final match in Dubai Sports City.

Oman Oxy team came through tough stages of qualifying. The preliminary qualifiers included

Swiss, Mali and UAE.

Oxy started by beating Swiss team 4-1 and then defeated Mali team with a score of 4-2. The Oman team lost to the UAE health 3-2 but qualified to the quarterfinals as second placed from the group.

In the quarterfinals, Oxy beat Saudi Arabia team STS, who were one of the favourites for the championship title, with a 2-1 score to qualify for the semifinals.

Oxy and the UAE health team were 2-2 after regulation time in the semifinal. The Oman side marched into the final after beating the UAE team in the penalty shoot-out.

The Oxy team qualified to represent the Sultanate of Oman after winning second place in the Ooredoo Business Fifco World Cup qualification competitions, which was held in Oman under the supervision of the Oman

Football Association and organised by Sportsmania Oman.

The Oxy Oman team players include Juma al Obaidani, Khaled al Busafi, Wael al Maamari, Abdullah al Zadjali, Said al Browni, Musab al Habsi, Yahya al Ruqaishi, Hamad al Buraiki, Ahmed al Hussein and Musa al Ismaili, while the technical staff consisted of the coaches Raed al Harmali, Saif al Harthy and administrator Nasser al Silti.





DAYS TO GO



NOVEMBER 20 - DECEMBER 18

**FRANCE
LOOK
TO
CAST
ASIDE
DOUBTS**

**INTERNATIONAL
DEBUT: 2007**

**TITLES
WITH FRANCE
NATIONS
LEAGUE
(2021)**



Now approaching his 24th birthday, the Paris Saint-Germain superstar may be relieved to be away from the spotlight of his club for a few weeks after endless speculation about his future. If Mbappe and Benzema click together, then that is likely to spell trouble for France's opponents. —AFP



France

"Les Bleus"



> **4th** FIFA ranking

> **16th** World Cup



COACH

Didier Deschamps

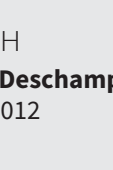
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Winner

1998 2018

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Denmark 

Tunisia 

Sources: FIFA, UEFA, federation

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Oman’s budget surplus climbs to RO 1.123 billion

MUSCAT: Oman’s budget recorded a surplus of RO 1.123 billion as of September-end 2022 versus a deficit of RO 1.030 million over the same period in 2021, according to the Fiscal Performance Monthly Bulletin published by the Ministry of Finance.

Oman’s public revenue stood at RO 10.567 billion at the end of September 2022, up by 43.4% compared to RO 7.368 billion registered over the same period in 2021. This is mainly due to an increase in oil price and production.

By the end of September 2022, hydrocarbon revenue increased to RO 8.102 billion, up by 51.9% compared to RO 5.331 billion registered over the same period in 2021. The increase is supported by higher average oil price of \$94 per barrel, as well as an increase in oil crude production to 1,056,000 barrels per day.

Current revenue increased by 22.3% to stand at RO 2.450 billion



by the end of September 2022 compared to RO 2.004 billion over the same period in 2021.

Public spending increased by 12.5% to RO 9.444 billion by the end of September 2022, up by RO 1.046 billion when compared to the same period in 2021.

The development expenditure of ministries and civil units amounted to RO 657 million, representing 60% of total development spending, i.e. RO 1.100 billion, allocated for 2022.

Meanwhile, current expenditure by the end of September 2022 increased by 10.1% to stand at RO 7.070 billion

OMAN’S PUBLIC REVENUE STOOD AT RO 10.567 BILLION AT THE END OF SEPTEMBER 2022, UP BY 43.4% COMPARED TO RO 7.368 BILLION REGISTERED OVER THE SAME PERIOD IN 2021. THIS IS MAINLY DUE TO AN INCREASE IN OIL PRICE AND PRODUCTION

the private sector an amount of RO 827 million.

This reflects the payment vouchers received through the e-financial system, and which have completed the documentary cycle.

Moreover, the bulletin indicated that the National Assets Register is an integrated central system that takes full account of government assets and helps to draft a strategy to ensure a centralised management of the assets, as well as to maximise their efficiency and returns.

This can be achieved through the optimal use of such assets in a way that generate more financial resources for the State budget.

The first phase of the National Assets Register’s tasks includes counting and listing of government assets of the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health and Muscat Municipality. The next phase includes launching the electronic system of the National Assets Register. — ONA

China accounts for 79% of Omani crude exports



JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

Global economic power China retained its position as a top destination of Omani oil exports, with 79.1 per cent of total crude exports, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals said in a report.

A total of 242.8 million barrels of Omani crude was shipped until the 3rd quarter of 2022, a 15 per cent increase compared to last year. The lion’s share amounting to 192.05 million barrels was exported to China. This however represents a decline of the 82.5 per cent compared to the same period last year.

Ranked in the distant second place was India, which lifted 12.3 per cent of Omani crude export amounting to 29.86 million barrels, an increase from last year’s 10.65 per cent.

Other notable importers of Omani crude until the end of 3rd quarter of 2022 were South Korea with 3.8 per cent amounting to 9.2 million barrels, a jump from

3.1 per cent last year. The biggest increase was seen with Japan with 3.8 per cent or amounting to 9.2 million barrels compared to just 1.6 per cent during last year. The remaining 0.9 per cent was distributed to the other importers of Omani crude.

Meanwhile, the price of Omani crude oil average \$90.80/barrel during the month of September (for November 2022 delivery). The total production of crude and oil condensate in the 3rd quarter reached 289.8 million barrels with an increase of 10.4 per cent.

The crude oil production recorded an increase of 14.1 per cent with 231.1 million barrels. On the other hand, the production of oil condensate reached 58.7 million barrels or a decrease of 2 per cent compared to the same period last year.

Meanwhile, refineries affiliated with OQ processed 62 million barrels during the three quarters of this year, a decrease of 1 per cent compared to the same period last year.

Forum highlights promising growth prospects of Islamic banking

BALQEES AL ORAIMIYAH
MUSCAT, NOV 7



HH Sayyid Mohammed bin Thuwaini al Said presided over the opening of the 1st Omani forum on Islamic banking, which focused on the theme, ‘Prospects for Growth and Development in line with Oman Vision 2040’.

The event was organised by Al Roya Publishing with the support of Oman Banks Association. In remarks to journalists, HH Sayyid Mohammed said the forum showcased the successful role of the Islamic banking sector in the Sultanate of Oman and its prospects for growth.

Oman’s renewed renaissance, he noted, rests on a number of sectors, including the banking sector. Islamic banking, he stressed, has a promising role in the achievement of these goals.

Hatem bin Hamad al Taie, Chairman of Al Roya Group, said the event takes a deeper look at the Islamic banking sector nearly ten years since its launch in Oman.

The Islamic banking sector is based on its ability to develop and meet the aspirations of the individuals and organisations inclined to deal in sharia-compliant banking and financial products. Regulatory frameworks established by the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) will enable the growth of Islamic

Oman’s renewed renaissance rests on a number of sectors, including the banking sector. Islamic banking has a promising role in the achievement of these goals

banking and its market share in the Omani banking sector.

In his speech, Al Taie underlined the needs for Islamic banks and windows to strengthen their preparedness in the face of cybersecurity challenges, in light of the growth of financial crimes around the world and the adoption of sophisticated criminal methods.

He explained that the Central

Bank of Oman — in its capacity as the regulatory authority for the banking sector — has put in place many controls and precautionary measures to ensure that electronic banking enjoys the highest standards of digital security.

Professor Dr Saeed al Muharrami of the College of Economics and Political Science at Sultan Qaboos University, spoke on the ‘Developmental Role of Financing and Investment Policies in Omani Islamic Banks’.

He touched upon the determinants of the banking sector and the path of Islamic banking and the challenges facing its development contributions in order to achieve an effective contribution that guarantees more development benefits.

At the conclusion of the working paper, Al Muharrami concluded that the policies of investing money in Omani Islamic banks do not take into account the developmental role, given their clear reliance on short-term financing and investment, in their desire to achieve quick profitability and high liquidity, thus becoming similar to what traditional banks offer.

He pointed out that there is a clear shortcoming of Omani Islamic banks in contributing to the achievement of economic and social development, as their long-term investment policies represented a small percentage of the total investment of funds, and thus Omani Islamic banks did not contribute to economic and social development in the manner that is hoped for.

Al Ahlia wins ‘Most Innovative Insurer-Oman’ award

MUSCAT: Al Ahlia Insurance, one of Oman's leading insurance companies, has added another prestigious award to its list of growing accolades by winning “Most Innovative Insurer - Oman” at this year's International Business Magazine (IntlBM) Annual Awards, held in Dubai on October 29, 2022.

The IntlBM awards are considered a hallmark of excellence and outstanding achievements from across industries internationally. The ‘Most Innovative Insurer’ award not only commemorates best-in-class business achievements and technology disruptions; but

also recognises the brand's vision for the insurance industry, the focus on customer-centricity throughout the organisation, and the leadership influence it has for others to follow suit.

With over three decades of expertise, Al Ahlia insurance has established itself as Oman's trustworthy Insurer. It has launched several cutting-edge propositions and is committed to improving the overall customer experience by tapping into insights and investing in technology to provide customers with unmatched service support.

Some of the leading propositions that have earned Al Ahlia this prestigious award



are “Claim registration through WhatsApp”, “Bot-assisted sales journey”, “Online policy transfer” and the “One-click renewal link”. Commenting on this

momentous win, Hanaa al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer – Al Ahlia Oman, said, “It gives us great pleasure to have been granted this global award that recognises

Al Ahlia as a leader in innovation across international business and finance sectors.

The recognition is a testament to the outstanding efforts that our team takes to enhance the customer experience, and the willingness to think outside the box to achieve that.

Speaking on the eve of the awards night, Arif al Zadjali – IT Director, Al Ahlia Insurance said: “Digitisation and technology have always been important areas of strategic focus at Al Ahlia, we always look at new innovative ways to create a seamless and easy experience for our customers. Our goal is to continuously find new

propositions and technologies that make the insurance process more accessible and more approachable.”

Established in 1985, Al Ahlia Insurance Co SAOG is one of Oman's longest-serving non-life insurance companies. Al Ahlia offers a wide range of products and services in the retail sector including Motor, Travel, Personal Accident, and home products.

With over 20 broker & affinity partners, 24 own branches, 35 agent offices, a dedicated call centre, an inbound toll-free number, and a convenient online platform; the company provides its customers with unmatched sales and service support.

NBO Muzn Islamic Banking migrates card services to Visa



MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman's (NBO) Muzn Islamic Banking has continued to unlock opportunities for its customers by migrating all card services to Visa, the world's largest payment network.

The move will offer customers an enhanced banking experience with a Visa card, including exclusive lifestyle and travel benefits, dining deals, preferential rates and discounts at over 70 million merchant locations in more than 200 countries worldwide, whilst proudly adhering to Sharia law practices.

Salima al Marzouqi, Assisting General Manager and Chief Islamic Banking Officer, at NBO Muzn Islamic Banking, said, “At Muzn we understand your ambitions and by working together, we provide the latest Shariah-compliant solutions, while exploring new possibilities with our customers in mind.

Our partnership with Visa offers secure and seamless payments, both in-store and online, and makes the everyday banking experience as simple and convenient as possible. Visa's global expertise will help our customers reach new heights with a growing range of Islamic banking products, services and lifestyle benefits while staying true to our shared values.”

Launched as Oman's first Islamic window, NBO Muzn has continued to be at the forefront of a fast-growing banking sector by offering a range of fully Shariah-compliant banking solutions.

Muzn was named Best Islamic Bank Oman 2022 at the World Economic Magazine Awards and Islamic Bank of the Year 2022 at The Banker Islamic Bank of the Year Awards, had has continued to offer a host of innovative, competitive and quality financial solutions with the values of Shari'a always at the core.

Enjoy distinctive luxury with Lincoln Aviator



MUSCAT: Lincoln luxury has been inspirational in many ways. From thoughtfully included details to quality materials that elevate every moment in the Lincoln Aviator.

The Aviator's eye-catching stance makes it grab attention at every instance. Its stylish design and overall profile make the Aviator stand out.

Offering thrilling driving experiences in the Aviator is a standard twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6 engine that is paired with a 10-speed SelectShift automatic transmission. The Aviator delivers an impressive 400 horsepower and 562 Nm of torque for effortless acceleration. The three-row luxury SUV is equipped with all-wheel drive capability.

The Lincoln Aviator offers

drivers an engaging drive with the Lincoln drive modes' five signature settings – normal, conserve, excite, slippery and deep conditions. This feature allows owners to further customise their driving experience, while a 10.1-inch standard configurable LCD instrument cluster confirms their choices with beautiful, easy-to-read dynamic graphics and prompts.

Putting on a show right from the start, the air glide suspension with dynamic lower entry automatically lowers the vehicle to “greet” the driver, adding a new level of sophistication to Lincoln's signature welcome lighting embrace. The convenience of this feature makes loading cargo easier as well.

KR Eshraqa supports Omani Women Association's sewing programme

MUSCAT: In an effort to create a better future for Omani women from different walks of life and to make them financially independent and self-reliant, Khimji Ramdas's (KR) Eshraqa recently conducted ‘Ana Aqdar’ – a tailoring and fashion design training programme, in partnership with the Omani Women Association, Muscat. This support is part of Eshraqa's ‘Qudurat initiative’, which focuses on women's empowerment and employability.

The two-month training programme which began in September mentored ten women on various tailoring techniques using the sewing machines and tailoring tools provided by Eshraqa.

The initiative culminated with a fashion show held at the Omani Women's Association in Muscat, under the auspices of HH Sayyida Hujaijah bint Jaifar Al Said, Chairperson of the Association for the Welfare of Handicapped Children. The fashion show showcased costumes that were designed and sewn by the participants themselves. Some of the best participants received top



honours and were felicitated by the chief guest at the event.

Highlighting Eshraqa's role in women empowerment initiatives across the Sultanate of Oman, Nailesh Khimji, Director, Khimji Ramdas Group said, “Eshraqa appreciates the value women bring to society as leaders, innovators, and accelerators of change. Through our support of programmes like the ‘Ana Aqdar’, we remain committed to Oman's Vision 2040 by creating an environment of equality and inclusivity.

We will continue to encourage

Omani women from different walks of life to build a better tomorrow for themselves and their families, and the society at large.”

HH Sayyidah Aliya bint Thuwaini al Said, Chairperson of the Omani Women's Association mentioned: “KR Eshraqa's support is creating new livelihood opportunities for the Omani women who have participated in the ‘Ana Aqdar’ programme. Skill workshops such as these go a long way in supporting women to become powerful agents of change.”

Bank Muscat offers special highly competitive rates to first time borrowers until December 31

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced discounted offers on Baituna and Personal Finance loans for first time borrowers till December 31, 2022.

In line with its customer-centric strategy of developing and offering the best services and facilities possible for its customers, the special offer features highly-competitive interest rates starting at just 4.25 per cent for Baituna home loans and 4.5 per cent on Personal Loans. It is available to Omani employees of government and quasi-government institutions as well as Tier 1 companies with salaries of RO 1,000 or more.

Also on the occasion, the bank has announced reduced interest rates on short term personal loans starting at just 4 per cent for 12 months, and home loans with attractive interest rates starting at 4.5 per cent for other



customers who would like to top up their loans.

Speaking about the announcement of the new offers, Abdullah bin Tamman al Maashani (pictured), General Manager – Products, Bank Muscat, said: “The latest offers featuring some of the most attractive interest rates was launched as part of the bank's ongoing efforts to reach out to the maximum number of customers and help them realise their dreams.

Our valued customers will be able to take advantage of various offers with reduced interest rates as per their changing needs. Bank Muscat is delighted with their



strong support and confidence in the bank and will continue to be responsive to customer needs and global financial trends.”

Both first time borrowers and existing customers can easily apply for home finance by visiting any of the Bank's Baituna Sales Centres in Qurm, Maabelah, Barka, Suhar, Saham, Sur, Ibra, Nizwa, Ibr, Buraimi and Salalah or any Bank Muscat branch in Oman.

Financing up to RO 500,000 and for a period up to 25 years is available to customers to construct or purchase new homes as well as to buy land for residential construction.

Baituna is one of the best home finance options in Oman thanks to its fast processing, documentation and prompt disbursement of financing.

Customers who would like to apply for personal loans can visit

their nearest Bank Muscat branch with the required documents including a salary transfer letter from their employer and their ID cards. Financing up to RO 200,000 is available to customers based on fulfilment of the eligibility criteria and the bank is well known for its speedy processing of applications.

Please go to <https://www.bankmuscat.com/en/Pages/Loan-Calculator.aspx> or call 24795555 to get more details about the loan options available to customers. As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman for the last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 146 retail banking branches.

With over 800 ATMs, CDMs and FfMs and state-of-the-art Internet and Mobile Banking, customers can meet the vast majority of their financial needs 24/7 from the ease of their homes or offices.



Metals surge on China Covid easing speculation



OLE S HANSEN

Commodities traded mostly higher during a week where the focus altered between optimism over China reopening and an extended rate hike cycle in the US having a negative impact on global growth and demand.

In addition, the energy market continues to focus on the price-supportive impact of Opec+ production cuts and upcoming EU sanctions against Russian crude sales.

Overall, the Bloomberg Commodity Index which tracks a basket of major commodity futures spread evenly between energy, metals, and agriculture, traded higher by more than 4 per cent near a three-week high.

Following Wednesdays expected 75 basis point rate hike, the fourth in this cycle, Fed Chair Powell went on to deliver what turned out to be a temporary hammer-blow to sentiment across markets after saying that any talk of a pause is "very premature".

However, it is also clear that the FOMC will be economic data driven, and any signs of weakness could alter this view after the Fed in its statement raised the prospect of pausing to assess the "cumulative tightening" impact.

The time lag between rate hikes and the economic impact remains a worry that the bond market is trying to price through an increasingly inverted US yield curve.

This week, the 2-10-year spread jumped to -61 basis points, the most inverted we have seen it since the 1980's and it highlights the risk of a central bank policy mistake leading to weaker growth without successfully managing to get inflation under control. These developments helped support gold and silver, both bouncing strongly on short covering following an initial and failed attempt to drive them lower through key support.

Crude oil remains on track for a third week of gains with Brent and WTI crude oil both approaching the top of their established ranges with the focus on the supply impact of Opec+ production cuts and upcoming EU sanctions against Russian oil as well as a tight product market while the demand side is torn between the prospect of a pickup in Chinese demand once Covid restrictions are lifted and worries that global economic activity will continue to weaken in the coming months.

While crude oil has been mostly rangebound since July, the fuel product market has continued to tighten as supplies in Europe and the US have become increasingly scarce, thereby driving up refinery margins for gasoline and distillate products such as diesel, heating oil, and jet fuel.

The focus in terms of tightness remains on the northern hemisphere product market where low stocks of diesel and heating oil continue to raise concerns. The market has been uprooted by the war in Ukraine and sanctions against Russia, a major supplier of refined products to Europe.

In addition, the high cost of gas has supported increased switching activity from gas to other fuels, especially diesel and heating oil.

This tight market situation is now being made worse by the Opec+ ill-timed decision to cut production from this month. While the continued release of US (light sweet) crude from its strategic reserves will support the production of gasoline, the Opec+ production cuts will primarily be provided by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE – all producers of the medium/heavy crude which yields the highest amount of distillate.

As long as the product market remains this tight, the risk of seeing lower crude oil prices – despite the current worry about recession – seems to be low so we maintain our forecast for a price range in Brent for this quarter between \$85 and \$100, with the tightening product market increasingly skewing the risk to the upside. *(The author is Head of Commodity Strategy, Saxo Bank)*

Oman Flour Mills weighs acquisition of Australian farm land

Supply diversification: Local trading arm inks deal with Australian grower for supply of 30,000 MT of wheat with first shipment due in Oman by next February

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, NOV 7

Oman Flour Mills (OFM), a major player in the country's food sector, says it is exploring a proposal to acquire farm land in Australia as part of its strategy to secure its wheat requirements over the long term.

According to Salah bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the publicly listed company's board of directors, the initiative is being keenly explored by Atyab Investments, the investment arm of Oman Flour Mills (OFM).

"A proposal to purchase farming lands was presented to OFM," said Al Maawali. "The company is currently evaluating more potential sites in Australia for farming land acquisition," he stated in the Directors' report of the company's financial performance for Q3 2022.

A key partner in Oman's food security strategy, OFM's minority government stake is represented by Oman Food Investment Holding Group (Nitaj), a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA).

Of late, grain producing powerhouse Australia is increasingly on OFM's radar as a potential source of wheat for its operations, as well as to secure



Oman's food security needs. To this end, the company has set up a local trading firm, named OMAUS Pty, to help secure grain supplies from Australia.

Significantly, OMAUS Pty has signed a contract with a local Australian grower for the purchase of 30,000 metric tonnes of Australian premium wheat (APW). The first shipment of this wheat is expected to arrive in Muscat by February 2023, said Al Maawali.

Additionally, Atyab Investments is currently exploring an array of new projects in line with OFM's strategy to integrate across the value chain, as well as drive diversification within the group.

One initiative that is set to shortly materialise is Oman Flour Mills' plan to venture into

the production of foods based on organic flour. To this end, the company has placed an order for a shipment of organic flour which is due to arrive shortly in the country. Organic flour-based products will be launched during the current quarter, according to the chairman.

Furthermore, it is actively looking at sustainable food projects based on alternative protein sources. It includes insect farming with the goal to sustainably support the animal feed requirements of Oman's burgeoning livestock, poultry and aquaculture sectors.

Another area of innovation being looked at by Oman Flour Mills is the farming of Spirulina – cyanobacteria from blue-green algae species which can be processed into nutritive products

consumed by humans and animals alike.

A third area of interest is the cultivation of water lentils – a plant with a roughly 45 – 48 per cent protein content that can be used as a soybean meal replacement in animal feed. Additionally, water lentils can also be used in nutraceutical, pharmaceutical and FMCG products.

Besides, the company is studying the possible cultivation of Azola – a floating plant leaf, dubbed 'The Green Goldmine', because of its potential use as a bio-fertiliser, animal feed, and also in its ability to improve the nutritional status of soils. Similar in appearance to water lentils, Azola has about 25 – 28 per cent protein, and can be used in the production of medicines and nutritive foods for human consumption.

■ CBO DELEGATION VISITS IRAN



A delegation representing the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) conducted a visit to the Central Bank of the Republic Islamic of Iran recently. The delegation, headed by Tahir bin Salim al Amri, the Executive President of CBO, met with Dr Ali Salehabadi, the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran. The visit is a continuation of the two countries' efforts towards enhancing their strong bilateral relations and promising trade prospects. According to December 2021 statistics, the volume of bilateral trade between the friendly countries registered approximately RO 254.309 million, while the volume of exports exceeded RO 155.583 million, and imports stood at RO 89.726 million. The visit is expected to yield a positive outcome and raise aspirations to boost economic cooperation and open up new and broad horizons of mutual work between the two countries.

Duqm Materials Market now 70 per cent complete

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 7

Duqm Materials Market, a key investment in the Sino-Omani Industrial Park in Duqm SEZ, is making headway in its development. The project is jointly developed between Oman Wanfang, developer and operator of the Sino-Oman Industrial Park, Al Thabet Holding Company and Oman Company for the Development of the SEZ at Duqm

(Tatweer).

Eng Ahmed bin Hamood al Sawafi from Tatweer said the project consists of building materials showroom, in addition to 5 buildings that consist of workshops and four stores with a total built-up area of 31,138 square metres.

The project includes relevant infrastructure works such as roads, electrical works, sewage network, water network, irrigation and landscaping works.



Tatweer Company is implementing and managing the project and supervising the construction work.

The establishment of Duqm materials market aims to provide new conception for commercial centres in the building materials sector, in a style that differs from other commercial centres and complexes in the Sultanate of Oman, in addition to showrooms and wholesale and retail stores.

The market will focus on light

manufacturing and assembly activities through specialised workshops.

It will also focus on bringing Chinese goods and manufacturing technologies to the Sultanate of Oman, and deal with wholesale demands for local and international markets.

Upon completion, the project will attract many local and international companies specialised in the fields of building and construction.

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National Museum hosts perfume industry to explore new frontiers

Three world-renowned perfume houses came together for a panel discussion organised by the National Museum of Oman to dissect sections of the perfume industry and talk about the emerging trends as well as highlight perfume industry developments in France and Oman... **P20**

Trumpeter Chris Botti to astonish in ROHM performance

THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE Muscat is delighted to announce the upcoming concert with Chris Botti. Botti is an American musician and trumpet player of astonishing renown. Since the release in 2004 of his critically acclaimed album, *When I Fall in Love*, he has been hailed as

the bestselling American instrumental artist of all time and counts Grammy awards, platinum and silver records to his name. Performing worldwide and selling more than four million albums, Botti has developed a form of creative expression that is rooted in jazz but

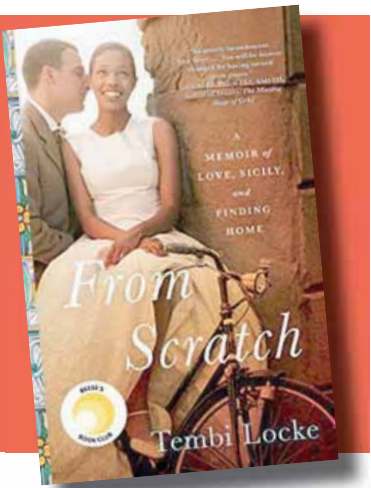
expands beyond that single genre and celebrates a blend of pop and balladic music. Over the past three decades, Botti has recorded and performed with top superstars such as Sting, Lady Gaga, Yo-Yo Ma, Paul Simon and Joshua Bell. He has performed with many of the finest symphonies at the world's most prestigious venues, from Carnegie Hall to Sydney Opera House and Teatro San Carlo in Naples. As a musician, he is difficult to classify, he is as happy improvising on a jazz number with a jazz legend such as Herbie Hancock, as he is riffing with Sting or performing classical tunes with Andrea Bocelli. Chris Botti has thoroughly established himself as one of the important, innovative figures of the contemporary music world.



READ

FROM SCRATCH

BY TEMBI LOCKE
A black American woman marries a Sicilian man, and finds solace in food and family after tragedy strikes.



FASHION

Italian fashion designer Alessandro Michele attends the 11th Annual LACMA Art+Film Gala at Los Angeles County Museum of Art in Los Angeles, California. — AFP



TRAVEL TALES

Revellers preparing lanterns to attach to hot-air balloons during the Tazaungdaing Lighting Festival at Pyin Oo Lwin Township in Mandalay. — AFP





As climate shocks loom, a race to document Namibia's rock art

AMONG THE RAMBLING herd painted onto the rocks of Namibia's Erongo mountains, some creatures are easy to spot - the long necks of giraffes, the spikes of antelopes' horns. Other animals have faded beyond recognition.

Local guide Johannes Ikun Nani had only seen his ancestors' rock art in books, until a job took him to the country's central region, where the ancient rock paintings and engravings have become a growing tourist attraction over the years.

Nani counts himself lucky to have witnessed his heritage firsthand — especially because archaeologists say climate change may be accelerating its disappearance.



"I feel proud to see this with my own eyes," Nani, an indigenous San descendent, told the Thomson Reuters Foundation as he pointed to a painting on the rocks he said depicted figures carrying hunting weapons and nets.

"They left this handmade rock art to show us we had family here; it's like a newspaper to let us know they were in this area," he said as the sun set behind the Erongo mountains.

Namibia is home to one of Africa's largest collections of rock art engravings and tens of thousands of paintings attributed to Stone Age hunter-gatherers — some dating back as far as 30,000 years.

While archaeologists say more research is needed, they fear climate-linked flash floods, dust, vegetation growth, fungus and desert elephants and other animals seeking water close to the sites pose a threat to the ancient art's survival.

RISING TEMPERATURES

Tens of thousands of people visit Namibia's rock art heritage sites each year, including foreign archaeologists, bringing in much-needed income to surrounding communities in the sparsely populated southern African country.

Rock art degradation — such as

cracks, fading and exfoliation — are caused by various factors, including seismic shocks and tourist activity, but climate impacts are a growing concern, said independent Namibian archaeologist, Alma Mekondjo Nankela. Rising temperatures combined with coastal fog can lead to evaporation, condensation and pigment run-off, while vegetation growth, accelerated by heavy rains, rubs against the art, said Nankela.

Animals seeking water and grazing close to the sites during drought periods increase erosion and dust, and — in the case of elephants — trample the rocks, she added. From Indonesia to Australia, archaeologists have found that climate

change impacts such as more variable temperatures, flooding and wildfires are causing blistering, peeling, and even rock explosions at important sites of ancient art.

Nankela fears the same lies in store for Namibia, where the absence of baseline data, funding and resources in the archaeology sector makes it difficult to track long-term climate changes over the years, she said.

"They have to be monitored because if they are destroyed, our rock art is lost to humanity," she added in a video call.

BRUTAL DROUGHTS

Namibia has been battling brutal droughts for the past decade, with recent torrential rains bringing only brief respite for farmers in the semi-desert country.

As climate change impacts gather pace, the country is expected to see extreme heat, unpredictable rainfall and rising and warming ocean conditions, according to the World Bank.

Drought can also destroy vegetation and accelerate soil erosion, meaning more water floods rock shelters instead of being absorbed by the earth, said Nankela, who was the only state archaeologist working for the Namibian Heritage Council for over a decade until 2021.

Over the years, Nankela made rock art condition assessments across the country, using photographs to capture fungal growth, cracked and collapsing panels, water damage and animal encroachment, noting deterioration on an annual basis.

But the throngs of tourists pose a risk too, said Nankela and John Kinahan, an independent Namibian archaeologist who has worked in the Namib Desert for more than 40 years.

At the Twyfelfontein rock art and UNESCO heritage site in northwestern Namibia, tourists from Germany, Spain, France and South Africa poured out of vehicles in the sweltering heat to view the age-old engravings etched into sandstone.



Many snapped photographs as groups piled on to metal platforms that balance against the rock face for a closer look.

"Traffic in people stirs up fine dust that sticks to the rocks," said Kinahan, adding that car fumes, tourists touching the rocks or overburdening the platforms, as well as seismic activity and mining, all pose a risk to the art's longevity.

At Twyfelfontein, some of the animals that are depicted are still easily to identify, but others are significantly more faded, with only a leg or body visible. In some places, chunks of rocks have broken off completely.

"Rock art spans a period of extreme climatic variations ... it is not made to last forever," said Kinahan, adding that it was important to find the balance between tourism and preservation, which requires funding to study as much as possible.

RACE TO DOCUMENT

At Omandumba farm in the Erongo Mountains, where Nani helps run a San cultural museum, archaeologists from France's National Museum of Natural History sieved through sand deposits, excavated small patches of soil and studied rock art pigment.

Inside a nearby shelter called Leopard Cave, Matthieu Lebon, a rock art pigment

specialist from the museum working with Nankela and other local archaeologists, gestured towards trails of orange and brown pigment running down a wall.

"This is a good example of what can happen in different climatic conditions: the quick shift between wet and dry periods could alter the paintings. They are almost erased by rain flow," he said.

At other sites on Omandumba Farm, manager Salome Visser pointed out patches where water has soaked through the granite rock during heavy rains, leaving white trails on the art. She has noted a visible lightening of the paintings over the past decade.

Around the world, heritage experts



are turning to new innovations and technology to preserve such sites.

The famous wall paintings of the Lascaux Caves in southwestern France have been reproduced on a nearby site for tourists to keep the original safe.

In South Africa, 3D scanning and virtual tours hope to protect art while bringing it to a wider audience, and in Ethiopia, large shelters were erected over the historical stone churches of Lalibela to shield them from the elements.

Namibia has made use of railings to encourage visitors to keep a distance and silicone strips at some sites to divert water flow when it rains.

The greatest tragedy of disappearing rock art is that many of Namibia's indigenous people may never get a chance to see their cultural heritage firsthand, local experts said, adding that funding and training for local archaeologists was vital.

"Rock art is about coming back to our culture," said Tertius Oeamseb, a guide at the Brandberg rock art site, which also lies in the Erongo region.

"That's why I work here, to be close to my ancestors while the art is still around," he said. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

Originally published on: <https://www.context.news/climate-risks/as-climate-shocks-loom-a-race-to-document-namibias-rock-art>

ART TREND

Artwork long thought a copy revealed as real Rembrandt



ART EXPERTS in the Netherlands unveiled an oil sketch on Thursday by the famous Dutch master Rembrandt after it languished for a century in a forgotten corner of a museum, believed to be an imitation.

"The Raising of the Cross" oil sketch from the 1640s was long thought to have been the work of a follower of the 17th century master, known for his famous works like "The Night Watch" and "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp".

But now the Bredius museum in The Hague, where the sketch has been on display since it was bought in 1921, has revealed, thanks to new scientific techniques, it was in fact painted by Rembrandt.

"The quality of the details are so well done that I am convinced that this is a Rembrandt," said Johanneke Verhave, who restored the sketch.

She studied the artwork together with Jeroen Giltaij, former chief curator of old paintings at Rotterdam's Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum who first "rediscovered" it while doing research for a book on Rembrandt about a year ago.

"I looked at this work again and again. At the brush strokes. They are brilliant," Giltaij told AFP.

"Just a few broad brush strokes" convinced him the sketch was indeed the genuine article, he said.

The artwork was first bought by the museum's original curator Abraham Bredius in 1921. He too was convinced the sketch was an original Rembrandt.

But over the years, art experts dismissed it as a "crude imitation".

Giltaij re-examined the sketch for his "Big Book of Rembrandt Paintings" which features all 684 works by the Dutch master.

"When I was looking at it, I thought Bredius was right. I think this is indeed a Rembrandt," he said.



'NOT A COPY'

One of the main arguments by art experts for the sketch being an imitation was the seemingly undealt brush strokes on the canvas.

"You have to remember, this is an oil sketch. Rembrandt is usually very precise and refined, but this is very rough," Giltaij said.

"The reason is the oil sketch is a preparatory sketch for another painting. He wants to show the composition, a rough idea of what the actual painting could look like," he said.

The sketch also harked back to a 1633 Rembrandt painting also entitled "The Raising of the Cross" which now hangs in the Alte Pinakothek art museum in Munich.

Restorer Verhave said infrared reflectography and X-ray scans were made of the sketch, revealing interesting elements.

"The research shows that the sketch has several changes made by the artist himself while painting, meaning that its composition was a creative process."

"This means the painter was changing his mind while he was working. He was clearly not copying another painting," she said.

The research also showed the way the painter handled his brush matched that of the great master.

The two experts' research was sent to Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, which conducted its own analysis.

"Regarding the use of materials, the researchers at the Rijksmuseum however did not find anything to contradict an attribution to Rembrandt," the Bredius museum said. — **AFP**



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AROUND THE WORLD

ANIMAL PLANET

Australia's 'irreplaceable' platypus threatened by dams: study



THE FUTURE OF THE platypus, a unique duck-billed, egg-laying mammal only found in Australia, is under threat because they cannot climb over tall river dams, according to a new study.

The platypus is an oddity in many ways. As well as its duck-like bill and egg-laying, it is a rare venomous mammal, brandishing centimetre-long poisonous spurs on its hind legs.

They are also one of the only mammals who can locate prey by detecting electric fields and whose fur glows blue-green under an ultraviolet light. Platypuses even have 10 sex chromosomes — most mammals have two.

But the number of platypuses has fallen by 50 per cent since Europeans settled Australia more than two centuries ago, according to previous research.

Its habitat has increasingly come under threat from climate change-fuelled extreme weather events including drought and fire. They are also preyed upon by invasive species such as foxes, cats and dogs.

A new study published in the journal *Communications Biology* this week identified a new threat: platypuses are not able to climb over large, human-made dams in rivers.

The study's lead author, Jose Luis Mijangos of the University of New South Wales, told AFP that "there might be as few as 30,000 mature platypuses" left in Australia.

More than three quarters of Australia's dams measuring over 10 metres (33 feet) are in regions where platypuses live, the study said.

Some platypuses, which mostly live in rivers and streams but can use their webbed feet to walk on land, have been reported to be able to cross smaller dams.

But they cannot get over taller dams, isolating the animals from each other, the study found.

INCREASED INBREEDING

The researchers took the DNA samples of 274 platypuses from nine rivers in the states of Victoria and New South Wales. Five of the rivers have dams between 85 to 180 metres tall, while the others flow unimpeded.

Comparing the samples, they found that genetic differences were four to 20 times higher in platypus populations around the dammed rivers compared to those not living near dams, indicating the first group rarely mixed with others.

They also estimated that the genetic differences had increased in every platypus generation since the nearby dams had been completed.

"These results suggest that almost no or no platypuses have passed around the dams since they were built," Mijangos said.

As a result, "populations are fragmented, which means that the ability to recolonise available habitat or migrate to areas with more suitable conditions is restricted," he added.

"Fragmentation also simultaneously reduces both local population size and gene flow, each of which is expected to lead to increased inbreeding and reduction of the genetic variation."

To address the problem, the researchers propose structures be built to help the platypuses scale the dams. They also suggested that humans could relocate some platypuses to promote diversity.

After all, the platypus is too weird to be lost.

"Platypuses are arguably the most irreplaceable mammal because they have a unique combination of features," Mijangos said. — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

Del Toro explores fascism and puppets in dark animated 'Pinocchio'



WHEN GUILLERMO del Toro first set out to make a dark, animated version of "Pinocchio" 15 years ago, he opted to set his tale of puppets and their string-pulling masters in 1930s fascist Italy.

The characters of elderly woodcarver Geppetto and his exuberant living puppet Pinocchio were first created in an 1883 Italian novel, and later popularised by Disney.

But in "Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio," out on Netflix next month, they find themselves living in Benito Mussolini's inter-war world of military salutes, strict conformity and violent machismo.

"I wanted (to set the film in) a moment in which behaving like a puppet was a good thing," del Toro told AFP on the red carpet of this weekend's AFI Fest in Hollywood.

"I wanted Pinocchio to be disobedient," he added.

"I wanted Pinocchio, who was the only puppet, to not act like a puppet. I thought, thematically, that was perfect."

While the theme of fascism could appear timely in light of recent global politics, del Toro said the movie was just as relevant when he conceived the project years ago. Indeed, del Toro has previously used his distinctive Gothic fairy tales to tackle the specter of fascism with films such as "Pan's Labyrinth" and "The Devil's Backbone," both set in Franco-era Spain.

"It is something that concerns me because it's something that humanity seems to

come back to," he said.

"I've always seen it. I don't know if it's the colour of my glasses, but I always see it."

Fascism is "always alive in the background — or in the foreground," he said.

'KALEIDOSCOPIC'

The Oscar-winning Mexican director pitched his version of "Pinocchio" to Hollywood studios and producers for years before streaming giant Netflix finally bought the rights in 2018.

"I've been fighting to make it for half my career," said del Toro. The movie required over 1,000 days of filming.

It uses the painstaking method of stop-motion animation, in which puppets are carefully manipulated frame-by-frame to create the illusion of movement.

For del Toro, using computer-generated imagery — like Disney's own recent live-action remake of its previous, seminal 1940 animation — was never an option.

"It was very pertinent for me to make a story about a puppet with puppets, and the puppets believe they are not puppets," he said.

"It is a very beautiful sort of kaleidoscopic, telescoping thing."

While del Toro has long been fascinated by animation, he won his Oscars for best director and best picture with 2017's live-action "The Shape of Water," and "Pinocchio" marks his first animated feature film.

"In North America, animation is seen as a genre for kids a little more," said del Toro.

"One of the things that I think everybody is trying to change, not just us, is to say, 'Animation is film, animation is acting, animation is art.'"

Stop-motion animation can "touch upon profoundly moving, profoundly spiritual things," but it is "a practice that is constantly on the verge of extinction," he said.

"It's only kept alive by crazy fanatics... we keep it alive!"

MOTHER'S LEGACY

While the story explores father-son bonds, Del Toro became fascinated with the character of Pinocchio as a child when he was introduced to the mischievous marionette by his mother, with whom he was extremely close.

"I'd collect artifacts from Pinocchio... My mother and I saw it together when I was very young, and she kept giving me Pinocchios all through my life," he recalled.

She passed away last month — just one day before the film's world premiere in London. Del Toro told the audience there that they were about to watch "a film that bonded me with my mom for an entire life."

"Guillermo del Toro's Pinocchio" will be released on Netflix globally from December 9. The film's cast of voice actors includes Ewan McGregor, Cate Blanchett, John Turturro and Tilda Swinton. — **AFP**



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
khalidalbalushi@hotmail.com

Thomas Takes out the Bullet from my Body

THE FOLLOWING is my English translation of excerpts from "A Soldier from Oman, Memory's Nectar" by (ret.) Inspector-General Said bin Rashid al Kalbani.

Thomas, an American surgeon, supervised my and Saif's treatment. My operation was a major one. Under local anaesthesia, I could hear the doctor's tweezers taking the bullet out of my body. It happened to be that a tribesman of mine, Rashid al Kalbani, was there with his son, Mohammed. When he heard that someone from Miskan was in the operating theatre, he rushed magnanimously to me, asking for reassurance that I was fine.

Not allowed to enter, he was told to wait for my permission. The doctor and the nurses asked me if I knew the man. Upon seeing him from the window, I told them "This is my father", meaning I took him to be like my father. He was, accordingly, allowed to come in. He stayed in the theatre till the operation was over, and I got transferred to the ward.

Rashid stayed till my uncle Salim and Private Ali al Kalbani, (who was from Miskan and later became brigadier and commander of the army). Every day the latter would make sure that we were treated properly and accordingly and then return to Bait al Falaj. All the three were with me till I was moved to Bait al Falaj. I stayed in hospital for a considerable period of time but to no avail. Finally, the surgeon told me and Maj. Denson that there was nothing else he could do. I was consequently moved to the

Bait al Falaj Hospital.

The Army informed the wali's office in Ibri about my condition. Both my father and Uncle Salim went to the wali, Sayyid Saud bin Harib al Busaidy. They sought his help to get me out of hospital and treat me in accordance with the traditional Omani way. Though the wali appreciated their view, he told them that their son was the son of the government, and that it would be a personal loss for him if he left the army. They were convinced that this advice was well intentioned, and that he truly wanted their son to receive the best treatment.

Upon visiting me in hospital, they told me about their conversation with the wali. I replied that he was right, as my joint injury was so severe that it required the kind of advanced treatment that only the army could provide.

I recall an interesting event during the time my father and uncle visited me in Thomas Hospital. Once there was a wedding in the area behind the hospital. It was a big event, drums and flutes playing loudly. Upon hearing the music, my uncle Salim got up and opened the window to listen. He said, as if directly talking to our faraway village's women "O Miskan people, come and listen to people in festive moods, they're not like you", as in indication of cultural differences between Miskan and Muscat. Women in our village, for example, would hide the bride when she was being taken to her husband's home, as if she were being smuggled.



art & life

Local Scene

TUESDAY | NOVEMBER 8 | 2022



National Museum hosts perfume industry to explore new frontiers

By Yeru Ebuen

Seldom seen in Oman, the National Museum became the centre for a discussion as three world-renowned fragrance houses dissected the topic "The Perfumery Industry: Exploring New Frontiers."

A collaboration between the National Museum of Oman, the French Embassy to the Sultanate of Oman, and the Omani-French Friendship Association, fragrance makers and experts from the Houses of Amouage, Givaudan and Hermes shared some insights on how perfumery has shaped the world and where the industry is headed in a world full of different evolving economic and socio-cultural challenges.

The panel discussion is part of the cultural programmes accompanying the 'Fragrant Journeys' exhibition, which is a collaboration between the National Museum of Oman and the Museum of Fine Arts of Lyon who have agreed to showcase a selection of perfume related artefacts.

Veronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of France to the Sultanate of Oman, said "Already, prestigious perfume houses

such as Amouage work closely with French perfumers and producers. But we could certainly go even further in our exchanges of expertise and cooperation, given the Sultanate of Oman's desire to develop this sector within the framework of Oman Vision 2040 and France's leading role in this sector. I am convinced that Oman has much to learn from French know-how to develop its brands internationally and create more jobs around the perfume industry in Oman, just as France has much to learn from the scent heritage and creativity of the Sultanate of Oman, this land of incense and refinement."

AN ARCHIVE OF PERFUME HISTORY

Hermes, being the most storied among the three houses, had its first perfume appear in the market in the 1950s. Represented by Patricia Mourier, Area Manager of Hermes, she went through the brief history of perfumery sharing how its origin is traced back to ancient civilisations and used as offerings to the gods.

From its early popular use by the Egyptians, the Romans and the Greeks, how the Middle East and the Islamic culture had been instrumental in the industry's development and propagation between the 6th and 19th centuries offi-

cially introducing the concept in Europe in the 14th century.

She also briefly looked into its growing popularity in the 19th century and the modern times with Italian regions including the French region of Grasse becoming the centre of studies, production and distribution.

She expertly navigated through time offering insights into how a perfume was used, not only as a way to mask the bad smell or to deter the plague but its elevated status in society.

"Hermes is driven by beautiful materials and objects. The artisans are at the heart of the business and we are always in

As someone in charge of the direction and creativity of the company, Salmon shared that he went through a lot of self-reflection and has come to the realisation that the world is ready for a different kind of luxury, one that puts Oman at its heart.

"I think the world of luxury is ready for a different type of luxury. A luxury that is more aware of its time, that is a little bit off-the-beaten-track where Oman is not just another destination or country but something that offers something more unique and with meaning," he said.

To take the company forward and take a bigger pie of the high perfumery market, Amouage is committed to working with

Because the direction was so clear, he said the process resulted in a fragrance he called Muscat Paris, which strongly captures the two countries' unified essence.

Asked whether small perfume producers in Oman will ever have an opportunity at Amouage, the panellists from the company shared that they are looking forward to finding an Omani master perfumer that would become a part of their team.

They said that as part of their social responsibility, they are also working with different communities not only supporting the farmers that produce the raw materials but extending their support



search of quality, excellence and innovation," Mourier shared.

"Hermes style is associated with creativity, high quality and know-how. The quality of the materials we use is at the centre of what we do whichever branch of the house it is under," she added.

BRINGING BACK THE MAGIC

For the House of Amouage, CEO Marco Parsiegla and chief experience officer Renaud Salmon presented the portfolio of Amouage including the company's direction and its role in modern perfumery.

Parsiegla explained that they operate under three key points: making their clients stand out, bringing the magic back to the category, and becoming an ambassador explaining that what they do becomes a reflection of Oman as a country filled with mystery and beauty that needed to be shared with the world.

Parsiegla shared that he and his team have decided to skirt away from the luxury brand category and focused more on high perfumery which he said has amazing potential and where their expertise lie and that testament to this right approach is their continuous global expansion as well as Amouage's successfully crossing the \$100 million retail sales threshold during the first half of 2022.

some of the world's perfumers, young and experienced ones, that would help create a diverse range of fragrances but all centred around their vision board of Oman.

STRONGER FRANCE-OMAN RELATIONS

The National Museum's Bayt Greiza is currently home to the "Fragrant Journeys" exhibition officially opened in October of this year. In the first joint cultural exhibition between Oman and France, 23 well-curated art pieces were loaned from the Lyon Museum of Fine Arts and will be on display until May 7, 2023.

For his part, Quentin Bisch, perfumer and expert from the House of Givaudan, shared that he was commissioned to create three scents that would become an interactive and crucial part of the exhibition.

He explained that for his process, he takes inspiration from different art pieces and his travels, and he identified three art pieces with different historical values to become his muse. The result was three fragrances that he shared captured the essence of the pieces.

Beyond the three fragrances, Bisch shared that he was excited to also have been allowed to work on a fourth fragrance that connects the two friendly countries of Oman and France.

where it can be of great value to the development of the industry in Oman.

At the end of the panel discussion Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Busaidy, Chairman of SABCO Group in his speech said: "I was very touched to listen to all our speakers this morning, at Amouage we have been very proud to be associated with Oman and to be Oman's leading fragrance house in the global scene. We thank very much the Omani French Friendship Association for organising this event today, it is also an honor to be here and to be part of this whole process over the past few weeks about the Omani adventures in the world of fragrance."

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