

Maximise efforts to stop conflicts

The Sultanate of Oman underscored the significance of adhering to international cooperation towards meeting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as all pledges made to maintain balanced growth within the context of social, economic and environmental development. During its speech at the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5), held in Doha, Oman affirmed that it incorporated all three dimensions of sustainable development into Oman Vision 2040 and its long-term sectoral strategies. **DETAILS ON P2**



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OMAN WIN 2 GOLD, 2 SILVER AT TENT PEGGING WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS



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NEW SOLAR FARM LINKED TO WATER PROJECT PREPARES FOR TEST RUN



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A PHILANTHROPIST MOM WHO CONQUERS MOUNTAINS



MUSCAT

HOTEL REVENUES EXCEED RO 20M

The revenues of 3-5 star hotel surged by 50.8 per cent as at the end of January 2023 compared to the corresponding period in 2022 to stand at RO 20.79 million, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Occupancy rate also recorded a rise by 31.3 per cent to reach 53.7 per cent compared to 40.9 per cent during the corresponding period in 2022. The number of 3-5 star hotels' guests stood at 173,313. **DETAILS ON P3**

CRUDE PRICE AT \$84.66 A BARREL

Oman oil price for May delivery on Tuesday reached \$84.66, comprising a rise by 55 cents compared to the price of Monday which was \$84.11. The average price of Oman oil for March delivery stabilised at \$80.92 per barrel, thus \$3.49 per barrel higher than February delivery. Brent crude futures slid 0.5 per cent to \$85.73 a barrel, while copper futures on the London Metal Exchange fell for a second day, losing 0.6 per cent to trade around \$8,867 a tonne.

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HM, BIDEN DISCUSS BILATERAL RELATIONS



MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq on Tuesday evening received a phone call from President Joe Biden of the United States of America. During the phone call, the two leaders reviewed the strong bilateral relations between the two friendly countries and ways of enhancing and developing them in all fields, in addition to exchanging views on a number of regional and international issues of common concern. – ONA

13,000 wage-related complaints in 2022

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

Around 13,000 of the total 24,000 labour complaints received by the Ministry of Labour in 2022 were related to payment of wages, it was confirmed by the ministry in a statement.

Among its priorities, the Ministry of Labour said its goals include safeguarding the rights of workers in private sector establishments, which are the cornerstone of Oman Vision 2040, especially the Wages Protection System (WPS), which is aimed at ensuring fair pay for workers and improving working conditions and enhancing the welfare of all parties involved.

WPS is an electronic tool created by the Ministry of

“

Our goals include safeguarding the rights of workers in private sector, which are the cornerstone of Oman Vision 2040, especially the WPS aimed at ensuring fair pay

MINISTRY OF LABOUR

Labour and the Central Bank of Oman to supervise and track wage payments in private sector businesses, guaranteeing their compliance with the Labour Law by transferring workers' salaries to their bank accounts. The Ministry of Labour, as the competent authority, is immediately notified. This system maintains a steady process of salary distribution, while also monitoring any delays in payment, allowing the ministry to take preventive measures to ensure workers receive their pay and prevent any labour disputes, strikes, or work stoppages due to delayed payments.

WPS is deemed to be a vital part of economic reform, aimed at safeguarding the earnings of private sector employees and establishing a precise database of their salaries. Its implementation is in accordance with Article (53) of the Labour Law, which states that the employer will not be cleared of the...

TURN TO P2

UK investments in Oman touch \$23.5 billion

MUSCAT: A delegation of British investors representing a group of companies operating in the sectors of mining, technology, agriculture, services and logistics visited 'Invest Oman' lounge on Tuesday. They took note of various incentives offered to investors, investment mechanisms and related procedures.

The volume of trade exchange between Oman and the United Kingdom in total exports grew to about \$362.3 million by October 2022, which was 20.3 per cent higher than the figures during the corresponding period in 2021.

The delegation toured various sections of 'Invest Oman' where they were briefed about the most important services provided to investors wishing to do business in Oman, the departments offering the services, enabling factors, relevant information and opportunities available in different economic sectors.

A visual display that was pre-

VOLUME OF TRADE EXCHANGE (TOTAL EXPORTS) AT

\$362.3

MILLION (UP BY 20.3%)

INVESTMENTS BY BRITISH COMPANIES UP BY

9.3%

PARTNERSHIP COVERS OIL AND GAS, TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

sented to the delegation demonstrated investment advantages, the Investor Residency Programme, incentives and facilities available at special economic zones and free zones. **TURN TO P2**



HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office on Tuesday Daren Tang, Director-General of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and his accompanying delegation, currently visiting the Sultanate of Oman. During the meeting, the two sides exchanged cordial conversations and reviewed aspects of the existing cooperation between Oman and the WIPO and means of promoting them. – ONA

Omani documentary 'Al Manyour' wins Audience Award

YERU EBUEN
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The documentary 'Al Manyour' directed by Mohammed al Ajmi, won the Audience Award at the 10th Tyre International Film Festival held in Lebanon from March 4 to 6.

The documentary delved on the agricultural process of Al Zamat — the traditional process of drawing fresh water from deep wells in coastal villages of the Sul-

tanate of Oman for agricultural and home use that is now threatened by modernisation.

With a slogan of 'Cinema for All,' this year's film festival short-listed 29 films from 18 countries covering fiction, documentary and animation, among others, with the jury comprised of Spanish director Anna Sandero Alfrez, Sudanese director Nasser Youssef, and directors Muriel Abu al Rous, Walid Mones, Fadi Syriani, and Shadi Zidan from Lebanon.



This is the second award won by the film after it won the Best Omani Film Award at the Sharqiyah Film Festival this year. "This award means a lot to me, especially that it is the first award won by the film at an international film festival," director Al Ajmi said.

"It was also heart-warming to know that the cinematic art is connected with the audience. This award showed that it won the admiration of the viewers," he added. **TURN TO P2**



British business delegation learns about investment incentives



FROM PAGE 2

This visit was organised by the Sultanate of Oman's Embassy in the United Kingdom, in cooperation with the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion.

It reflects the concept of promoting and attracting foreign investments to the Sultanate of Oman, and presenting the incentives and facilities offered to investors. Ahmed bin Salim al Rasbi, Director-General of the Investment

Services Centre at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, said that the British delegation was briefed about salient features of the investment climate in Oman, the role of the lounge and the services it provides

to investors within the context of a clear mechanism and basic tools to streamline an investor's business. Al Rasbi added that Oman is a leading destination for British investors, and that investments by British companies in Oman

touched \$23.5 billion in 2022, up by 9.3 per cent, compared to the figures of 2021. Al Rasbi pointed out that this partnership expanded in the past few years and covered several sectors, notably oil and gas, technology and infrastructure.

The British delegation will meet a number of Omani entrepreneurs to discuss investment partnership opportunities and the possibility of opening branches for British companies' products in Oman. — ONA

Maximise efforts to stop conflicts

DOHA: The Sultanate of Oman underscored the significance of adhering to international cooperation towards meeting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as all pledges made to maintain balanced growth within the context of social, economic and environmental development. During its speech at the 5th United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5), held in Doha, Oman affirmed that it incorporated all three dimensions of sustainable development into Oman Vision 2040 and its long-term sectoral strategies. The speech was delivered by Dr Said bin Mohammed al Saqri, Minister of Economy. Oman pointed out that its participation in this conference stems from a



deep conviction in the importance of partnership and cooperation to achieve the requirements of sustainable development, mainly out of respect for commitment to international agreements and covenants. The conference offers an opportunity for countries to work side by side to exchange experiences and discuss solutions for common problems, said Oman, noting that the event

consolidates global efforts to provide the best means of support to the least developed countries. The overall aim is to open wider scopes for those countries to eradicate poverty, boost their role in international trade and regional integration, and utilise their resources to realise comprehensive development and ensure sustainable development for all, Oman stressed in the speech.

Oman urged all countries to maximise efforts to help needy countries terminate acts of conflict and violence and concentrate, instead, on combating poverty. Oman also encourages developed countries and international financial institutions, like the International Monetary Fund, to undertake initiatives to finance development and reconstruction plans in least developed countries. The measures envisaged by Oman in this context include debt repayment and debt restructuring. Oman expressed its appreciation and thanks for all parties that contributed to the conference which, it hoped, would forge greater international collaboration to achieve sustainable development in least developed countries. — ONA

13,000 wage-related complaints in 2022

From page 1

... employee's salary unless the salary is deposited in the employee's account at one of the locally approved banks. A resolution by the minister may determine the exceptions where the employee's salary may not be deposited in his/her account. The system's primary aims are to guarantee that workers receive their wages as stipulated by the Labour Law, as well as ensure the registration of the local workforce in social insurance and the timely payment of their contributions. The system aids in the ease of research and resolution of labour disputes concerning wages by providing valuable wage transfer data. Additionally, it simplifies the process of wage transfer to banks through a standardised formula, while also protecting employers and providing evidence of worker claims regarding unpaid wages. This system promotes a stable employer-worker relationship, increases productivity and minimises wage-related conflicts. The recently introduced system aims to streamline the process of applying for various services provided by the ministry that require the attachment of wage-proof documents, including manpower recruitment permits, wage adjustments and work leave reports. The system eliminates the need for individuals to attach physical wage files as verification can now be completed electronically through the platform. This

results in a significant reduction in both time and effort expended by applicants. The introduction of this system is part of the Ministry of Labour's ongoing efforts to achieve its goal of producing satisfactory results for all parties involved. The system promotes transparency, which will benefit all parties in the future, and contributes significantly to the development of the labour market and the stability of its environment. It has also had a positive impact on the small commercial private sector enterprises, as they are now obligated to open bank accounts for their expatriate workforce whose salary is less than one hundred rials. Additionally, private sector institutions are required to update the wages of their workforce in the ministry's database. It should be noted that the method for bank transfers of wages in the Sultanate of Oman varies depending on the transfer formula used by institutions and employers. In some cases, the transfers may not be reflected in statistics and monitoring ratios by the Central Bank and the Ministry of Labour. To ensure that all transfers are included within the wage system and accurately reported, the ministry is taking steps to protect the rights of workers and companies. This will provide more precise percentages for each establishment and employer, and safeguard the interests of all parties involved.

New downtown projects on track

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oman Tourism Development Company (Omran) has affirmed that work on several projects is progressing at a steady pace and is in various stages of implementation. Speaking to the Observer, Ammar al Kharusi, Director of Development, said: "We are currently working on the Masterplan for the Sustainable City Yiti project of the flagship 'The Nikki Beach Resort' that will be ready for guests early next year." This property will have 140 hotel rooms and 30 villas and an array of facilities, including the beach club, restaurants and swimming pools with unique panoramic views. The Sustainable City Yiti will be developed within the Phase 1 of the Yiti Integrated Tourism Development Masterplan. The project will be developed in three phases on an area of 3.5 million square metres comprising of residential units of medium-sized villas, townhouses and low-rise apartments. "The Four Seasons Resort at



the Marina Bandar Al Rowdha is a long-term development and is currently in the design stage. Apart from bringing the Four Seasons brand to the Sultanate, the project will add 200 rooms to the market and also upgrade facilities at the marina. The project will be ready by the end of 2026," Al Kharusi said. He said Madinat al Irfan would be developed as a premium downtown hub, which will bring more footfall to the area. A three-star Ibis hotel project is under the implementation

stage by the investor while for the Business Park, one building is under construction and three others are in the design stage. Omran is also working with the local other authorities in other governorates to develop tourism facilities and one of the eagerly-awaited ones is the World Class theme park in Barka developed by the ASAAS, in which Omran is the stakeholder. "All our future tourism projects will be just hospitality centric but also a pure leisure lifestyle." Hayy al Sharq will be spread

over a multi-cluster 1.5 million square metre entertainment and leisure theme park, which will boast an integrated theme park, wildlife and water parks, an equestrian centre, and an edutainment centre, as well as retail areas that will offer a range of retail, leisure and dining options. It will also feature hotels, with a residential zone and retail areas. Zipline in Musandam is part of the Oman Adventure and will be replicated in other parts of the Sultanate of Oman.

'Al Manyour' wins Audience Award

FROM PAGE 1

He also said that "the film festival was a unique opportunity to introduce the cultural heritage of the Sultanate of Oman, of which it has plenty." Beyond the award, he is happy to have learned a lot from

other participants and to have been given a chance to interact with people who have the same passion for films. Al Ajmi said that by making a documentary on 'Al Manyour', he hoped to be able to contribute to the preservation of this important Omani cultural heritage.



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Under-Secretary receives Japanese official



MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Alial Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, received Katsuyoshi Hayashi, Japan's Special Assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, for Yemen, in Muscat on Tuesday. During the meeting,

they reviewed the efforts exerted to support the Yemeni parties in reaching a political solution that achieves security and stability for Yemen and the countries of the region. The meeting was attended by several officials at the Foreign Ministry.

Hotel revenues top RO 20m by January



MUSCAT: The revenues of 3-5 star hotel surged by 50.8 per cent as at the end of January 2023 compared to the corresponding period in 2022 to stand at RO 20.79 million, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Occupancy rate also recorded a rise by 31.3 per cent to reach 53.7 per cent compared to 40.9 per cent during the corresponding period in 2022.

The number of 3-5 star hotels' guests stood at 173,313, comprising an increase by 65 per cent till the end of January 2023 compared to the same period in 2022.

The number of guests from Oceania recorded a significant surge by 383.1 per cent from 767 guests by the end of January 2022 to 3,705 guests by the end of January 2023. European guests followed by recording a rise by 120.2 per cent from 26,461 guests to 58,256 guests till the end of January 2023.

The number of Asian guests stood at 21,098 till the end of January 2023, constituting an increase by 96.1 per cent compared to the corresponding period in 2022. GCC guests came next with a rise by 81.9 per cent going from 5,919 guests to 10,767 guests till the end of January 2023. — **ONA**

Oman showcases its tourism offerings at ITB Berlin

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

Oman is showcasing its tourism offerings at the ITB Berlin, the world's leading travel exhibition, which begins in Berlin, Germany, on Wednesday. The ITB travel trade show in Berlin is opening its doors this year under the slogan "Open for Change" at the Messe Berlin fairgrounds as an in-person event.

Running until March 9, this year's ITB Berlin will for the first time take place as a pure B2B event open for trade visitors only. The Sultanate of Oman's pavilion in ITB covers an area of 378 square metres, which aims to reach approximately 570 million people through media coverage of the fair and its various activities.

The delegation of the Sultanate of Oman in ITB is headed by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism. The minister will meet with a number of heads of the largest international tourism delegations, companies and investors to attract investments and tourists to Oman.

Oman is taking part in this fair to prepare for its participation in the upcoming ITB Berlin 2024, as an official partner of that event, which will be an attractive event for more visitors. A report issued by the World Tourism Organization points out that all countries that were official partners in the previous fairs have witnessed an increase in the number of tourists, ranging between 8 per cent and 20 per cent.

Al Mahrouqi said. "The Sultanate of Oman is always keen



to participate in ITB Berlin, which is one of the largest international exhibitions for promoting tourism."

He pointed out that the tourism sector in the Sultanate of Oman is witnessing growth through the emergence of a large number of tourism and hotel establishments. He said that the fair is an opportunity for Oman's tourism

companies, including SMEs and their international counterparts, to attract tourists to Oman with the aim for arranging tourist groups from various countries to the Sultanate of Oman.

The minister said that the participation of the Sultanate of Oman in these types of events also leads to finding out the latest offerings in tourism marketing,

promotion through technology and attracting certain segments and markets.

He emphasised that the Sultanate of Oman is one of the safest tourist destinations, and it is attracting many tourists from all over the world.

It is worth noting that the global tourism sector has recovered from the repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic and it is expected that the number of international tourists will increase this year by 80 per cent to 95 per cent, compared with the number of tourists before the pandemic period.

The Middle East region is witnessing the highest increase in the number of tourists by 83 per cent before the pandemic. Statistics show that the number of tourists in Oman in 2022 increased by 384 per cent compared to 2021.

Haj pilgrims to be shortlisted on March 11

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs will shortlist the applicants eligible for this year's Haj on March 11.

The ministry received as many as 33,536 applications, including 29,930 from Omanis and 3,606

requests from residents for this year's Haj, which will be held in the first week of June. The registration closed on March 5.

Only 14,000 people from the Sultanate of Oman will be able to perform Haj this year through the ministry as per the agreement with the General Authority for Awqaf (GAA) of

Saudi Arabia.

Those who are selected through online sorting will be contacted directly and will have five days to sign contract through the online system with Haj companies.

The Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah recorded the highest number of applications, followed by North Al Batinah and Muscat.

The Sultanate of Oman this year has 14,000 slots of which 13,098 are for Omanis, 500 for residents and 402 for officials.

On Tuesday, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs opened the online system for approved Haj companies to update their data and enter the services.

Oman improves ranking in the powerful passport index

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Sultanate of Oman's passport is currently ranked 99 in the most powerful passport index, with a total score of 65.50, which is based on the government's approach not just to travel, but also to international taxation laws, global perception, dual citizenship and personal freedom, according to Nomad Capitalist, the tax and immigration consultancy.

For the Oman Travel score calculation, the firm relied on publicly available passport data and news sources to rank travel access.

Based on that data, Nomad assigned Oman a Travel score of 95 as there are 40 countries

that Oman passport holders can enter without a visa (i.e. visa-free countries), 49 countries that allow Oman passport holders to enter by obtaining a visa on arrival (i.e. visa-on-arrival countries) and six electronic travel authorisation (eTA) destinations.

Altogether, Oman passport holders can enter 95 destinations — either without a visa, through a visa on arrival, or via an eTA. Separate from these 95 destinations, there are 155 additional destinations for which Oman passport holders either need a physical visa to enter or an e-visa.

For the Oman Taxation score calculation, the Nomad relied on data from our network of tax vendors, news sources and tax



authorities themselves. Nomad assigned the lowest score of 10 to countries that tax citizens no matter where they live, scores of 20 or 30 to countries that allow citizens to relocate to avoid tax,

40 to those that don't tax foreign incomes of resident citizens, and 50 to countries with zero tax.

Based on that data, we assigned Oman a Taxation score of 50, meaning that the Sultanate of

Oman has zero taxes.

The United Arab Emirates has the strongest passport in the world, according to a new index.

The country jumped from being tied for 32nd place on last year's ranking to the No 1 spot, according to a new index by the tax and immigration consultancy Nomad Capitalist.

The Emirati passport leapt up the list because it has visa-free travel privileges to most places (181 in total), no income taxes and an ever-increasing presence on the world stage, all of which make it attractive to aspiring global citizens, the company said.

How the ranking works unlike other rankings that focus solely on visa-free travel privileges, the "Nomad Passport Index 2023"

assesses five factors each given different weightings: Other than visa-free travel, the categories are assessed by scores that vary from 10 to 50, said Jovana Vojinovic, Nomad Capitalist's director of operations and sales.

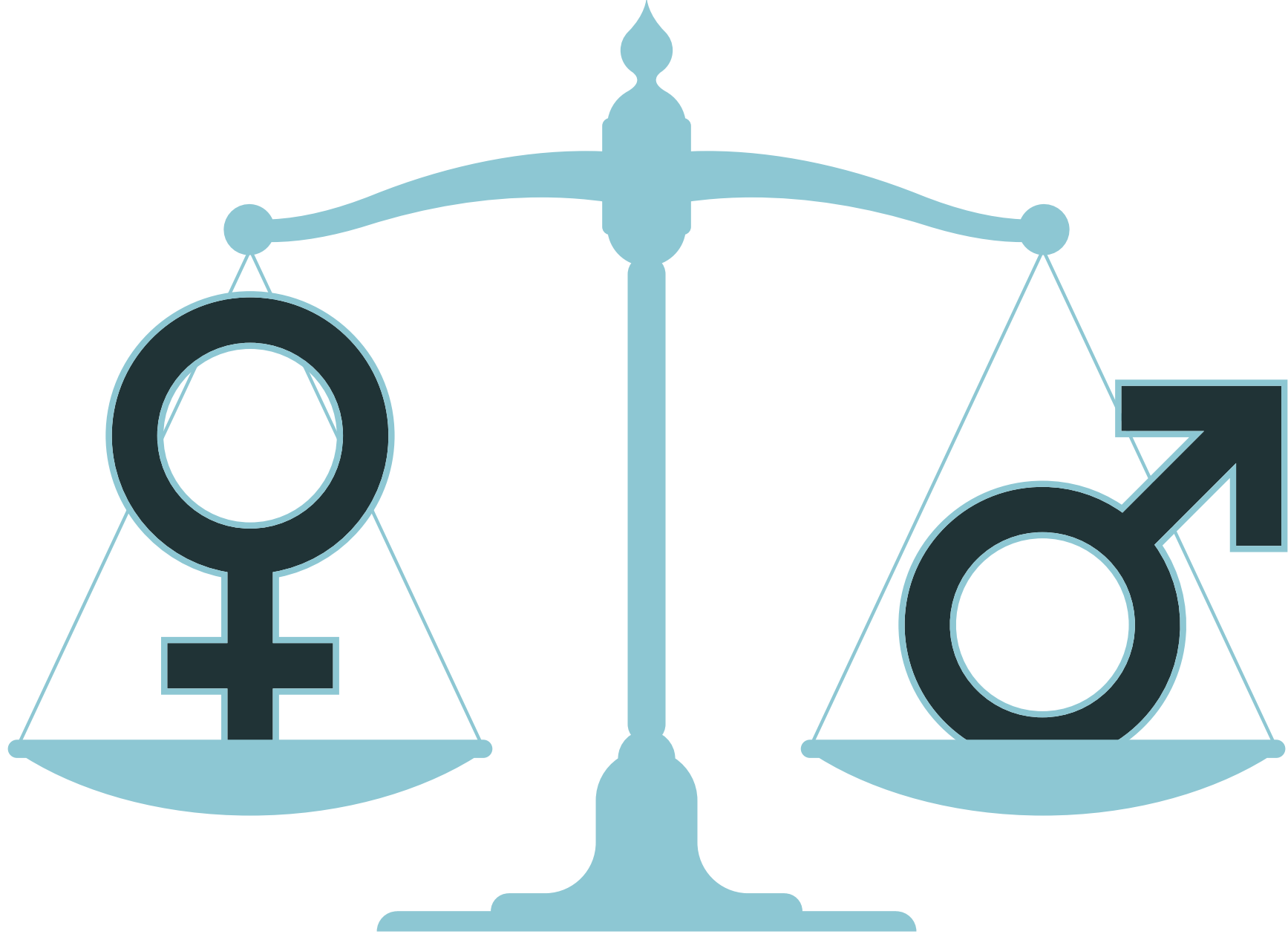
For example, taxation is based on the long-arm reach of a country's tax laws, as well as a country's tax rates: Citizen-based tax: where passport holders pay no matter where they live — score of 10.

Resident-based tax: where residents are taxed on worldwide income — score of 20 (if rates exceed 50 per cent) or 30 (if they don't).

Territorial tax: where income made within the country is taxed — score of 40.



DIGITALLY SMART WOMEN LOOK FOR GENDER EQUALITY



LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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WOMEN in the Sultanate of Oman are showing their technological advancement and emerging digitally smart. They are standing out at a time when the world is celebrating International Women's Day (March 8). Oman Observer took views of some women in the sector. They came out with valuable suggestions to get empowered in this competitive world, as a large number of women in the country are in the technology industry.

Duha Awayes, Country Director for IT Consulting

Protiviti Oman The number of women in the technology industry and tech entrepreneurs has significantly grown over the past decade worldwide.

Women in the Middle East are actively taking on jobs in artificial intelligence, data science and software engineering. We also see more Omani women entering cybersecurity, digitalisation and project management, as well as taking on leadership roles.

I believe the digital world can easily close gender gaps because performance and talent matter more now than ever before, and this will precisely provide women with more opportunities to excel.

**KAWTHER
AL HARTHY**
*Arabic Translator
and Instructor*

**VERONICA
SADE
OGUNSAKIN**
Volunteer

KAREN JANE
Masters student

SHILPA PAWANI
*Chairperson, Women
member's Empowerment
sub-committee, ICAI,
Muscat Chapter*

I ALWAYS wanted to leave something behind, something that is unforgettable, something I can help with and change someone's life. Yes, I am a woman, Omani, and I want to show my gratitude to my beloved country by being more productive.

I was called by an ambassador when I was representing my college. Since then, I have truly believed in myself and called myself the ambassador of my country. Nowadays, you can represent your country not by travelling around the world but by using technology well. You can create and invent an application or any solution sitting at home. I thought of investing in my knowledge and experience in translation and languages (Arabic and English) for the children diagnosed with ADHD, and I found a way to support them! The digital world helps us put all our efforts together and support each other.

I wanted to be empowered not because I'm a woman, but because of what I contribute to the world to be a better place and a factor in creating harmony between people from all levels.

FUNDAMENTALLY in the digital world, workplace gender bias is always obvious towards women. In the digital world, women appear to be relegated to the backstage, mostly in developing worlds such as Asia, Africa and the Middle East. There are shortages of women workforce in the digital world due to a lack of awareness.

Mentors and role models are required to encourage women folks; therefore, in celebrating International Women's Day, mainly in this part of the world, the focus should be on publishing the names of those women that have broken the gender barrier in the digital world.

By crawling, a child learns to stand; as such, regular seminars are required to educate younger women because what's good for the goose is good for the gander.

WE are living through a transformation in the world of work. "Thinking machines" are replacing human tasks and jobs and changing the skills organisations need to succeed. However, technology access is unevenly distributed.

Giant or medium firms must make sure all their employees – regardless of gender – have the chance to succeed. They will need to focus on gender diversity by internally training their employees. Equal opportunities to learn new skills that can increase the awareness of women and budding students regarding their rights and civic engagement. Therefore, the need for inclusive, transformative technology and digital education is crucial for us women to achieve a sustainable future.

ON this International Women's Day, I want to extend my heartfelt wishes to all the remarkable women out there. May your passion and drive lead you to achieve your goals, and may your smiles radiate positivity and inspire others. Remember, you are remarkable. As we celebrate women's achievements and empowerment, let us not forget the importance of financial independence. Every woman should have the knowledge and resources to take control of her financial future, and I am committed to promoting financial literacy and management among women, both personally and professionally. I strongly believe that financial independence is crucial for women's empowerment, and it provides a sense of freedom and security that can positively impact their lives and families.

In Oman, we have a shared commitment to empowering women and promoting gender equality through our Vision for 2040. I am proud to be part of a country that values women's empowerment and encourages women to take on leadership roles.



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TRIBUTE TO WOMEN

'Gender equality crucial for building nations'

SHADDAD AL MUSALMY
@shadadm

Behind every successful man is a woman. That is passé. When women of a community are empowered with education and skill sets, there is increased and sustainable development in the overall prosperity of the country, as is evident in the Sultanate of Oman.

Statistics indicate the constructive role, achievements and success stories of women over the past five decades of national action. Women in Oman – both citizens and expatriates – enjoy equal status with men and that is why many hold key positions across sectors, thanks to the attention by the government.

Oman joins the rest of the world in celebrating International Women's Day today, a day to recognise women's achievements in different walks of life.

The success of every woman should be an inspiration to other women. They should cheer each other and make sure they are courageous. They believe gender equality is important not only because it is a human right, but because it is essential for building peaceful nations.

Making sure women and girls have equal access to quality education, healthcare, work opportunities, as well as political representation and participation in economic decision-making is crucial to sustainable development and economic progress.

On March 8, women consider the day to honour their accomplishments, as they are an integral part of society. A quote from a Hindu monk and philosopher Swami Vivekananda, says

Making sure women and girls have equal access to quality education, healthcare, work opportunities, as well as political representation and participation in economic decision-making is crucial to sustainable development and economic progress

it all. It goes: "There is no chance of welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing." In this regard, International Women's Day calls for all to pledge to further nurture and strengthen 'the wings of our societies by respecting, acknowledging and treasuring the contribution of women in everyday lives.

In Oman, women are part of our country's economic development. I am grateful to the Honourable Lady, the Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, for her contribution to society, especially towards women empowerment. According to many women in Oman, they are proud and honoured to have her as their role model.

For others, International Women's Day is one of the most important global celebrations, which honours the cultural, political and socioeconomic achievements of women globally. Happy International Women's Day to the women in the Sultanate of Oman.

Women in focus at UN annual sessions in New York

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is joining the international community at the meetings of the 67th annual session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. The session takes place at the UN headquarters in New York, from March 6-17.

Oman is represented at the meeting by Dr Mohammed bin Awadh al Hassan, Permanent Representative of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Nations in New York, and officials from the Ministry of Social Development.

The current session reviews the



progress made by member states in enhancing the status of women, innovation, technological transition, education in the digital age and the best

practices for bridging the digital gender gap. It focuses on empowering women in all aspects of life.

Members of the Omani delegation will take part in some activities held on the sidelines of the session.

The gathering at the UN session will listen to a recorded speech by Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najjar, Minister of Social Development. The speech will outline the efforts made by the government of Oman on enhancing the status of women and ensuring their access to all rights cited in the laws approved by the government.

Promote a human-centred approach at the workplace

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The Omani French Friendship Association (OFA), in collaboration with the Economic Department of the French Embassy, organised the 5th edition of the French Weeks in Oman. The event is in conjunction with International Women's Day.

The event, aimed at putting forward the strong ties between the Sultanate of Oman and France, was held under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Tarik al Said, Honorary member of the OFA and Vice-Chairman of Tawoos Renaissance, and Véronique Aulagnon, Ambassador of France to the Sultanate of Oman. It is part of the French Weeks in Oman in 2023.

Titled 'Human Capital: Women and Young in Front', this year's economic conference edition is special since it is a month-long celebration spread over March month.

The French Embassy and sponsoring companies are programming various events in Muscat, including concerts, cultural and scientific events, workshops and conferences.

At the economic conference, more than 100 participants, several recognised leaders from Omani and French organisations, shared their views and best practices to promote a human-centred approach at the workplace while conducting corporate social responsibility



actions.

After a keynote video speech by Pascale Sourisse, an inspiring French woman leader and General Director for International Development of Thales, the first panel, entitled 'My boss is a Woman', focused in particular on empowering women and breaking the glass ceiling in the corporate.

Five expert panellists addressed the issues facing women in their career paths, such as leadership opportunities, work-life balance and the gender pay gap. The panel also tackled strategies for creating an inclusive workplace that values diversity and provides equal chances for all.

Those who took part in the event included Ghaniya al Rashdy, Finance Controller, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO); Marie Laure Tassin, Near and Middle East HR Director, Veolia; Hanaa al Hinai, CEO, Al Ahlia Insurance Company; Berivan Suzgun, Head of People and Organisational Development,

DEI – AMEA, Engie, Caline Daher, Head of Networks and Partnerships, and École Supérieure des Affaires (ESA) - Business School.

The second panel, entitled "Training of the Future", focused on enhancing the skills of young professionals, training innovative leaders, managing Omanisation and making the best use of offsets for training programs. Five experts from leading Omani and French companies shared their insights and expertise on these topics, providing valuable perspectives on the latest trends and best practices in talent development.

Bechir Chehab, Managing Director, JCDcaux, Noora al Raaidan, Senior Manager of Workforce Planning, Omantel, John Murphy, Head of Learning and Development, Renaissance Services, Nadeem Ahmed, General Manager, Khimji Training Institute, Youcef Rachidi, Cyber Security Technical Manager, Thales Cyber Academy were part of the panel.

ICAI workshop on emotional intelligence to mark Women's Day

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The Muscat chapter of Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, under the sponsorship of the College of Banking and Financial Studies, is commemorating International Women's Day on March 8 by conducting a workshop on Emotional Intelligence. Experienced trainer and expert Farzeen Noorie Ashik will facilitate the workshop. The workshop is an excellent opportunity for professionals to develop their EQ skills, which are vital for success in their professional and personal lives.

Areej Mohsin Haider Darwish, the Chairperson of Mohsin Haider Darwish (ACERE), will be the Chief Guest for the event. Jesal Asher, the Executive Director of Al Ansari Group of Companies, and Dr Juhaina al Mullahi, CBFS representative, will be the Guest of Honour. Their inspiring messages and words of encouragement are eagerly awaited. The Chapter operates as a non-profit organisation of Indian Chartered Accountants employed in the Sultanate of Oman, and it arranges professional learning events that are open to professionals of all nationalities residing in the country.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (10/2023)

Companies specialized in the field and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents for the website through the following link: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) against non-refundable fees as mentioned below starting from the date of this announcement and until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender Number	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
2023/MM/QS-12 (PRE/23/025)	Adobe CC Renewal	25	18/03/2023	23/03/2023	Excellent
2023/MM/HQ-5 (PRE/22/176)	Construction of Slope Protection Works on Al Jabal Road at Al Amirat	51	29/03/2023	17/04/2023	First

1. Bidders shall submit their offers electronically and an Electronic Bond (E-Bond) issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality, valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission.

Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.

2. Clarification and Support:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200/24402330).



شركة المغليفات الصناعية المرنة (ش.م.ع)
Flexible Industrial Packages Co. (SAOC)

Annual Ordinary General Meeting Agenda

The Board of Directors of **Flexible Industrial Packaging Company SAOC** is pleased to invite all Shareholders to attend the company's Annual Ordinary General Meeting, which will be held on Monday 27/03/2023 at 10:00am, in the head quarter of Mohammed Al Barwani Company in Al Azaiba. If the quorum not satisfied a second Annual Ordinary General Meeting will be held on Thursday 30/03/2023, in the same place and at the same time to discuss the following Agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' report for the financial year ended December 31, 2022.
- To consider the Auditors' Report and to approve the Financial Statements Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account, for the financial year ended on December 31, 2022.
- To approve the sitting fees of the Board meetings paid to the Board members for previous financial year ending on 31/12/2022, and to determine the sitting fees for the next fiscal year ending on 31/12/2023 (As per Attachment).
- The appointment of the Auditors for the Company for the financial year ending December 31, 2023, and determine their fee.

Shareholder would have access to reports, documents and statements relating to the agenda items of the Annual General Meeting during the official business hours at the Company's head office, according to the Company's Articles of Association, each shareholder is entitled to authorize in writing any other person to attend the meeting and to vote on his/her behalf on the decisions of the general meeting

The shareholders are requested to arrive a half an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

For further information please contact
Mr. Ahmed Sulaiman Al Amri on Telephone No. 24446121

Chairman	Auditor	Legal Adviser
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Syria medics launch cholera vaccine campaign

MAARET MASRIN: Syrian medics launched on Tuesday the first cholera vaccination campaign in the rebel-held northwest since a deadly outbreak began last year, amid increased fears of contagion after last month's devastating earthquake.

Health workers were going door to door to inoculate people in homes and displacement camps in the Idlib region, the war-torn country's last main rebel bastion.

Syria's first cholera outbreak since 2009 has killed at least 26 people in areas outside Syrian regime control since September, according to Idlib health official Zuhair Karrat.

Local authorities have recorded 565 cases of the extremely virulent disease, Karrat added. Across Syria around 85,000 suspected cases have been logged, according to the United Nations.

The vaccination campaign, which relies on UN supply and had been planned before the February 6 earthquake, began on Tuesday and "will last 10 working days", said another Idlib health official, Rifaat al Farhat.

Officials had said that it targets



A medic gives the cholera vaccination to a child during a vaccination campaign in the town of Maaret Masrin.

– AFP

"high-risk areas" near the border with Turkey that were heavily impacted by the tremor.

The Syrian rebel-held pocket's

healthcare sector had been hit particularly hard, with hospitals and civilian infrastructure already battered by years of Russian air

strikes and government shelling. Thousands of people now languish in cramped shelters and tents, with poor access to clean

water and hygiene, putting them at a higher risk of infection. These conditions mean "the risk of disease outbreaks soars,"

Ammar Ammar of the UN children's agency Unicef said.

"For vulnerable children, an increase in waterborne diseases such as cholera and acute water diarrhoea could be catastrophic."

The United Nations sent 1.7 million cholera vaccines to northwest Syria in January in preparation for the inoculation campaign.

More than four million people live in areas outside government control in Syria's north and northwest.

Cholera is generally contracted from contaminated food or water, and causes diarrhoea and vomiting.

The disease can spread in residential areas lacking proper sewerage and drinking water systems.

Even before the quake, nearly two-thirds of Syria's water treatment plants, half of pumping stations and one-third of water towers had already been ravaged by almost 12 years of war, the UN has said.

Cholera can kill within hours if left untreated, according to the UN, but many of those infected will have no or mild symptoms.

— AFP

Palestinian killed by Israeli troops in Jenin raid

NABLUS: Israeli troops on Tuesday killed one Palestinian and wounded several others in a raid in Jenin, scene of frequent clashes in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said.

Witnesses in the Jenin refugee camp reported heavy gunfire between Palestinians and soldiers as the Israeli forces surrounded a house.

Two witnesses said rockets had been fired at the building housing a group of Palestinians, and reported gunfire in the streets of the northern West Bank camp, the latest in a string of fatal military operations in the territory.

The Israeli army said "security forces are currently operating in the Jenin camp", but gave no further details.

"Mohammad Wael Ghazzawi, 26, was killed by occupation bullets to the chest in Jenin," the Palestinian ministry said in a statement.

At least five other Palestinians have been wounded, including one with a serious injury to the



Israeli security forces keep their positions during a military raid in the city of Jericho in the occupied West Bank. – AFP

stomach, it added.

The raid comes amid a surge in violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and specifically in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since the Six-Day War of 1967.

Since the start of the year, the conflict has claimed the lives of 66 Palestinian adults and children, including fighters and civilians.

Thirteen Israeli adults and

children, including members of the security forces and civilians, and one Ukrainian civilian have been killed over the same period, according to an AFP tally based on official sources from both sides.

Earlier this month, Israeli and Palestinian officials pledged in a joint statement to "prevent further violence" and "commit to de-escalation" following talks in Jordan.

— AFP

Two strong earthquakes rock southern Philippines

MANILA: Two strong earthquakes jolted the southern Philippines on Tuesday, authorities said, with the second damaging buildings and forcing the evacuation of hundreds of villagers from their homes.

A 6.0-magnitude quake struck at about 2:00 pm, a few kilometres from Maragusan municipality in the mountainous gold-mining province of Davao de Oro on Mindanao island, the US Geological Survey said.

Local authorities said there were no reports of casualties or significant damage.

But a shallower second quake, measuring 5.6 magnitude, hit nearly three hours later in the neighbouring municipality of New Bataan, triggering the collapse of some houses.

New Bataan disaster officer Lynne Dollolasa said nearly 300 people were forced to leave their homes in Andap village, where "a number of houses collapsed".

About 100 people inside a shopping mall in Tagum city, in the adjacent province of Davao del Norte, were hit by falling glasses and plates as they fled the building, said Jay Suaybaguio, the provincial



Students are taking shelter inside their classroom in Mati, after a 6.0-magnitude earthquake jolted the southern Philippines. – AFP

information officer.

"I was in the third floor buying office supplies when the quake suddenly struck," Suaybaguio said.

"When we reached the first floor we saw broken bottles of wine and condiments. The lights went out but emergency lights turned on, helping us to find our way."

The first quake lasted about 30 seconds and was followed by aftershocks, said Corporal Stephanie Clemen, a police officer in Tagum, about 40 kilometres from Maragusan.

"We immediately went under our desks and when the ground stopped shaking we went straight outside," Clemen said.

"We are still outside because a moderate aftershock just hit."

While the quake did not appear to have destroyed anything, Clemen said, it was strong enough to "cause fear".

Quakes are a daily occurrence in the Philippines, which sits along the Pacific "Ring of Fire", an arc of intense seismic and volcanic activity that stretches from Japan through Southeast Asia and across the Pacific basin. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

MOGADISHU

Soldiers killed in attack on army base

Al Shabaab militants on Tuesday attacked a military base in a Somali town, killing several soldiers, according to local army officials.

The troubled Horn of Africa nation has witnessed a surge in attacks as government forces and allied militias wage a declared "all-out" war against the Al Qaeda-linked militants.

The militants stormed the base at Janay Abdale, located around 60 km outside the port town of Kismayo. Somali army officers



said the militants used explosive-laden vehicles to mount an attack on the base before they were repelled. Another officer said several soldiers were killed in heavy combat. — AFP

SAO PAULO

Police carry out more raids of riots probe

Brazil's federal police said on Tuesday they were carrying out new raids as part of a probe into the January 8 riots in Brasilia, in which supporters of former president Jair Bolsonaro stormed government buildings.

The raids represent the seventh phase of an operation launched in mid-January to identify people who participated, in which a mob invaded and ransacked the Congress, presidential palace and Supreme Court. Police did not disclose the names of those



targeted in Tuesday's raids, but said they were being investigated for crimes of "violent abolition of the rule of law, coup d'état, qualified damage of specially protected property". — Reuters

TEHRAN

Suspects arrested in poisonings at schools

Suspects have been arrested in five provinces in connection with the mysterious wave of poisonings in Iran.

More detailed information on the number of arrests and the backgrounds of the suspects was not initially available, citing information from the deputy interior minister responsible for the security forces, Majid Mirahmadi.

On Monday, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for harsh punishments



for those responsible for the poisonings, describing it as an "unforgivable crime." The first cases of the mysterious poisonings were reported in November. — AFP



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In brief

■ BAGHDAD



US TROOPS TO STAY IN IRAQ: AUSTIN

US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said on Tuesday that US troops would remain in Iraq, as the Pentagon chief made a surprise visit ahead of the 20th anniversary of the US-led attack that toppled Saddam Hussein.

“The US forces are ready to remain in Iraq at the invitation of the government of Iraq,” Austin said in Baghdad, following his meeting with Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al Sudani.

He said the US forces are operating in a non-combat, advise, assist and enable role to support the Iraqi-led fight against terrorism. “This is a critical mission and we are proud to support our Iraqi partners,” Austin said.

■ WASHINGTON



UN CHIEF IN UKRAINE TO TALK GRAIN DEAL

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy in Kyiv on Wednesday to discuss extending a deal with Moscow that allows the Black Sea export of Ukraine grains amid Russia's war in the country.

“The Secretary-General has just arrived in Poland on his way to Ukraine,” UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday, adding that Guterres will discuss the continuation of the deal “in all its aspects and other pertinent issues.”

The 120-day deal, initially brokered by the UN and Turkey in July and extended in November, will be renewed on March 18 if no party objects.

■ BRATISLAVA



SLOVAK PM QUIT'S PARTY BEFORE SNAP POLLS

Acting Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger announced he was quitting his own party OLaNO on Monday night, months before a snap general election scheduled for September.

“My story in OLaNO ends today,” Heger said in a Facebook post, adding that his role and mission in the party had been fulfilled. “I have my own vision of politics. I know that if I want to fulfil it, I have to go my own way,” he added.

“Life simply brings situations where we have to make a decision. I'm doing it today.”

Heger did not say whether he intended to join another movement or form a new one.



A Ukrainian service member looks on in a trench at a position on a front line, as Russia's attack on Ukraine continues, near the city of Bakhmut, Ukraine, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Kyiv vows to send more troops into Bakhmut

ZELENSKIY SAYS MILITARY COMMANDERS TO KEEP FIGHTING FOR CITY

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy publicly committed his troops to holding out in Bakhmut after days in which they had seemed likely to withdraw, apparently prolonging the war's bloodiest battle in a bid to break Moscow's assault force.

Moscow has sent thousands of troops in human wave attacks over recent weeks to try to capture the eastern Ukrainian city and secure its first battlefield victory in more than half a year. Ukrainian forces have dug trenches further west and in recent days had seemed to be preparing to pull out.

But Zelenskiy's remarks in an overnight address suggested Kyiv had elected not only to stay and fight on but to reinforce the city, apparently convinced that Russia's losses in trying to storm it would be greater than those of the defenders.

“The command unanimously supported” the decision not to withdraw, Zelenskiy said. “There were no other positions. I told the commander in chief to find the appropriate forces to help our guys in Bakhmut.”

Russia, which launched a full-scale attack of Ukraine a year ago and claims to have annexed nearly

The Ukrainian military command on Tuesday reported a record 1,600 Russians killed over the previous 24 hours. Such figures of enemy dead cannot be confirmed and the sides do not release regular figures of their own casualties

a fifth of its territory, says taking Bakhmut would be a step towards seizing the surrounding industrial Donbas region, a major war aim.

“The liberation of Artemovsk continues,” Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said in televised remarks, using the Soviet-era name for Bakhmut, re-adopted by the Russians.

“The city is an important hub for defending Ukrainian troops in the Donbas. Taking it under control will allow further offensive actions to be conducted deep into Ukraine's defensive lines.” Western strategists say the ruined city has limited value, and Russia's assault may be motivated by a need for a symbolic victory at the end

of a winter offensive involving hundreds of thousands of conscripted reservists and fighters from the Wagner private army.

The Ukrainian military command on Tuesday reported a record 1,600 Russians killed over the previous 24 hours. Such figures of enemy dead cannot be confirmed and the sides do not release regular figures of their own casualties. But past Ukrainian reports of similar spikes in Russian losses have corresponded with major failed Russian assaults.

Reuters journalists have not been inside Bakhmut for a week and could not independently verify the situation there.

Urban warfare typically favours defenders. Some Ukrainian officials have spoken in recent days of a ratio of as many as seven Russians killed at Bakhmut for every Ukrainian lost.

“The opportunity to damage the Wagner Group's elite elements, along with other elite units if they are committed, in a defensive urban warfare setting where the attrition gradient strongly favours Ukraine is an attractive one,” wrote the Washington-based Institute for the Study of War. — Reuters

President Biden teases budget plan and eyes extending Medicare



WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden aims to protect Medicare and reduce health care costs by raising some taxes on wealthy Americans, the White House said on Tuesday, putting him on a collision course with Republicans over spending issues.

The Democratic leader teased part of his upcoming budget plan by highlighting his intention to raise Medicare tax rates on people earning over \$400,000, which would extend solvency of the country's government-funded health insurance programme for seniors “by at least 25 years,” according to a White House fact sheet.

“Millions of Americans have been working their whole lives, paying into Medicare with every working day, and want to know that they can count on Medicare to be there for them when they turn 65,” the statement said.

The budget blueprint by the 80-year-old Biden — who has given strong signals he will run for re-election in 2024 — is expected to be unveiled on Thursday.

The fact sheet shows a plan to fulfil the president's promise to raise taxes on the rich, at least regarding Medicare pay-ins. According to the White House, Biden proposes increasing the Medicare tax rate from 3.8 per cent to 5.0 per cent on income above \$400,000

per year. Some government analyses have estimated Medicare — on which some 18 per cent of Americans rely — would become insolvent by 2028.

“By asking those with the highest incomes to contribute modestly more, we can keep the Medicare programme strong for decades to come,” the statement says.

BUDGET PLANS

White House budget plans are aspirational documents that lay out a president's priorities. Spending authorisation requires congressional approval, and the tax increase proposal sets up a looming clash with Republicans, who control the House of Representatives.

Biden has positioned himself as a defender of blue-collar workers and the middle class. With his Tuesday announcement he could boost his standing with older, white working class voters, who in recent decades have tended to vote Republican.

As his all-but-official campaign for re-election gets underway, the president clearly sought to woo that working class demographic during a speech to first responders.

“No billionaire should be paying a lower tax rate than a firefighter,” Biden said.

— AFP

Pension strike snarls france as unions strike

PARIS: French truck drivers and garbage collectors joined nationwide strikes against President Emmanuel Macron's pension reform plans on Tuesday as trade unions stepped up their campaign to try and force a policy U-turn.

There was also widespread disruption to train services, fuel deliveries were halted and teachers walked off the job on the sixth day of nationwide protests against Macron's plans to raise the pension age by two years to 64.

“I don't want to work until I'm 64... we're fighting not to lose our rights,” 50-year-old truck driver Mickael Lormeau said at a protest march in the western France city of Saint-Nazaire, one of more than 300 rallies scheduled across the country. “People are fed up, they're exhausted,” 41-year-old

Jessica Trocme, a union leader in a Lidl supermarket, said in Saint-Nazaire. This is a critical time for both sides since the government is hoping the pension changes will be adopted by parliament by the end of the month. Looking to pile pressure on lawmakers, France's more hardline unions said there would be rolling strikes this time, which could go on for days, including at oil refineries and on the railways.

“We will continue until the reform is withdrawn,” the head of Force Ouvriere (FO) union, Frédéric Souillot, told RTL radio. Macron's proposal to make people work longer is deeply unpopular amongst the wider public, opinion polls show.

“This reform is unfair,” said Aurelie Herkous, who works in public finance in the Normandy



Protesters hold a banner reading “Pension reform” as they participate in a demonstration in Montpellier, southern France, on Tuesday. — AFP

town of Pont Audemer. “Macron offers tax gifts to companies ... he's got to stop coming down on the same people time after time.”

ROLLING STRIKES?

France's leading trade unions have so far acted with rare unity, but the coming days and weeks

will be a test of their ability to maintain that united front.

Union leaders, who said on Tuesday looked to have brought more people on the streets than at any time since the start of the pension reform protests mid-January, will meet in the evening to decide on the next steps.

Locally, some have already decided on rolling strikes.

Eric Sellini, a CGT union representative at TotalEnergies said that a strike currently completely blocking the Gonfreville oil refinery in Normandy was expected to run until Thursday and one at the Donges refinery in western France until Friday. “The objective is to renew the strike everywhere,” CGT representative Benjamin Tange said.

— Reuters

Social media and personal struggles



Badr al Abri

The writer is interested in rapprochement and understanding. He is the author of *The Jurisprudence of Terrorism*

Knowledge, be it spawned by humanities or experimental and applied sciences, can accommodate everyone. Knowledge touches people's lives and reality and redresses their issues and problems, however it can also be pure illusion and argumentation. In all cases, knowledge bears epistemological pleasure from the one hand and encourages questioning and discussion on the other hand.

Nations have, since antiquity, been competing to gain knowledge and utilise acquired knowledge for serving human society. This process produced the existing body of knowledge and sciences some of which is now a thing of the past yet others had been upgraded and are benefiting humankind and building

civilisations.

Man had since antiquity experienced passion for discovery and had raised lots of questions regarding existence and human nature. Man has lived with a multitude of religions and philosophies of mind, gnostic and natural philosophies. They have sought ways of life and its course to emulate nature and unveil its secrets. Therefore, humanity knew many doctrines. Such is the nature of humankind, it could not have been possible for knowledge without differences, otherwise the minds would have frozen and come to stillness as death.

Just as man experiences passion for discovery, they also experienced the development of their means of doing so and handled the challenge

ONE IS ENTITLED FOR FREEDOM OF THOUGHT. BUT IT SHOULD BE DONE BASED ON EVIDENCE OTHERWISE THE WORLD WILL TEEMING WITH ABUSE, HARASSMENT AND SARCASM

of discovering the rules of existence. People transmitted their knowledge verbally, then they invented writing on palm leaves, barks, rocks and bones until the discovery of papyrus by ancient Egyptians which led to the spread of books and many philosophies became widespread among nations and civilisations. Thus, the legacy and philosophies of Greece, Persia, India and the Arabs

were preserved for us.

However, the biggest quantum leap was made by Johann Gutenberg (1468) with the discovery of printing. It was not until the nineteenth century that radio and television were invented. The 20th century marked the invention of satellite channels, internet and social media, all of which have made a quantum leap in the spread of knowledge and sciences.

Social media has gathered together the means of knowledge from the beginning of history to the present day. Hence, knowledge spread among the public in all languages and means whatever audible, visible or readable, be it human knowledge or natural knowledge. Unfortunately, we see some people discharge their

negative energy on social media by swearing and degrading other people and then acting as though they have triumphed and scaled higher ranking. In fact, they are abusing their own doctrine whether left wing or right wing and insulting the countries to which they belong because history has no mercy and what is written today, however trivial, will be read by the next generations.

One is entitled to defend one's thoughts regarding existence and they can freely display their talents and knowledge even if they were viewed as naïve by others. However, that should be done based on dialogue and the exchange of evidence otherwise the world will teeming with abuse, harassment and sarcasm.

Economic and cognitive empowerment of Omani women



Amani al Jalbubi

Economic and cognitive empowerment of Omani women refers to the process of enabling women in Oman to have greater control over their economic and personal lives, and to be able to fully participate in and contribute to their communities and society. Economic empowerment includes providing women with access to education, training, and employment opportunities, as well as ensuring that they are paid fairly and have equal opportunities for career

BY CONTINUING TO FOCUS ON EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP INITIATIVES, AND BY WORKING TO OVERCOME SOCIAL BARRIERS, OMANI WOMEN CAN ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

advancement. It also includes providing women with access loans, which can help them to start businesses and improve their financial independence. Cognitive empowerment refers to the development of women's critical thinking skills, self-esteem, and confidence, which can help them to challenge gender stereotypes and discrimination, and to become active and engaged members of society. This can be achieved through education, training, and mentorship programs, as well as by providing women with

opportunities to participate in decision-making processes at all levels. The empowerment of Omani women is important not only for achieving gender equality, but also for promoting sustainable economic and social development in the country. When women are empowered, they are better able to contribute to the growth and development of their families, communities, and the country as a whole.

There have been a number of initiatives aimed at promoting the economic and cognitive empowerment of Omani women. For example, the government has launched a number of programs aimed at increasing women's participation in the workforce, including incentives for companies to hire women and initiatives aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship. The government has also focused on improving access to education and training for women, with a particular emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields.

In addition to government initiatives, there have been a number of grassroots efforts.

For example, women's organisations and NGOs have launched programmes aimed at providing financial literacy training, mentorship, and networking opportunities for women. These programs can help women develop the skills and confidence they need to make informed decisions about their careers and finances, and to overcome the social and cultural barriers that may limit their opportunities.

By continuing to focus on education, training, and entrepreneurship initiatives, and by working to overcome social and cultural barriers, Omani women can continue to make significant strides in achieving their full potential and contributing to their communities and country.

Reimagining global integration



Olivia White



Jonathan Woetzel

Authors are senior partners, McKinsey

Global trade still conjures images of giant container ships. But our world has changed. The transport of physical goods across borders is no longer the only, or even the primary, driving force behind global integration. Instead, we are increasingly connected by flows of intangibles, services, and talent. From the cloud-based applications that companies use to manage customer relations to the research that led to the development of the Covid-19 vaccines, knowledge is binding our world together.

As we show in a new report, global flows associated with know-how have taken the baton from manufactured goods, resources, and capital – the primary drivers of interconnection until the late 2000s. Between 2010 and 2019, international trade in services, intellectual property, and education grew twice as fast as trade in goods. Cross-border data flows – the fuel of the digital era – have exploded, increasing at an annual rate of 45 per cent. In terms of trade in services, knowledge-intensive categories – including professional, government, IT, and telecommunications services – are growing most rapidly.

Speculation that the world is deglobalising misses the mark: Global integration is evolving, not retreating, in the digital era. Every major world region imports 25 per cent or more (in value-added terms) of at least one important type of resource or manufactured good that it needs, and often much more. The spread of intangible know-how is having a palpable influence on many sectors. In particular, research and development now involves much more cross-border cooperation. In the automotive sector, the share of R&D occurring in offshore locations rose from 5 per cent to 15 per cent between 2000 and 2018. The same is true of the pharmaceutical industry: Multinationals based in Europe and Asia use R&D performed outside of their home countries for more than half of innovation that produces new patents.

Likewise, highly qualified talent – one of the most important inputs across sectors – is globally mobile.

Consider the semiconductor industry. An estimated 40 per cent of high-skill semiconductor researchers working in the United States were born in other countries, and foreign-born workers contribute over 80 per cent of semiconductor patents. Multinational corporations are pivotal players in world trade, accounting for about two-thirds of global exports. They are overrepresented in sectors where intangibles are the most relevant. For example, they account for about 80 per cent of exports in

SPECULATION THAT THE WORLD IS DEGLOBALISING MISSES THE MARK. EVERY MAJOR WORLD REGION IMPORTS 25 PER CENT OR MORE OF AT LEAST ONE IMPORTANT TYPE OF RESOURCE OR MANUFACTURED GOOD THAT IT NEEDS, AND OFTEN MUCH MORE

some of the most innovative industries, including transport, pharmaceuticals, and electronics.

In knowledge-intensive global value chains, intangibles create highly scalable assets that can be deployed globally at low marginal cost. This, in turn, enables large economies of scale and a self-reinforcing cycle of higher returns, concentrating market share and performance in a small number of superstar firms that drive a disproportionate amount of economic activity. Hence, the close correlation between dominant multinationals and intangibles.

Multinationals have the opportunity to unlock new sources of competitive advantage through increased investment in intangibles,

particularly those with the potential to flow across borders. One example is MELLODDY, a public-private partnership coordinated by the AI biotech company Owkin. The project uses decentralised data from ten leading pharmaceutical companies to tweak models that predict molecule behaviour, in the hope of accelerating the drug discovery process.

According to McKinsey Global Institute research, large companies are well positioned to outperform their peers when they master the deployment of intangibles investment: Firms in the top quartile for growth in gross value added invest 2.6 times more in intangibles than companies in the bottom two quartiles. This suggests new sources of growth for companies grappling with growing economic and geopolitical uncertainty. But there is room for all on the fast-moving intangibles train, from the largest multinational corporations to the smallest microbusinesses, which can have a cross-border presence thanks to digital technology.

Firms on the hunt for growth opportunities would also do well to consider trade in services, which seem poised to deepen and expand. More economies are undergoing a transition to services, and there is much to gain from further liberalisation, as trade barriers affecting most services are two or three orders of magnitude higher than those for goods. Moreover, further technological advances could make these flows more seamless – the remote-everything of the pandemic era forced companies to provide services virtually, a practice that has become the norm for many services.

The widespread disruption to supply chains caused by the pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine has prompted a new narrative about globalisation in retreat. Considering the full picture of flows, however, suggests that global integration is here to stay, and that knowledge and know-how are now an important part of the way forward. Firms will need to reconfigure value chains in order to capitalise on the growth potential in services, intangibles, and talent. @Project Syndicate, 2022

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Fight against a budging epidemic

The world is heading towards a health crisis driven by obesity, a body condition that has been overlooked for many decades. While many consider it a cosmetic concern, obesity is a complex disease with profound social, economic and health implications.

Like many other international days to create awareness and action on issues of human concern, every year on March 4 we observe World Obesity Day to educate people about the risks linked with this life-altering disease.

Like the previous years, this year too, people from various international and local organisations all over the world stood together to raise awareness about the budging crisis.

According to World Health Organization, obesity has reached a global epidemic proportion, with roughly 800 million individuals affected and at least 2.8 million people dying each year as a result of being overweight or obese.

If these rising trends persist, 70 per cent of the global deaths and 57 per cent of the disease burden worldwide may be attributable to obesity by 2030, reports indicate.

It is not restricted to developed societies alone. Even some lower-income countries have experienced the most staggering rises in their obesity rates over the past decades.

Health experts link obesity with a range of chronic diseases that are directly responsible for the majority of deaths related to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development finds as a major challenge for sustainable development.

Overweight, particularly obesity, is the most important threat for many heart diseases such as high blood pressure, and in addition diabetes mellitus, and certain types of cancers like breast and endometrial cancers.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we found that obese patients who suffered from coronary artery disease, diabetes, chronic obstructive



Samuel Kutty
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DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, WE FOUND THAT OBESE PATIENTS WHO SUFFERED FROM CORONARY ARTERY DISEASE, DIABETES, CHRONIC OBSTRUCTIVE PULMONARY DISEASE AND ASTHMA WERE MORE VULNERABLE TO THE SEVERITY OF THE VIRUS

pulmonary disease and asthma were more vulnerable to the severity of the virus.

Even if a person is only slightly overweight, experts point out that the risk increases and becomes more serious due to the rise in the body mass index. Experts believe that increased exposure to unhealthy lifestyles has made people, especially in urban areas, more prone to obesity.

In the Sultanate of Oman, like other countries in the Gulf countries, social advancement has brought changes in eating patterns leading to trends of overweight and obesity-related comorbidities.

The results of a recent cross-sectional community-based survey of the population in the Sultanate of Oman showed how obesity has become a severe public health issue that is escalating at an alarming rate.

The survey found that almost 66 per cent, which is two-thirds of the population, was overweight. Significantly, Omani women specifically were identified as having a higher prevalence of obesity rate of 40.9 per cent against Omani men with 28.2 per cent.

Although the advancement in the socio-economic growth in Oman combined with the demographic developments are good health indicators, the drastic rise in complex diseases like cardiovascular heart diseases, diabetes and other obesity-linked disorders to name a few can, however, swamp the accomplishments achieved during the past years.

Experts suggest that all people disregarding their age must take obesity very seriously, not just because it hampers our day-to-day functions, but because it also increases our risk of developing chronic conditions and raises unprecedented challenges.

By changing public perceptions, promoting healthy lifestyle choices and developing new solutions that address the root causes of obesity, we can make progress towards a healthier and more inclusive world.

FESTIVAL OF COLOURS



A woman is smeared with 'Gulal' or coloured powder during celebrations of spring festival 'Holi' in Kolkata, India, on Tuesday. – AFP

Decolonising global health leadership

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, has selected an African as its new chief executive officer. The appointment of Muhammad Ali Pate, a professor at Harvard University who is a former Nigerian Minister of State for Health and Global Director for Health, Nutrition, and Population at the World Bank, is a welcome development for the entire Global South, which is woefully underrepresented in global health leadership. But Pate's selection alone will not correct this imbalance.

Pate's appointment has been widely lauded. Bill Gates of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation tweeted, "I have no doubt he will bring learnings from his impressive career in Nigeria and at the World Bank to ensure children have access to lifesaving vaccines." Gavi Board Chair José Manuel Barroso, a former European Commission president, echoed this sentiment, noting that he looks forward to "working closely" with Pate to advance vaccine equity.

Barroso is right to highlight the issue of equity. As the Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated, there remain massive disparities in global healthcare delivery, with some high-income countries having hoarded lifesaving resources, especially personal protective equipment and vaccines. What the media labelled "vaccine nationalism" was, at its core, lethal selfishness, for which the Global South paid the price.

Gavi, together with the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness



Ifeanyi M Nsofor

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WHILE ACHIEVING GLOBAL HEALTH GOALS MUST BE A COLLECTIVE EFFORT, WHO PAVES THE WAY CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Innovations and the World Health Organization, attempted to prevent this outcome with the Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) initiative. COVAX was regarded by its creators as the "only truly global solution" to the Covid-19 pandemic, because it was the "only effort to ensure that people in all corners of the world" had access to vaccines, "regardless of their wealth."

But COVAX fell far short of this ideal, not least because it reflected a colonial mindset. As Ayoade Alakija, Co-Chair of the African Union (AU) Vaccine Delivery Alliance, explained, those behind COVAX "did not come to us Africans, they did not come to ask our leadership, they did not come to ask our people, 'What would you like?'"

As Alakija implies, leadership matters. While achieving global health goals must be a collective effort, who paves the way can make all the difference. That is why it is not enough simply to include people with a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences in global health initiatives; diverse figures must be given opportunities to lead.

So far, this has rarely happened. Based on a survey of 198 international organisations, the 2020 Global Health 50/50 report concluded that 83 per cent of global health leaders hail from

high-income countries, which account for just 17 per cent of the world population. Moreover, 50 per cent of global health leaders are nationals of just two countries: the United States and the United Kingdom. And a whopping 92 per cent of global health leaders obtained their academic degrees in high-income countries, with 8 per cent having attended Harvard. This entrenched pattern is severely hampering progress on health equity, including vaccine equity.

There is no question, then, that the appointment of an African to lead Gavi is a step in the right direction. And Pate appears to be committed to advancing equitable access to vaccines. To that end, one key priority must be to secure a comprehensive waiver of intellectual-property rights on Covid-19 vaccines, as well as therapeutics and diagnostics.

As Harvard Law School's Bill of Health explains, the World Trade Organization's Ministerial Decision on the TRIPS Agreement, adopted in June 2022, produced only a limited waiver, covering patent rights on vaccines and protected clinical trial data for use in issuing regulatory approval. Pate must work closely with fellow Nigerian and WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala to secure a broad waiver before the next pandemic.

Boosting vaccine equity will also require African leaders to reduce their dependence on donor funding for child-vaccination programs. While poverty rates across Africa are high, so are illicit financial flows away from the continent, with

nearly \$89 billion lost through illicit capital flight each year. Leaders across the public, private and non-profit sectors must block these leakages and allocate the proceeds to advance poverty-reduction and development goals, including health imperatives like vaccination.

A larger role for low- and middle-income countries in decision-making at the World Bank's new Pandemic Fund is also necessary. The fund was created precisely to help such countries invest in their capacities to prevent, prepare for and respond to outbreaks of infectious disease. Yet the Africa CDC – responsible for coordinating disease-prevention and control for the AU's 55 member states – has not yet been accredited as a so-called Implementing Entity. Surely an agency that oversees the health security of 16 per cent of the global population should be able to participate fully in the Pandemic Fund.

Seeing Pate receive this leadership opportunity makes me both proud, as a fellow Nigerian, and hopeful for the future of health in the Global South. But to decolonise the global health sector and achieve genuine health equity, more must be done. How we collectively fare during the next pandemic depends on it.

@Project Syndicate, 2022



COVAX was regarded by its creators as the "only truly global solution" to the Covid-19 pandemic.

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Oman win 2 gold, 2 silver at tent pegging WC qualifiers



WALEED AL JAHWARI
MUSCAT, MAR 7

Oman won two gold and two silver medals at the World Cup qualifiers for tent pegging, hosted by the Sultanate of Oman from March 4 to 7 Al Rahba Farm in Barka.

The qualifiers were organised by the Oman Equestrian Federation, under the supervision of the International Tent Pegging Federation, with participation of five countries namely Sultanate of Oman, Kuwait, Yemen, Iraq and Germany.

Oman hosted the fourth qualifying round of the World Cup qualifiers of tent pegging, after three tournaments held in Sudan, Pakistan and Egypt. Two countries will qualify from each tournament to compete with eight countries in

the World Cup next August.

Oman national team is represented by five riders under the supervision of the national coach, Mansour bin Ali al Mahrouqi. The team is represented by Hamad bin Nasser al Riyami, Safwan bin Zaid al Maamari, Hamad bin Saif al Raisi, Khalid bin Salim al Habsi, Waleed bin Zahir al Shuraiqi, and Ahed bin Khamis al Balushi.

The first day witnessed fierce competition on spear tours, three rounds for individual category, one round for doubles and three rounds for the teams.

Ahed bin Khamis al Balushi won the gold medal in the individual competition after obtaining 41.5 points, the Yemen team contestant Osama Abdul Khaliq al Hamzi, came in second place with 40.5 points and Yemen's Abdulaziz

Mohammed Abdulaziz with 40 points finished third.

At the team level, the Yemeni team snatched the first place and gold medal, after scoring 143 points, Oman national team was able to get the silver medal after collecting 141 points and the Iraqi team claimed the bronze medal after collecting 122 points.

OMAN CLINCH TEAM GOLD

Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources for Agriculture, was the chief guest of the opening ceremony, in the presence of Mohammed bin Issa al Fayrouz, President of the International Equestrian Federation.

On second day, competitions were held in three rounds of sword

category for individual category, one round for doubles, and three rounds for teams.

The individual gold medal was won by Iraq's Abdulhameed Rashid with 42 points, Oman's Ahed bin Khamis al Balushi, came in second place after obtaining 41.5 points, while the third place went to the Yemen's Osama Abdul Khaliq al Hamzi with 38 points.

In the team category, Oman national team snatched the gold medal after collecting 135.5 points, Iraq team claimed the silver medal with 134 points and Yemen took the bronze with 129 points.

Ahmed bin Saif al Abri, Secretary-General of the OEF and Dr Yousef bin Sulaiman al Wahibi, Treasurer and Executive Director of OEF, crowned the second day winners.

AFC Asian Cup Qatar draw on May 11

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) chose May 11 as the date for the draw for the Asian Nations Cup Qatar 2023, which will be held from January 12 to February 10, 2024, with the participation of 24 teams for the second time in the history of the tournament after the UAE 2019 edition. The draw ceremony will be held in The Opera House in Katara Cultural District in Doha. Oman national team will participate in the tournament for the fifth time in its history after 2004, 2007, 2015 and 2019, ensuring its qualification for the next edition after reaching the final stage of the qualifiers for the

Qatar World Cup 2022.

The tournament was scheduled to be held in 10 Chinese cities in June and July of this year 2023 before China apologised last year due to the exceptional circumstances related to the Covid pandemic. Then South Korea and Indonesia, along with Qatar, expressed their desire to host the tournament. Before the two countries withdrew, Qatar won the organisation for the third time in its history.

The organising committee of the tournament in Qatar announced that the competitions would take place between January 12 and February 10 from the year 2024.

According to the continental championship regulations, the 24

teams are distributed into 6 groups, each comprising 4 teams, from which the leaders and runner-up qualify, in addition to the best four teams that are in third place, for the round of 16, which is held by the knockout system.

The AFC will depend on the classification of the draw levels on the Fifa classification of the teams, which will be issued next month.

The 24 teams that qualified for the AFC Asian Cup finals are Qatar, Oman, Japan, Iran, Australia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Iraq, UAE, China, Syria, Vietnam, Lebanon, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Bahrain, Palestine, Kyrgyzstan, India, Tajikistan, Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Indonesia.





AUSTRALIA LOOK TO SQUARE INDIA TEST SERIES



India's R Ashwin celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Australia's Steve Smith during the second Test at Arun Jaitley Stadium, New Delhi. — Reuters

SMITH RELISHES 'GAME OF CHESS'

AHMEDABAD, India: Stand-in captain Steve Smith is looking forward to a new "game of chess" against India as Australia aim to square the series on another spin minefield when the final Test begins in Ahmedabad on Thursday.

India were chastened by a rare home defeat in the third Test last week and are looking to bounce back to take the series 3-1, and with it secure their berth in the ICC World Test Championship final at the Oval in June.

Australia clinched their place in the showpiece with their nine-wicket third Test win, completed before lunch on the third day on a treacherous Indore track.

Australia captain Pat Cummins has remained at home because of a family illness, leaving his deputy Smith with another chance to pit his wits against India in the subcontinent, something he clearly relishes.

"It's a game of chess, every ball means something," said Smith after the Indore victory, which followed India's wins in Nagpur and Delhi.

"It's good to just move people and try to make the batter do something different and just play games with them," Smith said after the Indore triumph.

"It's probably my favourite place in the world to captain."

India and Australia's prime ministers are scheduled to attend on Thursday where another sharply turning wicket is expected at the Narendra Modi Stadium,



Australia's Todd Murphy celebrates after taking the wicket of India's Ravindra Jadeja during the second Test. — Reuters

the world's largest cricket ground with a capacity of 132,000.

Joe Root's England were thrashed there twice two years ago, including inside two days in a day-night game, the shortest completed Test since 1935.

'TOO MUCH' PITCH TALK

Despite the local Gujarat Cricket Association's assurances of a "normal pitch", both sides are again expected to pick three spinners, though India may opt

for the wrist-spin of Kuldeep Yadav instead of Axar Patel, who has taken only one wicket in the series.

India may also strengthen their batting by dropping a seam bowler and bringing in the explosive Suryakumar Yadav.

Australia's spinners Nathan Lyon and Matthew Kuhnemann took full advantage of an Indore pitch officially rated as "poor" by the match referee to give Australia only their second Test victory on

Indian soil since 2004.

Kuhnemann took five wickets and Lyon three as India were rolled for 109 in their first innings after opting to bat.

Usman Khawaja's 60 in a 96-run stand with Marnus Labuschagne helped Australia to an 88-run lead, despite a late collapse from 186-4 to 197 all out.

Lyon ripped through with 8-64 as India made 163 in their second innings, before Travis Head and Marnus Labuschagne chased down the 76-run target with ease.

India captain Rohit Sharma said he was fed up with the constant focus on the playing surfaces and wanted to focus instead on some exceptional bowling performances.

"This pitch talk is getting too much," he said after the Indore Test. "Every time we play in India it's always about the pitch."

"Out of the 10 wickets maybe one or two where the pitch did help the bowler, but other than that it was the skill of the bowler that foxed the batsman". — AFP

INDIA (FROM): Rohit Sharma (capt), KL Rahul, Shubman Gill, Cheteshwar Pujara, Virat Kohli, KS Bharat, Ishan Kishan, Ravichandran Ashwin, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Ravindra Jadeja, Mohammed Shami, Mohammed Siraj, Shreyas Iyer, Suryakumar Yadav, Umesh Yadav, Jaydev Unadkat

AUSTRALIA (FROM): Steve Smith (capt), Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Cameron Green, Peter Handscomb, Travis Head, Usman Khawaja, Matt Kuhnemann, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Lance Morris, Todd Murphy, Matt Renshaw, Mitchell Starc

LOCAL FLAVOUR

Omani karate referees attend UAE Open championship



MUSCAT: The UAE Open Karate Championship was launched in the sports hall of the Sharjah Sports Club in the United Arab Emirates, under the auspices of the UAE Karate Federation and the Sharjah Sports Club, with the participation of 624 male and female players representing 19 countries on March 3.

Hosts UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Jordan, Egypt, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Russia, Italy, Uzbekistan, America, the Philippines, Nepal, India, Pakistan, in addition to the participation of the Sultanate of Oman with a group of international referees are taking part in the championship.

The new and amended rules has been applied by the International Karate Federation in the tournament where the championship was divided into kata and kumite competitions according to the weights and ages for the categories of seniors, youth, juniors, cadets and kids for males and females.

The competitions started on the first day with the junior and senior categories for males and females, then on the second day the competitions for juniors, under 14 years old and under 12 years old began, then on the last

day the competitions and final matches for the junior and Seniors categories started.

In the general ranking, Russia came top with 53 medals, including 22 gold medals, the UAE came second with 104 medals (21 gold) and Azerbaijan were third with 12 medals (5 gold) and Jordan finished fourth with 8 medals, including 3 gold.

The Oman Karate Committee participated in the UAE Open Karate Championship 2023 with 10 international referees, namely: Ahmed al Zakwani, Sulaiman al Hinai, Yousef al Siyabi, Salim al Qutaiti, Salim al Masrouri, Hilal al Abdali, Mohammed al Hinai, Adil al Hinai, Hisham Bani Toroof and Mohie Lutfi. Their participation was by attending the lecture that was held to discuss the implementation of the new and amended rules before the start of the open championship competitions.

The Omani referees participated in managing the championship competitions on 5 mats as referees and judges, which contributed to the knowledge of the new changes that occurred in the international arbitration law for kata and kumite.

Al Kishry honours Oman boxing champions in Qatar championship



MUSCAT: Taha bin Sulaiman al Kishry, Secretary-General of Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) on Tuesday honoured the boxers who won medals for Oman in an Open boxing championship in Qatar recently.

Fares bin Ahmed al Maqbali, won the gold medal in weight of 92 kg and Firas bin Fida al Balushi won the silver medal in 56 kg in the fifth Katara Open Boxing Championship held in Qatar from February 15 to 18.

The reception was attended by

the Olympic boxing trainer Afaf al Qarniyeh, the first Qatari female boxer, Nasser bin Ali al Eisari, President of the Master Academy for Martial Arts, and the academy players and administrators.

Al Kishry, on behalf of OOC Chairman and Board Members, congratulated the champions who won medals in their first international participation in boxing, wishing them and all Omani athletes to achieve more achievements and represent Oman well in international events.

Team Sinai emerge winners



Team Sinai emerged winners of the MGOCYM Talent Scan T10 Cricket 2022-23 tourney under the captaincy of Libin Raju. In the final held at Al Amerat Cricket Stadium, Team Sinai beat Team Horeb by 8 wickets. Team Sinai

scored 84 for 2 in 7 overs in reply to Team Horeb's score of 83 for 5 in 10 overs. Team Horeb's captain Justin Samuel top-scored, slamming 48 runs from 28 balls while Cyril claimed 2 wickets for 13 runs for Team Horeb.

Oman Golf Trophy grand finale concludes

BARDAZZI AND MORATE CLAIM MEN'S AND WOMEN'S TITLES



The winners of the Oman Golf Trophy being presented the trophies at Opera House Muscat. (Right) Dignitaries at the closing ceremony. – Faisal al Balushi

SPORTS REPORTER MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The Grand finale of the Oman Golf Trophy concluded on Tuesday in the stunning surroundings of Al Mouj Golf in Muscat, with Barbara Morati claiming the Oman Golf Trophy title for women with 29 points and Enrico Bardazzi clinching the men's title with 32 points.

Morati, qualified for the final by winning at Circolo Golf Villa d'Este in Italy on October 2, 2022.

The men's winner Bardazzi qualified for the final by winning at Circolo Golf Rapallo on November 13, 2022.

The Italian leg of the Oman Golf Trophy was played on seven of the most prestigious courses in Italy between September to November 2022, culminating in this week's finale in Muscat, with 14 of the Italian leg qualifying win-

ners competing head-to-head for the title. The tournament reached its conclusion on Tuesday after an action-packed week for the players who were treated to a tourism and investment awareness programme to complement their golf interests while in Oman.

Al Mouj Golf, which played host to some of the best golfers in the world recently in the International Series Oman event, once again glistened in the Omani sun proving a tough test for golfers for Oman's guests from Italy.

On March 5, Al Mouj Golf welcomed a friendly practice round which included Omani business-people and club members, as well as Omani sports icons to enjoy the afternoon and network.

Morati relished the opportunity to compete in the event and on presentation of the trophy, by Mohammed al Wahaibi, Oman's



Under-Secretary of Administrative and Financial Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, said: "It's been a great experience to be a part of the Oman Golf Trophy, and have the chance to play such a fantastic golf course. The location is wonderful – on the coastline and next to the mountains. The people in Oman have been amazing. I am very honoured to be here and to experience all the destination has to offer."

Bardazzi added: "What a golf course. It was a great challenge and

the people of Oman have been so welcoming. Hopefully this can be the start of a great partnership between Italy and Oman and encourage others to come and experience the beauty of Oman that we have witnessed this week."

The Oman Golf Trophy invites Italians/Europeans to discover Oman's exclusive tourism experiences and rich business opportunities. It is a unique public private partnership aimed at United national promotion- stewarded

by the Oman Golf Association representing the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth as well the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Heritage & Tourism, and the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion and some of the most well-known private groups in the country including Daud Group, Oman Air, OHI, The Zubair Corporation, Al Mouj Muscat and Kempinski Hotel Muscat.

The Oman Golf Trophy concluded at the spectacular Royal Opera House in Muscat at a closing ceremony with Undersecretary Mohammed al Wahaibi as the guest of honour. Guests enjoyed a tour of the stunning venue, followed by the trophy giving ceremony and a celebratory dinner. The evening had a unique music set by Oman's own premier harpist Badr al Busafi harmonising with Italy's Matteo Andreini on the piano. The music

was thoroughly enjoyed by the officials and OGT participants and sponsoring entities alike.

During the closing ceremony, the Foreign Minister delivered a message in a video and said: "Oman is known as a land of peace and neutrality, principles which align closely with the spirit of sportsmanship. But we always consider it the highest compliment when told that we are also known for our hospitality."

He continued: "Our culture has been enriched by centuries of engagement with people from around the globe. This tournament has, without a doubt, provided an invaluable opportunity for such engagement. We hope the intersection of business and leisure, and Oman's sport and adventure portfolio, has helped to further promote our trade and investment relations, as well as people to people connections."

OFA unveils details of HM Cup final



SPORTS REPORTER MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth and Oman Football Association (OFA) unveiled the details of the HM Football Cup Championship on Tuesday in a press conference at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The final match of the HM Cup will be between Seeb and Al Nahda

and will take place on Thursday under auspices of Sayyid Badr bin Hamed al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, besides top dignitaries.

Hilal al Maamari, Assistant General Manager of Welfare and Sports Development, said that series of meetings were held to finalise all the preparations for the final match of the coveted cup.

"All the doors of the venue will be opened ahead of the match

with sufficient time for smooth and ease audience entrance to the complex. Many activities will be organised as a sidelines events prior the match start" he said.

FINAL VENUE

Hilal al Sinani, Executive Director of OFA, affirmed that the selection of Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex as a venue for the HM Cup final match was based on the readiness of

complex and it can accommodate more fans beside other factors.

"The final match of the HM Cup is a prestigious event and much-awaited game by all the football fans. We are working hard with our stakeholders to ensure delivering a high profile match. Many zones around the venue will be distributed for food, sports corner, fun zone and entertainment area," he said.

OMAN CRICKET CHAIRMAN KHIJMI NAMED IN ICC COMMITTEES

MUSCAT: Oman Cricket (OC) Chairman Pankaj Khimji's stature as one of the leading cricket administrators continues to grow at the global level.

Less than a year since he became the first

Omani to be elected as Associate Member Director of the International Cricket Council (ICC), the world cricket governing body, Khimji has now been named in two ICC committees and one ICC working group.

The appointment in three ICC panels underlines Khimji's growing influence at the world stage, and the Omani cricket boss is humbled by the recognition.

"I am extremely honoured by the appointments made by the ICC, and I hope to serve the different committees to the best of my abilities," said Khimji.

Khimji, who is also the vice-chairman of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), has been named as a member of the ICC Development Committee. The committee is chaired by Imran Khwaja of Singapore and comprises 12 members. The Omani cricket administrator, who serves as advisor for foreign trade and international cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry



and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), has also been appointed to the eight-member HR and Remuneration Committee of the ICC. This committee is chaired by West Indies' Richard

Skerriitt.

Besides the two ICC committees, Khimji has also been named as a member of the ICC Governance Working Group, the third ICC panel in which he has been entrusted to play a key role.

Khimji said: "I am overwhelmed by the trust and belief of the ICC."

"I hope my 30-40 years of corporate experience will help me in contributing positively to the ICC. There will be useful experiences in the time to come for me. Working with people who have some fantastic understanding of these committees will be a good learning experience for me initially."

Khimji, who is also director of Muscat-based business conglomerate Khimji Ramdas Group, added: "At some point of time, I am confident that I will be able to contribute positively to the various committees and I am looking forward to sharing my experience with the ICC."



Now get your investor licence in 5 minutes via OPAZ’s Invest Easy portal

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) in Sohar Free Zone has launched the service of issuing automatic licences for economic activities through the Invest Easy portal in the zone.

The service was launched in a workshop held with the participation of a number of OPAZ employees and representatives from the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Sohar Free Zone and others from concerned parties.

The launch is part of OPAZ efforts to harmonise and integrate special, free and industrial zones and central national system & solutions, in order to develop sustainable action plans within the Authority’s continuous plans to develop investment through digital transformation.

Investors now can obtain a licence to start their activities and the environmental permit automatically within only 5 minutes, post digitally signing the terms and controls specified for each type of business.



Besides, OPAZ plan aims to unify the procedures for obtaining the services provided by the special economic zones and free zones through its online portals for investors and other beneficiaries through the one-stop shop.

Further, investors can submit their requests to invest in the special economic zones and free

zones through the e-services portal for each zone and follow up the applications too.

The portal enables investors to attach the required documents and process the e-payment.

Hence, the one-stop-shop employees of each zone receive the applications and process the necessary approvals, starting from

THE LAUNCH IS PART OF OPAZ EFFORTS TO HARMONISE AND INTEGRATE SPECIAL, FREE AND INDUSTRIAL ZONES AND CENTRAL NATIONAL SYSTEM & SOLUTIONS, IN ORDER TO DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE ACTION PLANS WITHIN THE AUTHORITY’S CONTINUOUS PLANS TO DEVELOP INVESTMENT THROUGH DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION.

receiving the applications until completing the final approval for all transactions.

OPAZ is proceeding with plans to develop the investment environment by unifying the one-stop-shop procedures in the economic and free zones as an endeavour to complement its ongoing efforts to attract various investments in its affiliated zones.

This also serves accelerating the process of investors’ transactions and facilitates practicing the businesses and converting paper applications to digital transactions. OPAZ had earlier introduced the automatic licensing service in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm and Salalah Free Zone.

Australian subsea cable specialist to expand underwater cable to Salalah



JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

Australian-based submarine cable development specialist SUB.CO announced that it will expand its Oman Australia Cable (OAC) with a new branch unit in Salalah.

About 1,200 kilometres of new cable will be added to the existing 9,800 kilometre system, laid from OAC’s branching unit to the new interconnection hub of Salalah, adding a new diverse path from the existing cable which lands in Barka near Muscat.

The OAC, which costs over \$300 million, was officially switched on by Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in Perth, Australia in October 23, 2022. The cable system has landing points in Perth, Australia; West Island, Cocos (Keeling) Islands and Muscat, Oman.

It is the first fully diverse cable between EMEA and Asia that avoids the Malacca Straight — a narrow stretch of water between Indonesia and Malaysia — that has a high level of seismic and marine activity causing regular outages on submarine cable and a single point of geographical risk.

Once complete, the new branch will be able to interconnect with several new hyperscale cable systems that lead from Salalah into Europe and Africa, including the Meta-backed 2Africa, the Reliance Jio-backed India-Europe Express (IEX), and Google, Sparkle and Omantel-backed Blue-Raman.

In addition to express low-latency connectivity, this new direct route delivers geographic diversity from all existing systems west of Australia.

Bevan Slattery, founder and CEO of SUB.CO, said, “I am incredibly excited to be sharing our plans to build OAC’s diverse landing in Salalah, which will enable a new low latency route from Australia to Europe.” “With a number of other major subsea cable systems interconnecting, or planning to interconnect, at Salalah, we hope to provide our customers with an express gateway for onward capacity from Australia to EMEA, and enable enhanced network performance, connectivity and resiliency for all of Australia,” he added.

The Salalah branch is an extension of OAC’s deep-sea route which crosses the deep waters of the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea, avoiding shallow, congested and earthquake-prone paths that pose significant connectivity risks from unplanned outages.

Abraj IPO oversubscribed eight times

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

Eng Ayad bin Ali al Balushi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Abraj Energy Services, announced that the final offer price of Abraj shares was set at RO 0.249 per share, to be the highest level of the previously announced offering price range due to the high demand from both individuals and institutions.

He revealed that the volume of subscription in the company’s shares amounted to more than RO 790 million, where the subscription was covered by 870 per cent, which exceeds the offered amount by more than eight times thus making the IPO of Abraj is the largest in the history of the Sultanate



of Oman.

According to Al Balushi’s press statements, approximately 40,000 individual subscribers

contributed RO 246 million to purchase over one billion shares.

Meanwhile, the institutional subscription was oversubscribed by more than 21 times, with 132 participating institutions locally and internationally contributing more than RO 507 million within just 12 days.

This impressive institutional subscription, with investment funds, regional, and international institutions accounted for a significant 46 per cent, a clear indication of the confidence and strategic foresight of these entities in recognising the potential of this lucrative investment opportunity.

The remaining 54 per cent of the institutional subscription was accounted for by Omani institutions.

TURN TO PAGE 14

New solar farm linked to water project prepares for test run

ENERGY TRANSITION: Veolia-backed Sharqiyah Desalination Company to switch to solar for a third of its energy requirements

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

A first-of-its-kind solar farm that will power an existing seawater desalination plant in operation at Sur on Oman’s South Al Sharqiyah coast is set to enter the testing phase before it brought fully online.

The 17 MW peak-capacity solar photovoltaic-based farm has been built by the renewable energy arm of French energy major TotalEnergies to help decarbonise – at least partly – the water desalination operations of Sharqiyah Desalination Company.

The latter – a publicly traded



firm backed by French-based global water and environmental services specialist Veolia – currently operates a modern 80,000 cubic metres/day capacity desalination project at Sur.

Philippe Paulissen, CEO -

Sharqiyah Desalination Company SAOG, noted in a recent post on social media that the solar farm has passed a key commissioning step. “Now the Solar Farm is entirely energized and producing green energy. This is one of the last stages

before the trial run test leading to the Commercial Operation Date (COD). This plant is now producing 17 MW DC green energy for our Sur desalination plant,” he stated.

Covering an area of 130,000

sq metres, the solar farm features around 32,000 high-efficiency solar panels with a capacity to generate around 30,000 megawatt-hours (MWh) of green electricity annually.

This output will reduce the desalination project’s dependence on gas-powered electricity by around a third of its energy requirements. In the process, it will also eliminate around 300,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions per annum.

Meanwhile, A’Saffa Foods SAOG, a leading producer of poultry products and foodstuff, has also announced that it has tied up with TotalEnergies for the establishment of a 7 MW-peak capacity solar PV plant to support its operations at Thamrait in Dhofar Governorate.

Sharing details about the initiative in its latest financial report, the company stated: “The Board of Directors decided to

install a solar power system to reduce the cost of the fuel and power.

The company has signed an agreement with TotalEnergies Renewables Orient LLC to install the solar system at the A’Saffa farm on a build-operate-transfer (BOT) basis.

TotalEnergies has initiated the procedures to get the required approvals from the authorities,” the company added.

Following the government’s decision to introduce subsidy-free Cost Reflective Tariffs (CRT) for large consumers a couple of years ago, growing numbers of industrial and commercial establishments are investing in renewable resources to offset their sizable energy costs.

This transition to renewable and sustainable energy resources is also progressively contributing to Oman’s commitment to achieving Net-Zero by 2050.

Bank Muscat provides corporate finance, advisory services for marquee deals entailing aggregate fundraising of over RO 800 million in 2022

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, continues its successful track record of providing innovative and customised financing solutions to suit the unique requirements of its customers.

The bank had another successful year in 2022, providing corporate finance and advisory services for a number of prestigious clients including for government related entities as well as large corporate entities.

Bank Muscat successfully advised on multiple transactions spanning across various sectors including telecom, financial services, gas networks, utilities and supplier financing, which resulted

in fundraising in excess of RO 800 million (\$ 2 billion) in 2022.

Khalifa Abdullah al Hatmi, Deputy General Manager - Investment Banking and Capital Markets, Bank Muscat, said, “The bank is synonymous with innovation, customer-centricity, agility and trustworthiness and always aims to deliver reliable, dynamic and customised solutions, which suit the unique requirements of our customers. We are pleased to continue delivering on these principles consistently.

Bank Muscat prides itself in its intricate understanding of diverse business requirements of its clients, offering unmatched financial expertise and guidance, innovative funding solutions and



wide array of services for various customer needs.”

In 2022, Bank Muscat’s investment banking team engaged with the Ministry of Finance to achieve a unique financing solution to offer an alternative solution to meet working capital requirements for various suppliers and service

providers to various ministries of the Government of Oman.

It also advised and raised funds for Helios Towers’ acquisition of Omantel’s telecom towers and related assets, which is the first of its kind acquisition in Oman by a UK-listed entity.

The bank also helped a leading

finance and leasing company in the Sultanate to raise financing for its business. Moreover, the investment banking team also provided financial advisory services to leading GREs in Oman operating in various sectors.

Bank Muscat led the successful Initial Public Offering of Barka Desalination Company. On the Mergers & Acquisitions side, the team acted as the sole advisor on the merger of Oman Qatar Insurance Company with Vision Insurance Company, both listed on Muscat Stock Exchange.

The bank also advised and managed the largest ever bond offering on MSX i.e., RO 375 million AT1 perpetual issuance by Bank Muscat which was issued to

bank’s shareholders as a bonus.

The successful financial advisory mandates achieved financial close for these transactions which highlights the capabilities of the team members, comprising some of the most experienced investment bankers in Oman having a wide experience across sectors and geographies.

Bank Muscat’s Investment Banking team is the market leader in corporate finance and advisory solutions encompassing corporate finance, project finance, debt capital markets, debt refinancing and restructurings, IPOs, structured financings, quasi-equity financings, private placements, as well as mergers and acquisitions in the Sultanate of Oman.

Truckoman inaugurates Journey Management Centre in Muscat



MUSCAT: As part of its philosophy, which is based on the commitment to provide the best high-quality logistic solutions that protect the health and safety of its employees, contractors, and other beneficiaries of its services, Truckoman Group (SAOC) celebrated, on Wednesday, the inauguration of the Journey Management Centre (JMC) in the Group’s Headquarters at Jifnain, Muscat. The Guest of Honour, Mohammed al Salmi, UID Infrastructure Director of Petroleum Development of Oman (PDO), presided over the official ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Dr Mohamed bin Mousa al Yousef, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Truckoman Group, stated while stressing the capabilities of the JMC, its significant functions, and introducing the Centre team members: “The Journey Management Centre plays a paramount importance in monitoring the safety of all trips carried out by the group’s fleet across the Sultanate of Oman, and it has been established after extensive research, analysis and study of the proposed ideas for setting it.”

He further emphasised that “the statistics and track record have demonstrated the importance of JMC and its benefits, and we are confident that the Centre would be an effective platform in the upcoming period to assist the Group in achieving its growth aspirations”.

Bank Nizwa marks a decade of exceptional growth and innovation in the Islamic banking sector with a grand celebration

MUSCAT: Bank Nizwa, the fastest-growing Islamic bank in Oman, is proud to celebrate its 10-year anniversary, marking a decade of exceptional growth and performance in the Islamic banking sector.

The event was held under the auspices of Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance and Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of Bank Nizwa. The gala celebration was hosted on March 6 in the Majan Ballroom of the Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz Carlton Hotel.

The event highlighted the bank’s achievements, growth strategy and future.

“As we mark this momentous occasion, we are grateful for the unwavering support of our shareholders, customers and employees who have played a pivotal role in our journey towards becoming Oman’s fastest-growing Islamic bank. Over the past decade, we have successfully executed our strategy of delivering



innovative Shariah-compliant banking solutions that meet the evolving needs of our customers. As we look to the future, we remain steadfast in our commitment to providing exceptional banking services that are grounded in Islamic principles and are aligned with the aspirations of Oman’s Vision 2040. We are confident that Bank Nizwa will continue to play a leading role in driving the growth of the Islamic banking sector in Oman and contributing

to the development of the national economy,” said Shaikh Khalid bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of Bank Nizwa.

Bank Nizwa, as a pioneer of Islamic banking in the country, is committed to expanding its reach throughout the Sultanate of Oman and increasing its branch network to serve all governorates and regions. The bank strives to provide financial services to the maximum number of customers and cater to their needs, no matter where they are located.

Abraj IPO oversubscribed eight times

FROM PAGE 13

The Chairman of the Board of Directors of Abraj concluded his speech by saying: “All the success that accompanied the IPO of Abraj Energy Services confirms the strong expertise and the strategic decision-making necessary to reach this important and historical moment, not only at the level of the company, but the positive impact of that decision on our national economy.

He expressed his thanks to all the investors who participated in the IPO, in addition to the stakeholders in the IPO process. Abraj will soon be among the top 10 companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange based on its market value.”

Azzan al Abdullatif, Head of the IPO Transaction Team, noted that the positive participation rates in the public subscription of the company were a testament to the high level of investor confidence in Abraj’s investment value.

Malabar Gold & Diamonds emerges as Oman’s most trusted brand for the 6th time in a row

MUSCAT: Malabar Gold & Diamonds, currently ranked as the 6th largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of over 305 outlets spread across 10 countries, has won ‘Oman’s Most Trusted Brand’ award in the jewellery category for the sixth time in a row.

Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, handed over the award to Najeeb K, Regional Head – Oman, Malabar Gold & Diamonds in the presence of Muhsin P, Branch Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, and Saleh al Zakwani — Executive Chairman, Apex Media. The award is instituted by Apex Media, one of Oman’s premier publishing houses involved in a host of publishing and digital activities.

Apex takes fame throughout Oman and internationally for its high-quality title



productions involving a team of highly professional journalists and designers.

Oman’s Most Trusted Brand Awards acknowledges brands that have won the confidence of their customers through a voting process, which is also an opportunity for customers to prove their loyalty towards their favourite brands.

“It is with great pride and pleasure that we graciously accept this award. It is a strong testament to our unwavering commitment towards providing our customers with the best jewellery shopping experience they could ask for. We dedicate this inspiring triumph to our millions of satisfied customers, team members and investors, without whose wholehearted support, this exceptional accomplishment would not have been possible”, said Najeeb K, Regional Head, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

This national project was made a success with efficiency and competence, making it the largest in the history of the Sultanate of Oman, he added.

Meanwhile, Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, Executive President of the Capital Market Authority, said the amount collected from the subscription process exceeded eight folds of the offered shares for the second category at RO 246 million while the amount of shares offered for small investors was RO 29.6 million which represents 35% of the total offering.

Al Salmi pointed out that the allocation of the shares of Abraj Energy was approved based on distribution of the minimum limit to the small shareholders category at 4,500 shares and 0.1121% of the remaining shares for each subscriber, and allocation of 4.62% proportionately to each subscriber in the first category represented by institutional investors.

Oman: A major oil player with great aspirations



MARYAM AL NOFLI

The author is a lecturer at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences - Shinas. She can be contacted at alnoflimaryam@gmail.com

The Sultanate of Oman is in the southeast corner of the Arabian Peninsula. It has a strategic location and a variety of landscapes that make it rich on the outside and inside.

It is bursting with enormous human and natural resources, and internally, it contains innumerable amounts of oil, gas, and mineral treasures.

Oman is the only GCC member located outside of the Persian Gulf, and it is near the Strait of Hormuz. One-fifth of the world's oil production and liquefied gas transit through the Strait of Hormuz, which is strategically located at the entrance to the Arabian Gulf and between the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.

It is also the world's oldest and most significant maritime commerce route. Oman's hydrocarbon reserves are lower than those of its neighbours, yet oil and gas are nonetheless vital to the country's economy.

Oman has made infrastructure investments in an effort to take advantage of its advantageous location and establish itself as a hub for global logistics. The Oman Vision 2040 will continue to place a significant emphasis on diversification, privatisation, and omanisation in order to fulfil its short- and long-term strategic development goals.

Over the past centuries, the Sultanate of Oman has sought to consolidate and strengthen its economy by harnessing its various resources. Oil and gas have become the mainstay of the economies of the Gulf countries,

including Oman. Since the oil and gas sector accounts for a large portion of Oman's economic growth and government revenue, changes in the sector can have a significant impact on the Sultanate of Oman's overall progress.

The Ministry of Energy and Minerals of Oman has made significant efforts to achieve various goals connected to developing and improving the performance of the oil and gas sectors. Despite recent progress in diversification initiatives, hydrocarbons activity continues to attract a sizable portion of local and international investment, and this pattern is expected to continue for some time.

Sultanate of Oman oil exploration

The Sultanate of Oman faced numerous obstacles and challenges during the discovery and extraction of crude oil reservoirs.

An Irish geologist by the name of "George Martin Lees" began looking for oil in the Sultanate of Oman in 1925, under the rule of Sultan Taimur bin Faisal, after surveying the region from the north of the country to the southeast coast of the Arabian Peninsula to the Dhofar Governorate. George worked with D'Arcy, which received a mining licence for a two-year renewable period.

Although the primary motivation for founding the parent firm "Anglo-Persian" was oil exploration in Iran, D'Arcy was created as a subsidiary of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (currently British BP) exclusively for crude exploration in Oman, and due to the difficult geological nature and the unstable political situation in the Arabian Peninsula and its inability to find oil, it withdrew in 1928.

In 1937, an oil exploration concession was granted to the "Oil Concessions Company Limited," which entrusted the concession to the Oman Oil Company and Dhofar during the reign of Sultan Said bin Taimour, and the operations did not reveal the presence of oil.

In 1951, the Dhofar concession was terminated, the name of the company was changed to Petroleum Development Oman Limited, and a second exploration concession was awarded to the



OMAN HAS MADE INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN AN EFFORT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ITS ADVANTAGEOUS LOCATION AND ESTABLISH ITSELF AS A HUB FOR GLOBAL LOGISTICS. THE OMAN VISION 2040 WILL CONTINUE TO PLACE A SIGNIFICANT EMPHASIS ON DIVERSIFICATION, PRIVATISATION, AND OMANISATION IN ORDER TO FULFIL ITS SHORT- AND LONG-TERM STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS.

"City Service" American company, which had worked for the Dhofar City Services Company, which included a franchise in the Dhofar Governorate.

Oman used alternative methods of exploration, such as seismic surveys, and as the security situation improved, the nation ultimately found oil resources. It was reported that oil had been discovered in the fields of Jebal and Natah in commercial amounts in 1962, and the Fahud field in commercial proportions two years later. In 1966, a significant crude oil pipeline between the Fahud field and Mina Al Fahal was built.

On board, the Japanese tanker Moss Prince, the first shipment, which contained 543.8 thousand barrels and cost \$1.42 per barrel, was exported in 1967. In 1970, the average daily production of crude oil was 332,000 barrels.

The Sultanate of Oman's government acquired a 25% stake in Petroleum Development Oman in 1973, increasing it to 60% a year later. In 1980, a royal order was issued to alter PDO's legal form to that of an Omani limited liability

corporation, and in 1982, work at the Al Fahal port's Oman Oil Refinery got underway.

In 1996, the government-owned Oman Oil Company was established to invest in the energy sector inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman, and the average level of crude oil production in 2001 reached 956 thousand barrels per day produced from 2546 wells.

The Sohar refinery began its production in 2006, and in 2007 the two refineries were merged by royal decree under the name of Oman Refineries and Petrochemical Company.

The average daily production of crude oil and oil condensate was around 955 thousand barrels per day at the end of December 2016.

The Sultanate of Oman reduced its oil production by 45,000 barrels per day (bpd) in January 2017 after Opec signed a deal with independent producers that were not members of Opec.

2020 saw the signing of four new oil contracts, the first of which was for the 9,546 square kilometre No. 12 Concession Area with the Thai business (PTTIP)

and the French corporation Total Exploration and Production. For the 4,557 square kilometres of concession area No. 58, Tethys Oil Co signed the second agreement. For concession area No. 36, IUG Resources signed the third agreement. For concession area No. 70, Maha Energy signed the fourth agreement.

Oman is now the Middle East's largest oil producer outside of Opec, with approximately 150 oil and gas fields. The majority of which are small, more complex, and expensive compared to their counterparts in other Gulf countries.

Even though Oman relies on fossil fuels, it did not join Opec. Instead, it joined the Opec+ alliance, which also has some crude producers that are not in Opec.

Oman's oil production

Oman complies with Opec+ regulations despite having the ability to produce up to a million barrels of crude oil and condensates per day. Oman's oil reserves are primarily made up of heavy crude, and China is its main export destination.

30% of Oman's GDP is derived from the oil and gas sector, which also provides the government of Oman with 70% of its annual budget through taxation and joint ownership of some of the more productive fields.

The Sultanate of Oman's oil output made a stunning recovery in 2022 following the record

production cuts implemented by Opec+ starting in mid-2020 as a result of the Covid-19 crisis that rattled the world's energy markets.

During the first half of last year (2022), Oman's oil sector saw an increase in production and exports of that fossil fuel as the nation continued to profit from rising worldwide market prices. During the first half of the year, Oman's output of crude oil and condensate grew by 10% compared to the same period last year (2022).

Oman's crude oil reserves, according to the Ministry of Energy and Minerals (MoEM), were estimated to be 5.2 billion barrels in June 2022.

Additionally, according to MEM, new oil finds will raise Oman's production by 50,000 to 100,000 barrels over the course of the following two to three years.

The sector suffered greatly from the 2020 oil price decline, but it has recovered as oil prices have risen above pre-pandemic levels.

The Omani Ministry of Energy and Minerals previously cited adherence to the Opec+ alliance pact to achieve a balance between supply and demand on a global scale as the reason for the Sultanate of Oman's decreased oil production.

The nation took part in the Opec+ alliance deal, which was made public in the middle of 2020, and lowered oil supplies by a record 9.7 million barrels per day in order to balance out the world markets after the effects of the pandemic.

However, the alliance decided to gradually reduce the cuts with economic recovery until they were completed in August 2022.

Based on typical oil prices of \$50 per barrel, Oman's government budget estimates \$27.6 billion in revenue, with oil accounting for 42% of total revenue. The government recorded revenues of \$17.4 billion (and a \$2 billion surplus) in the first half of 2022 based on an average oil price of \$87 per barrel, and it is on track to produce its first annual surplus in ten years.

Notably, the Sultanate of Oman increased its production volume from 0.957 million barrels per day in 2020 to 0.964 million barrels per day in 2021, placing it eighth among the top oil-producing Arab nations.

UK could get digital pound during this decade

The Bank of England (BoE) and the Treasury are convinced that a central bank digital currency (CBDC) is becoming increasingly necessary.

"On the basis of our work to date, the Bank of England and HM Treasury judge that it is likely a digital pound will be needed in the future," said Andrew Bailey, governor of Bank of England in a report.

Deputy governor of BoE, John Cunliffe, said a 'digital pound' would be needed to maintain trust in the UK's monetary system while he set out limits for its use to preserve financial stability.

Speaking at UK Finance, Cunliffe said the Bank could not ignore the possibility that the use of cash would become increasingly irrelevant while "new



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forms of money" would become more and more prominent, threatening trust in the monetary system.

These developments made it likely the UK would need a digital pound to perform the "anchor function" that cash has performed in the past. Cunliffe also outlined the Bank's response to concerns that the introduction of the 'digital pound' could affect financial stability.

The Bank is likely to propose a temporary limit on 'digital pound' holdings of between £10,000 and £20,000 he confirmed.

A limit of £10,000 would mean that three quarters of people could receive their pay in digital pounds, while a £20,000 limit would allow almost everyone to receive their pay in digital pounds.

Admitting that the Bank could

be wrong, Cunliffe stressed that it was taking a forward-looking approach.

"We don't always want to be five years away from this" given how quickly things have changed in other spheres, he said.

Firms in the financial district of London (known as the 'City') may face a cap on how much 'Bitcoin' they can hold, as the BoE pushes forward with a potential digital pound.

Holdings of a central bank digital currency would be capped for both businesses and individuals – at least in the introductory phase – according to a consultation on 6 February.

"While cash is here to stay, a digital pound issued and backed by the Bank of England could be a new way to pay that is trusted, accessible and easy to use," Chancellor Jeremy Hunt said.

"That's why we want to investigate what is possible first, whilst always making sure we protect financial stability."

However, a working Bitcoin is still a while away.

The BoE and Treasury said that a decision would likely come around the middle of the decade. Only a small number of countries have so far launched a CBDC, most notably China. Despite historically being sceptical of the idea, the US Federal Reserve is experimenting with a potential digital dollar and launched its own discussion paper last May.

The European Union is also exploring a digital euro. The consultation on 6 February said the digital pound would be "risk free, highly trusted and accessible" and "subject to rigorous standards of privacy

and data protection – neither the government nor the central bank would have access to personal data and holders would have the same level of privacy as a bank account."

BoE has been laying the ground for a possible Bitcoin for several years now.

City leaders queued up to join the engagement and technology forums the BoE set up in 2021, with more than 200 applications for the chance to sit alongside representatives of technology giants including Google and Visa, revealed at the time.

The likes of Morgan Stanley EMEA chief operating officer Arun Kohli, HSBC co-CEO of global banking and markets Georges Elhedery and Standard Chartered group head of conduct Tracey McDermott won slots and helped to shape the debate.

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A social worker mom who conquers mountains

Aisha bint Ahmed bin Hilal al Toubiyah has dedicated her life to serving others and her family. When a health issue threatened her life, she realised she also needs to take care of herself to continue being of service to others. That's when she discovered mountain hiking where she's proving that it's not just a young people's adventure ... **P20**

El Greco, Goya works in Spain for first time in over century

PAINTINGS BY MASTERS including El Greco and Goya from New York's Frick Collection have returned to Spain for the first time in more than a century for a temporary exhibition.

A total of nine works from the collection built by late US industrialist Henry Clay Frick will go on display from Tuesday

at the Prado museum in Madrid until July 2.

The Frick Collection art museum has loaned the works while it is closed for renovation. It has sent works to other museums as well, including Musee d'Orsay in Paris.

The Prado has received four paintings by Francisco de Goya, three by Renaissance painter El



Greco and one each by Velazquez and Bartolome Esteban Murillo.

"It is a limited number of works but of enormous quality," Prado director Miguel Falomir told a news conference.

Ian Wardropper, the director of the Frick Collection said the works were being loaned "for the first time in a hundred years".

Among the paintings on loan is El Greco's "Vincenzo Anastagi" — the only full-length standing portrait by the artist which exists today, said Prado conservation director Javier Portus.

Also featured is El Greco's "The Expulsion of the Money Changers from the Temple" which Frick bought for \$120,000 at the beginning of the 20th century in Spain.

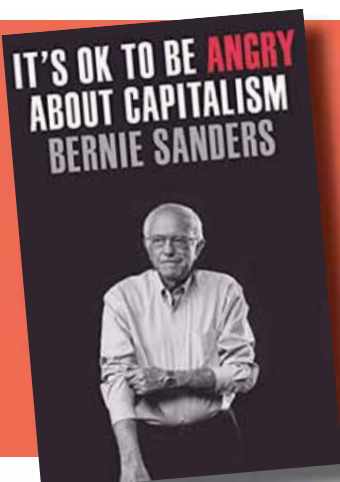
The Frick Collection works are exhibited alongside other paintings belonging to the Prado with which they have "close links", the museum said in a statement.—**AFP**

READ

IT'S OK TO BE ANGRY ABOUT CAPITALISM

BY BERNIE SANDERS
WITH JOHN NICHOLS

The Vermont senator depicts the impact capitalism has on key areas of our lives and ways to address this.



LIFESTYLE

People smeared with 'Gulal' or coloured powder during celebrations of Hindu spring festival 'Holi' in Mumbai. — **AFP**



FASHION

A model presents a creation from Chanel Womenswear Fall-Winter 2023-2024 collection during Paris Fashion Week in Paris. — **AFP**





A trainee midwife examines a woman and her newborn baby at a hospital in Bamiyan. - Reuters

Young Afghan women train as midwives for out-of-reach villages

IN A SMALL VILLAGE circled by velvety white snow-topped mountains in Afghanistan's Bamiyan province, Aziza Rahimi mourns the baby son she lost last year after a harrowing birth with no medical care.

"It was too hard for me when I lost my baby. As a mother, I nurtured the baby in my womb for nine months but then I lost him, it is too painful," said Rahimi, 35.

The village's rugged and remote beauty in Bamiyan's Foliadi Valley comes with deadly barriers for pregnant mothers. A narrow road to the village with few vehicles is sometimes cut off by snow, severing a lifeline to hospitals, clinics and trained health workers.

However, a potentially life-saving improvement is on the way. Rahimi's village is one of several around Bamiyan that have sent 40 young women to train for two years as midwives in the provincial capital, after which they will return home.

Isolation can become a death sentence in any difficult birth, doctors and aid workers say, contributing to Afghanistan's extremely high maternal and infant mortality rates, among the worst in the world.

The United Nations estimates an Afghan woman dies every two hours during pregnancy and childbirth, making Afghanistan's maternal mortality rate the highest in Asia.

The trainee midwife programme has been spearheaded by the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) with the Watan Social and Technical Services Association, a local charity. They hope to expand the programme, which also takes place in neighbouring Daikundi province. Since taking over in 2021, Taliban authorities have barred women from universities and most charity jobs, but they have made exemptions in the healthcare sector and UNHCR says local health authorities are supportive of the project.

"When the roads are blocked of course there is no means of transportation, people even use donkeys to move patients to the clinic centres, but sometimes there is not even the opportunity for that," said



A trainee midwife arranges her headscarf in front of a mirror, in a training center in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. – Reuters

Mohammad Ashraf Niazi, the head of UNHCR's Bamiyan office.

Rahimi, who has five other children, said riding a donkey was out of the question when she was jolted by pain while nine months' pregnant in the middle of the night four months ago. Stumbling, bleeding, for two hours to her in-laws' house after her husband was unable to find a car or ambulance to take them to hospital, she gave birth there.

The baby died shortly after. Too late, an ambulance arrived.

POST-PARTUM CARE

Women giving birth experience a very different situation in Bamiyan's main city hospital where the trainee midwives work alongside staff, and with the help of a trainer learn how to assess and guide pregnant women, deliver babies and provide

post-partum care.

"We want to learn and serve the people of our village," said one 23-year-old trainee, who walks two hours each day to the hospital. UNHCR asked the trainees not be named for safety.

In one small hospital clinic, with dozens of women waiting outside, a trainee midwife guides a woman with the help of a book of images on what to expect to prepare for birth under the watchful eye of two trained healthworkers.

Any women with risks of complications are admitted to a maternity ward in a nearby building where another trainee midwife takes the blood pressure of a pregnant patient suffering from an infection. She checks regularly on a woman who gave birth six hours earlier, her baby daughter nestled by her side.

Many of the trainee midwives, some with small children of their own, have faced logistical and financial challenges, often having to travel huge distances, or live far from home to attend the programme.

"At first, I didn't want to study nursing or to be a midwife, but after I faced problems and pains during my pregnancy, I got a desire to study midwifery," said a 20-year old trainee, the mother of an 18-month old son who struggled to access care in her village. She said many women and families in remote areas did not have the information and support they needed to prepare for a safe delivery.

"We have to change such kind of thoughts ... I want to go to remote areas to treat women who face problems." — Reuters

LIFESTYLE

'Herstory' trend brings women's lives out of shadows in Britain



FROM THE OPERA STAR who went on stage smothered in diamonds to a young widow left penniless with a small child in 19th-century Britain, a new wave of "herstories" are spotlighting female voices ignored or even erased by history.

The UK's Royal Opera House and the National Trust heritage charity are among those delving back into the past to tell the story of previously forgotten lives.

At London's Covent Garden opera venue, visitors can now discover the theatre's own "herstory" on a tour celebrating the many forgotten women who helped shape it.

Nineteenth-century composer Ethel Smyth had to threaten to run away from home to persuade her family to allow her to study music.

After winning them over and attending the Leipzig Conservatory in Germany, she had a huge success with her "Mass in D".

"People absolutely loved it but she had to fight tooth and nail both against critics and also some of the musicians themselves who refused to work with a woman," said Royal Opera House tour guide Amandine Riche. Despite the acclaim, Smyth found herself accused of being "out of her depth" if she pursued typically masculine pieces such as "Mass in D", or "light and frivolous" if she restricted herself to chamber music, she said.

FORGOTTEN STAR

Composer Giuseppe Verdi paid tribute to another long-forgotten female performer, Adelina Patti, as the greatest singer he had ever heard.

A huge international star of her day, she charged the present day equivalent of \$100,000 a performance and once arrived wearing a dress covered in 3,700 diamonds that was worth \$23 million.

Officers from the nearby now-closed Bow Street police station had to be dressed up as extras and go on stage to keep an eye on it during the show.

But it is not just the lives of rich and famous women who have been sidelined by a male-led narrative.

For this year's International Women's Day on Wednesday, Britain's National Trust is telling the story of some of the ordinary working women whose lives have slipped into obscurity.

The Trust, Europe's biggest conservation body, has drawn on research into women who lived in a cluster of 19th-century homes, now preserved and restored, in the heart of Birmingham, central England.

The houses are the only ones to survive the mass redevelopment of the city centre in the 1960s.

"It's an opportunity to shine a light on people we don't hear about very often but these were real people who lived in these houses which is fascinating," said National Trust spokeswoman Sophie Flynn.

Visitors can walk through the cobblestone courtyard where the women would have hung out their washing and peer into the rooms where they lived and slept.

REAL LIVES

"You get a real sense of what their lives might have been like," said Flynn.

One of the women who lived there was widow Eliza Wheeler, who ran a market stall, and her daughter Sarah.

"Being widowed and left with children in the Victorian era... that would have been challenging but somehow she managed," Flynn added.

Maria Beadell, founder of London's Herstorical Tours, said there was a growing appetite for history from a female perspective.

Her first historical re-enactment tour, launched in 2021, focused on London's witches and was so popular that last year she added a second telling the story of the capital's 18th-century sex workers.

Beadell said that unlike monarchs or other noble females, ordinary London women's stories had largely been "erased from history".

Her tours tell the stories of Marjery Jourdemayne, a midwife accused of witchcraft who was burned at the stake in 1441, and Sally Salisbury, an 18th-century courtesan jailed for stabbing one of her lovers. "It's just the way the world's been for over 2,000 years, the male voice has been dominant... but these were actual people who lived," she said.—AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

CONSERVATION

Chile announces biological corridor to protect endangered deer



CHILE LAUNCHED A programme on Monday to protect the huemul, an endangered southern deer, by creating a biological corridor that includes an area recently donated by the family of the late philanthropist and founder of the North Face, Douglas Tompkins.

The Rewilding Chile Foundation, Tompkins' legacy, along with Chile's Ministry of Agriculture, said that the "Huemul National Corridor" will be made up of approximately 16 connected, state-protected areas alongside other private conservation initiatives.

"This public-private initiative seeks to reduce threats to the species, strengthen huemul populations in key conservation areas of the Patagonian Park Route," the ministry said in a statement, adding that it will also build the world's first Rescue, Rehabilitation and Reproduction Center for Huemuls.

Last week, Kristine Tompkins, co-founder and president of Rewilding Chile, met with President Gabriel Boric to donate 93,492 hectares (231,024 acres) for the creation of a new national park in the Magallanes region.

"This is one of the reasons that this park is so important not only for Chile but for the world," Tompkins said, adding that Southern Chile is an important source of carbon sequestration due to its peat bogs and untouched forests. "This is a 'great goal' for conservation and fighting against the climate crisis."

The huemul is one of two species of native deer found only in the Patagonian forests of Argentina and Chile. But habitat degradation has reduced the huemul to less than 1 per cent of its original population, according to ministry data.

Adult huemuls, also known as güemuls, can reach about 1.55 metres (5.1 feet) in length, 80-90 cm (31.5-35.5 inches) in height and weigh up to 68 kg (150 lb). They are herbivores and live for about 14 years.

Despite being originally found in areas in central Chile, the huemul can now be seen mainly in the southernmost regions of Aysen and Magallanes.

"A species like the huemuls will not survive if all its places are not connected and this is a very broad vision that will serve as a model in many other parts of the world and will be the act that saves this species," Tompkins said.— **Reuters**

ENTERTAINMENT

Oscar short docs race showcases booming art form



WHEN MARINE biologist Maxim Chakilev flings open the door of his ramshackle Siberian hut in the Oscar-nominated short documentary "Haulout" to find 100,000 honking and heaving walruses, the effect is breathtakingly cinematic.

For almost two minutes, the screen is crowded with jostling animals, their guttural snorts filling the soundtrack and putting the viewer right in the middle of an astonishing natural spectacle.

The scene, the centerpiece of a 25-minute film on how climate change affects the natural world, illustrates how short documentaries have exploded as an art form — and why big guns like The New Yorker and Netflix are getting involved.

"Video is a very powerful medium, and right now, this is how many people get their information about the world," Soo-Jeong Kang, executive director of programming and development at The New Yorker, said.

"Traditional media companies are increasingly recognising this as both a way to reach new audiences and as a profound storytelling platform."

The almost language-free "Haulout," produced by brother-sister team Maxim Arbugaev and Evgenia Arbugaeva, who spent three months living in Chakilev's rudimentary hut, is exactly the kind of top-notch content that dovetails with The New Yorker's high-brow fiction and deep-dive reporting, Kang said. "It's a pure cinematic experience, where you don't need a spoken word to know what that story is about...an extension of that intersection between art and great journalism."

RANGE

"Haulout" is competing for the Academy Award for best

documentary short film against four other nominees, and the range of those contenders demonstrates the breadth of a format audiences are increasingly embracing.

New Yorker stablemate "Stranger at the Gate" tells the story of a US military veteran whose tours have left him scarred by hate, but whose warm welcome at the mosque he had planned to blow up reconnects him to his humanity. Nobel peace laureate Malala Yousafzai is the short's executive producer.

"How Do You Measure a Year?" splices together interviews that filmmaker Jay Rosenblatt conducted every year with his daughter between the ages of two and 18.

Netflix's "The Elephant Whisperers" is a joyous exploration of the love an Indian couple share for the baby animals in their charge.

The streamer's second nominee in the category is "The Martha Mitchell Effect," a curation of archival footage about a woman on the fringes of the Watergate scandal.

The Netflix contenders are just two of the scores of documentaries available on its platform — some of which regularly feature as its most watched offerings.

DEMOCRATISATION

Documentaries were dominated in past decades by the likes of Britain's publically funded BBC, or America's PBS — both organisations that lean towards didacticism. But in recent years, the sector has shown its entertainment chops.

Netflix's "Making a Murderer" and HBO's "The Jinx" — real-life crime thrillers from 2015 — were instrumental in popularising the format for the streaming age.

And such fast-paced, watchable fare continues to come thick and fast — well before a jury found a South Carolina lawyer guilty of killing his wife and son last week, Netflix said "Murdaugh Murders: A Southern Scandal" was one of its most popular programmes.

But even the less-obviously digestible offerings are doing well, as important subject matter — particularly around climate change and identity — resonates with viewers.

The New Yorker says it gets nearly 11 million monthly video views across its YouTube channel and newyorker.com, with documentaries at the top of the list, both in terms of total views and average number of views per video. Those burgeoning audiences are increasingly seeing themselves reflected in the kind of documentaries that are getting made, as improving technology lowers the barriers to entry and allows almost anyone to become a filmmaker.

"In recent years because of the accessibility and affordability of editing software and high-quality cameras... anyone who dreams of making a documentary now (has) reasonable access to the tools," says Kang.

"It's a democratisation of this field that allows people from all walks of life to make a story about their experiences."

For filmmakers like Arbugaeva, whose stunning cinematography elevates "Haulout," this democratisation is key to the authenticity and intent required of a good documentary.

"When local storytellers tell stories of their environment, it's something that is so personal," she said.

"You're talking about your own heart and the heart of your community that is breaking."—**AFP**

FASHION

Eye-light highlight at Louis Vuitton



FUTURISTIC LUMINOUS visors were the highlight of Louis Vuitton's womenswear show on Monday at Paris Fashion Week.

A front row that included film stars Zendaya, Alicia Vikander and Lea Seydoux, as well as the label's newly minted menswear designer Pharrell Williams, underlined the French brand's current hot streak.

Its latest womenswear show from designer Nicolas Ghesquiere was a largely traditional affair in the Orsay Museum, but some innovative touches were guaranteed to light up social media.

As well as the luminous glasses, there were bags made to look like houses and Paris street signs.

Elegant outfits with unexpected shapes came mostly in the classic winter colours of black, caramel, chocolate and cream.

The show finished with Squid Game actress Jung HoYeon in an impressive black-and-white flower dress.

"Nicolas exhibited his superior ability in playing with unexpected form and proportions... showcasing the exceptional skills from pin-sharp tailoring to exquisite embroidery and embellishment," said Simon Longland, director of buying for Harrods department store.

Earlier in the day, Stella McCartney treated fashionistas to a horsey morning, as the audience braved the cold of a military riding school to see the environmentally-minded designer's latest collection.

"This season is totally organic," she told reporters after the show at the Picadere de la École Militaire, the oldest riding school in Paris.

The British designer stuck to the theme with horse prints, organic wool jumpers, hussar-style jackets and knee-high boots made from her much-touted mylo — a mushroom-based leather substitute.—**AFP**



A social worker mum who conquers mountains

By Rumpa Mitra
Instagram: @rumpa_mitra

Photos by Abhilash Pillai
@theimagegrapher

On March 8, the world celebrates International Women's Day (IWD). This year's theme is "Embrace Equity" (#EmbraceEquity). Almost everyone understands the meaning of embracing equality, but what is the meaning of embracing equity?

Equity means understanding that everyone comes from a different background or circumstance and therefore would need different levels of support to level the playing field. It promulgates the idea that sharing resources, support, and opportunities would help alleviate each of our situations in life.

IWD and its topic for the year are unknown to Aisha bint Ahmed bin Hilal al Toubiyah. But, she has been involved in social service, sports, and other volunteer work for close to 30 years because she felt that she wanted to devote her life to Allah in particular. Aisha, who was married at an early age and had four children, was unable to finish her education. In a few years, she separated from her husband, and her late father advised her "life going to be tough and she needs to prepare herself for the struggle to come". She stayed quiet but inside she was determined to

face all the obstacles to come on her way.

The one thing she was certain of was that she would give her children and younger siblings the education that she had not received as a child. She stepped up and assumed all of the family's obligations after her father passed away. She began offering teachers who were going to universities or schools transportation services.

"Somehow being close to the teachers and the education system kept my hope alive for life," Aisha shared.

She was able to take care of her family's needs in terms of money, but her heart was searching for more. Rather than focusing on her own needs, she wanted to help those in need. While operating a modest transportation company, she observed that many kids needed more financial assistance to travel to their educational institutions. She sought additional income since she wanted to offer support to those in need. She then started preparing meals for the teachers and bringing them breakfast and lunch. This marked a turning point, and her company began to advance right away. She started offering free transportation to kids who wanted to learn but couldn't

afford the extra costs associated with travelling to educational institutions since she didn't forget the motive for growing her business. She was so determined to help and bring equity that she never kept a helping hand for her cooking business to avoid any extra cost.

"Looking at those students and their needs, I didn't feel like I was neglecting myself or my family despite my schedule and responsibilities being hectic," she said.

INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S DAY
MARCH 8

She kept herself busy all day long, yet she never lost sight of her siblings and kids. All of the people she supported are well-established and highly educated; some of them are even seeking higher education abroad. She was determined that everyone must complete their school and pursue higher degrees. She believed that education was the most essential aspect of life. She had such a strong desire to learn new things that she found time to read any book, at any time, despite her demanding

schedule.

The more she read, the more she learned and the more she believed that she could do more. She joined several charitable groups because she believed she could accomplish more as her expertise increased. She gradually started regularly volunteering for non-profits including the International Istiqama Muslim Community, the Ehsan Charity, and many more. She committed herself to enhance the lives of people from less fortunate or middle-class origins through various philanthropic organisations.

She visited places including Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Yemen, the Syrian border, Zanzibar, and Cambodia. She has worked with new moms and taught them nursing skills, encouraged the women to learn Islam including about their rights, and gave social care to the destitute and orphans. She has also tried to spread happiness among the orphan children.

Last but not least, she committed herself to helping those in need by raising awareness, encouraging positivity, and maintaining an emphasis on education and information.

Her health was almost completely neglected as a result of her involvement in so many charitable endeavours and companies. At one time,

this left her bedridden; "it was so bad that I couldn't sit on the ground to give my prayers," Aisha sadly recalled. However, she gradually regained her confidence and began to walk around her home compound and then five kilometres around the neighbourhood. She knew she could only recover with the right medications and by including exercise in her life.

Her determination is so strong that she started climbing mountains in Oman with some expert teams. She started hiking regularly at the age of 50 and was able to hike the Jabal Shams Summit, the highest mountain in Oman, three times in the five years that followed the encouragement and support of her children and family.

She is currently promoting physical activity, participating in outdoor sports, and the value of sports in everyday life. Her business is succeeding because of her tremendous efforts, yet she is still able to give away free meals and transportation to students who might use a little help and equality in their lives.

We would like to wish everyone a happy international women's day on this day as well as express our admiration and support for the woman whose modest lifestyle and determination to "not give up" have helped so many people both inside and outside of the nation. Anybody interested in learning more can contact her on Instagram: @oum ahmeed12.