

The Majlis Ash'shura on Sunday flayed the unjust attacks on the brotherly Yemen. In a statement, the Majlis Ash'shura said it is following with great concern the events taking place in the region expressing its pride and commendation for the stance of the government of the Sultanate of Oman in this regard. The statement condemned the unjust attack on the brotherly Republic of Yemen by some Western powers under the pretext of attacking on commercial ships and the protection of the shipping lines. – ONA



GOVERNORATES

SET TO GET

MORE POWERS

HM MEETS SHAIKHS AND DIGNITARIES OF MUSANDAM GOVERNORATE

KHASAB: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Sunday held a meeting at the Royal Camp in Saih Al Mahasin valley in the Wilayat of Khasab, Musandam Governorate, with shaikhs and dignitaries of Musandam, some members of the Council of Oman and members of the Municipal Council and the businessmen community in the governorate.

The meeting was in pursuance of His Majesty the Sultan's keenness to engage with citizens all over the Sultanate of Oman. It also reflects His Majesty the Sultan's conviction in the need to directly listen to the visions and proposals of citizens about measures to promote the development of their respective governorates and upgrade economic and service projects.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to Allah the Almighty for the bounties He has bestowed on Oman. He prayed to Allah to perpetuate these blessings on Oman.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan reviewed matters of local concern.

His Majesty the Sultan affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman is pressing ahead with plans and programmes in various spheres. He commended the accomplishments made in 2023 which, he said, reflected positively on economic conditions and maintained the amelioration of financial performance indicators - an evidence of the government's success in implementing development of strategies and goals of Oman Vision 2040. This paved the way for a verdant present and a future that promises sustainability for the Omani economy and prosperity for the people of Oman, His Majesty noted.

His Majesty the Sultan also lauded the positive outcome of implementing decentralisation, the System of Governorate and the Municipal Council

- MEETING IN PURSUANCE OF HM'S KEENNESS TO ENGAGE WITH CITIZENS
- REFLECTS HM'S CONVICTION IN THE NEED TO DIRECTLY LISTEN TO CITIZENS
- AFFIRMS THAT OMAN IS PRESSING AHEAD WITH PLANS AND PROGRAMMES
- LAUDS THE POSITIVE OUTCOME OF IMPLEMENTING DECENTRALISATION
- STEPS UNDER WAY TO GRANT MORE POWERS TO GOVERNORATES
- INVESTORS, MERCHANTS, ENTREPRENEURS TOLD TO TAKE ADVANTAGE
- ENHANCED ACTIVITY TO GENERATE JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIZENS

Law, besides delegating broad powers to governors and assisting them with the financial and administrative resources necessary to manage and develop their governorates.

This, His Majesty the Sultan observed, crystallised in upgrading infrastructure, advancing public and municipal services in the wilayats and ensuring high levels of performance. **TURN TO P2**



HM meets Shaikhs and dignitaries of Musandam



FROM P1

His Majesty the Sultan valued public welcome accorded to this approach. He pointed out that steps are under way to grant the governorates more powers during the forthcoming period.

In this context, His Majesty urged shaikhs, dignitaries and members of the business community to cooperate and work diligently with the Governor and members of the Municipal Council to achieve comprehensive development

in Musandam Governorate in a manner that meets the hopes and aspirations of citizens.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his personal keenness on witnessing the economic growth of Musandam due to the governorate's strategic location and the investment opportunities that abound there, notably in the sectors of tourism, fisheries and services. He encouraged investors, merchants and entrepreneurs to take advantage of these opportunities and promote

commercial activity based on ports and other infrastructure being developed by the government. He exhorted all to set up light industries in industrial zones, noting that this would undoubtedly help enhance economic activity and generate employment opportunities for citizens in the governorate.

His Majesty the Sultan was briefed by some ministers about development and service projects being implemented in all wilayats of the governorate.

He gave instructions to the officials in charge to complete the projects on time and in accordance with the approved programmes. His Majesty also underlined the need to generate employment opportunities for citizens from these projects.

On this occasion, His Majesty the Sultan gave directives to implement more projects in the governorate, including charting out a masterplan for commercial-residential compound in Al Jaradiya Neighbourhood and Sana'ia Neighbourhood in Seih

Al Wasat valley in the Wilayat of Mad'ha, the construction of social houses in the governorate and developing some coastal villages, as well as setting-up a number of ready-built factories in Mahas Industrial City in the Wilayat of Khasab and the industrial zone in Seih Al Wasat valley in the Wilayat of Mad'ha to benefit entrepreneurs and startups.

These directives reflect the Royal interest of His Majesty the Sultan in boosting the economic growth, continuing

to provide services, completing infrastructure, supporting private sector activities and generating more job opportunities for citizens, within the context of local action under the patronage of His Majesty.

May Allah the Almighty protect His Majesty the Sultan and guard him as a source of pride for this dear homeland! May He perpetuate the blessing of prosperity on Oman and its citizens and residents under the wise leadership of His Majesty!

— ONA





HM GETS WARM WELCOME IN MUSANDAM

KHASAB: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik arrived on Sunday in the Governorate of Musandam on a Royal meet-the-people tour during which he will closely inspect aspects of social and economic development. His Majesty will also meet shaikhs, dignitaries and some members of the Council of Oman, members of the Municipal Council and the business community in the governorate.

When the Royal Yacht, Fulk Al Salamah, approached the coastline, it was surrounded by a group of ships and boats boarded by local citizens. The flotilla was draped with the flag of the Sultanate of Oman and adorned with His Majesty the Sultan's portraits, in a manifestation of warm welcome for the auspicious Royal visit.

His Majesty the Sultan greeted the loyal citizens, exchanged with them ardent sentiments and welcomed their

hospitable reception.

When the Royal Yacht entered the Port of Khasab, two folklore troupes presented the art of Al Nadba, one of the governorate's most famous traditional arts.

As His Majesty the Sultan disembarked, another group of citizens presented the art of Al Razfa.

Then, His Majesty the Sultan headed to Saih Al Mahasin valley in the wilayat of Khasab, where the people of the governorate came out in large numbers and lined both sides of the road.

The citizens welcomed His Majesty the Sultan and chanted expressions of loyalty and gratitude. His Majesty the Sultan reciprocated the gestures, waving back in recognition for the citizens' noble feelings. The interaction reflected the deep-rooted solidarity between the leader of Oman's Renewed Renaissance and the loyal public.

— ONA



HM visit to enhance governorate's economic growth

KHASAB: Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, has said that the Royal tour of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Musandam Governorate will give a strong boost to the development in the governorate.

Sayyid Ibrahim pointed out

that the Royal visit, the first of its kind to the governorate since His Majesty the Sultan assumed the reins of leadership in Oman, was aimed at providing a closer look at the projects being implemented in economic and developmental fields. His Majesty the Sultan was keen

to learn, in person, about the most important achievements that are currently being made to stimulate spatial economy in the governorate, he added.

Thanks to the Royal visit, Musandam will draw more attention, notably through emphasis on economic growth

that directly benefits society, said Sayyid Ibrahim.

He explained that major projects currently underway include Dibba - Lima - Khasab road, the new Musandam Airport (which will be built in the Wilayat of Khasab) and the development of residential

neighbourhoods and city centres.

In the meantime, the logistics sector (by sea, land or air) will take centre stage in discussions, said Sayyid Ibrahim, noting that Khasab Port serves both the transportation sector and the fishing sector.

Sayyid Ibrahim said that, due to the fact that the geographical nature limits to space areas that can have tangible development, steps are underway to overcome this difficulty by establishing an industrial zone outside the port and integrating the services with it.

— ONA

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Development strategy in Musandam bears fruition

AMER AL ANSARI AND AHMED AL SHUHI

THE Governorate of Musandam is witnessing a historical moment of its development march reflecting the government's keenness to convert the governorate into an investment hub capable of housing major public projects in the logistics of tourism sectors.

Among the most notable infrastructure projects currently under implementation in Musandam Governorate that is expected to boost prosperity in the governorate is the Khasab-Lima-Dibba road. Once open, the road will shorten the distance between the wilayats of the governorate as well as contribute to tourist attraction. Last year, the governorate received about 60 ships carrying 156,000 tourists from across the world.

Tourism wise, there is a project that aims to develop the waterfront in the Niyabat of Lima and another project for developing the waterfront in the Wilayat of Bukha in addition to Al Shati Park within the waterfront. Also under implementation is a project for developing the fishing port in the

Wilayat of Dibba which includes 4 packages of facilities including facilitations for fishermen such as the fixed berth, two floating berths and a slide for launching and taking out boats and facilities for traditional tourist boats.

Other projects include wave breakers in the villages of Al Jari and Ghammaa in the Wilayat of Bukha. The two projects cost approximately RO 2,500,00. A project is also underway in the Wilayat of Bukha to replace the main water distribution network.

There is a project to establish a hospital in the Wilayat of Mad'ha which is nearing completion. The hospital will have 18 specialised clinics and utilise the latest medical technologies and equipment.

Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam said that the government is accorded attention from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik through following up and evaluating the projects to be more beneficial for the governorate's economy and the country's economy in general.

The governor added: "The general outlook for

PROJECTS INCLUDE WAVE BREAKERS IN THE VILLAGES OF AL JARI AND GHAMMAA IN THE WILAYAT OF BUKHA. THE TWO PROJECTS COST APPROXIMATELY RO 2,500,00. A PROJECT IS ALSO UNDERWAY IN THE WILAYAT OF BUKHA TO REPLACE THE MAIN WATER DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

the economic and social development strategy in Musandam Governorate has been adapted to yield the best economic results in the shortest possible period by providing and securing logistical connectivity with the rest of the governorates.

It also adds activity and movement to Musandam Governorate with regard to other sectors. It is important to focus on the logistics sector which includes strategic areas such as improving the civil aviation sector and internal connectivity between the coastal wilayats of Bukha, Khasab and Dibba. This sector also involves improving shipping and ground handling operations at the sea ports of the coastal wilayats through several projects.

Speaking about the details of those projects, the governor stated that during the previous five-year development plan, the 38-km coastal road linking Taibat and the Wilayat of Khasab was completed. A project for constructing a road linking the Wilayat of Khasab and the Wilayat of Dibba via the Neyabat of Lima was awarded. It is a 70-km strategic road that secures land transportation between the two wilayats.



OWA launches ‘Ishraqat Ahd’ painting contest, new logo

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The Omani Women’s Association in Muscat launched a painting competition with RO 15,000 cash prizes devoted to Her Highness The Honourable Lady under the slogan ‘Ishraqat Ahd’. OWA also unveiled a new logo.

The OWA logo embodies strength, beauty and innovation that characterises Omani women. The blooming flower signifies development, growth and the desire for excellence.

The competition will bring together artists from across the Sultanate of Oman to draw the picture of HH the Honourable Lady as an expression of gratitude and appreciation. The deadline to submit the work is March 11. The winner will get RO 5,000 while four others will get RO 4,000, RO 3,000, RO 2,000 and RO 1,000 each.

Abdulkarim al Maimani, an artist in and member of the supervision committee, said, “As part of the Ishraqat Ahd Forum, a



The OWA conducts many forums to foster partnerships with community partners, supporters and beneficiaries

committee was set up to determine the framework of the competition and and terms of reference.

This committee will oversee the forum’s work and shortlisting of competitors.” “The forum is the first artistic event in the Sultanate of Oman that aims to harmonise the spirit of artistic giving with the spirit of national belonging, so that the artist can expressing his/ her gratitude for the unlimited support of the HH the Honourable Lady in bridging cooperation between the various branches of OWS in Oman,” said Aisha al

Alawi, head of the media and social communication committee.

A jury will be formed to select the best five works in the competition. The OSW in Muscat will provide the basic technical tools for artists shortlisted for the competition. The rights of winning works will be under the ownership of OSW.

Participation in the forum was limited to Omani artists of both genders aged 18 years and above. S/he can use oil colours or acrylic colours for the work.

The panel size was 120 x 100



The new OWA logo embodies beauty that characterises Omani women

cm as a standard size for all those selected to participate. The last date for submitting the painting will be March 11. The participant must draw directly in front of the public during the specified period at the various premises of OWA branches across Oman.

The OWA conducts many forums to foster partnerships with community partners, supporters and beneficiaries. Among the companies supporting this forum are Omantel, Mohsin Haider Darwish Company and Ooredoo.

Two Cranwell College graduates feted



MUSCAT: Air Vice Marshal Khamis bin Hammad bin Sultan al Ghafri, Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) handed over military diploma certificates to two RAFO officers who graduated from the RAF College Cranwell in the United Kingdom (UK). The meeting, held at the office of the RAFO Commander at Muaskar Al Murtafaa, was attended by several senior RAFO officers. – **ONA**



Students get a taste of farming

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As part of instilling the importance of farming, a competition for children was held by a Facebook group to get them acquainted with all the stages of agriculture including preparing the soil, choosing the right seed and seedling, nurturing, and harvesting.

Organised by the Oman Krishikkootam, a voluntary organic farming group in Oman, in collaboration with Indian School Buraimi, the ‘Little Green Fingers’ contest witnessed an overwhelming

participation from children.

The saplings for the competition were distributed to the students at the school assembly by Shantakumar Dashari, Principal of the school, at an event led by the members of The Oman Krishikkootam Buraimi wing including Sreejith, Nishad, Dhanya, Rosh, Sanila, and Shaji.

This competition is conducted in three categories. Students from 1st to 3rd grade were given a sapling of Tomato, while 4th-6th graders were given seedlings of Tomato and Brinjal. Those in 7th to 10th grades received seedlings of Tomato, Brinjal and okra.

The competition runs from January 11, to April 5 during which period, photos and videos of the plants grown by students in their respective categories are to be submitted. The student who successfully grows plants with good health, yield, and care will be declared the winner.

“This is the second year that ‘The Little Green Fingers’ competition is being organised The Oman Krishikkootam. The current competition has received the best response compared to the previous ones,” the Oman Krishikkootam Buraimi members told the Observer.



The ‘Little Green Fingers’ contest witnessed an overwhelming participation from children

Hand sanitation, vaccination best shots against flu

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Preventing and managing flu symptoms is what one needs to equip with while going through a flu season. There have been many cases of flu reported in addition to a small number of Covid-19 cases as announced by the Ministry of Health. People who came down with flu this season also complained about severe body pain and fatigue.

Dr Salah al Hinai, family medicine practitioner, explained that flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. It can cause mild to severe illness, and even death in some cases.

Fortunately, there are a number of things you can do to prevent the flu. When it comes to treatment of flu, he said that there is no specific treatment for flu. Patients can take over the counter medications like analgesics and decongestants. But there are precautions one should consider.

Dr Al Hinai said, “The most important step to be taken is to get vaccinated every year. The flu vaccine is safe and effective for most people. It works by stimulating the body’s immune system to produce antibodies that can protect people from getting sick. It’s recommended



for everyone six months of age and above to get vaccinated against the flu. He explained that the second point to bear in mind always is to wash hands frequently with soap and water.

“This is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser,” he advised.

The third most important factor to remember is to avoid close contact with people who are sick. This means staying away from people who are coughing, sneezing, or have other flu symptoms.

Covering the mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing is a precaution one must make as a habit, he pointed out. If tissue is unavailable, coughing or sneezing into the elbow is advised.

Dr Al Hinai feels it is

extremely important to stay at home when having sickness as this will help prevent people from spreading the flu to others.

Practicing good hygiene habits goes a long way in keeping you safe from flu and this includes avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth.

And finally in Dr Al Hinai’s list is eating a healthy diet and getting plenty of rest as these can help boost the immune system. Lately there have also been cases of Covid-19 and Dr Al Hinai said this is why people should take extra cautions.

“Yes, they should prevent transmission of the disease to themselves and their family,” he concluded, also adding that if after following the above mentioned tips and if symptoms persist or get worse then it is time to seek medical advice.

Visiting writer mulls book on Sultanate of Oman

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Smitten by Oman, an Indian writer is jotting down her notes to author a book on her maiden visit that made her feel home away from home.

Fehmida Zakeer, an independent writer with bylines in several publications including The Bangalore Review, The Hindu, Al Jazeera, Reader’s Digest, Himal South Asian, National Geographic, is on a visit to meet her relatives and acquaintances scattered across the Sultanate of Oman.

“Oman is simply awesome!

I cannot help but praise the friendly approach of the people here who consider expatriates and even visitors as their own people and take care of them. We received respect and care from the smiling faces at the airport as soon as we landed here,” an excited Fehmida told the Observer.

“It is a beautiful country and the authorities are taking good care of the environment. For me, every place is an inspiration and I’m more awestruck after visiting the sink hole and the pebble beach, dolphin watching and the like before we moved to Salalah,” she listed her reasons to author a



Fehmida Zakeer, an independent writer, said Oman is simply awesome!

book on the country, adding that “I enjoy the place a lot and am so excited to see more of Oman and its diverse nature, culture, and above all, the people’s care and

hospitality”.

Fehmida’s stories have come out in anthologies such as ‘Pangea: An Anthology of Stories from Around the World,’ ‘Ripples

Short Stories by Indian Women Writers,’ ‘Happy Birthday to Me.’ Her short story was placed first in the Himal South-Asian short story competition 2013 and another was chosen by the National Library Board of Singapore for the 2013 edition of its READ Singapore anthology.

Born in Thalassery in the Indian state of Kerala and brought up in Chennai, capital of Tamil Nadu state, Fehmida has travelled extensively across India before she began to write for the Indian newspaper New Indian Express. Her articles and essays on health, culture and travel have also appeared in other dailies.

Her translation of the celebrated Malayalam writer, BM Zuhara’s memoir was published by Sage-Yoda Press in 2022 titled ‘The Dreams of a Mappila Girl,’ which received rave reviews.

“It was a collaborative effort on translating the popular work of a celebrated author, BM Zuhara. She was very particular about the nuances of the region and she did not want to lose the very essence of the jargon prevalent in Malabar area.

Hence, we have adhered to some of the words, which are at the verge of extinction, and were given as glossary with the book,” she adds.



ON 100TH DAY OF GAZA WAR

Netanyahu carries more massacres

GAZA: Israeli strikes pounded southern Gaza on Sunday, the 100th day of the war which has claimed a surging civilian death toll and ravaged the besieged Palestinian territory.

The conflict has created a dire humanitarian crisis for the 2.4 million people in Gaza, the United Nations and aid groups warn, and reduced much of the coastal strip to rubble.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose government has faced growing international pressure over civilian casualties in Gaza, vowed that “no one will stop us” from destroying Palestinian groups.

The government media office said on Sunday that “more than 100 people were martyred in the attacks last night until 6:00 am in all areas of the Gaza Strip”.

In Rafah, a thick column of smoke was seen after strikes on the city where many displaced Palestinians have sought shelter in makeshift tents.

Fears that the conflict could spread across the wider region grew when new strikes hit areas in Yemen on Saturday, after Yemenis warned of more attacks in solidarity with Gaza on what they deem Israeli-linked Red Sea shipping.

On the Israel-Lebanon border, which has seen regular exchanges of fire with Lebanese ally, the Israeli army said it killed four gunmen who had crossed the frontier and “fired at the forces”.



A man sits next to writing painted on a wall amid the rubble of a house, which was destroyed in a deadly Israeli strike, in Rafah. — Reuters

Troops patrolling the Shebaa Farms district near the annexed Golan Heights “engaged and responded with live fire”, a statement said.

Israel launched a relentless military campaign that has killed almost 24,000 people in the Palestinian territory, mostly women and children, according to the Gaza health ministry.

After the International Court of Justice in The Hague heard arguments that accused Israel of breaching the UN Genocide Convention, Netanyahu insisted that Israel will “continue until victory”.

“No one will stop us — not The

The government media office said on Sunday that “more than 100 people were martyred in the attacks last night until 6:00 am in all areas of the Gaza Strip”

Hague, not the Axis of Evil and no one else,” he said at a televised news conference on Saturday, referring to “axis of resistance” groups in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen.

At Rafah’s Al-Najjar hospital,

mourners prayed near the bodies of slain relatives.

The Gaza Strip’s people suffer acute shortages of food, water, medicine and fuel, and the health system is collapsing.

“The massive death, destruction, displacement, hunger, loss and grief of the last 100 days are staining our shared humanity,” said Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA, during a visit to Gaza on Saturday.

He warned an entire generation of children in Gaza were being “traumatised”, diseases were spreading and the clock was “ticking fast towards famine”. — AFP

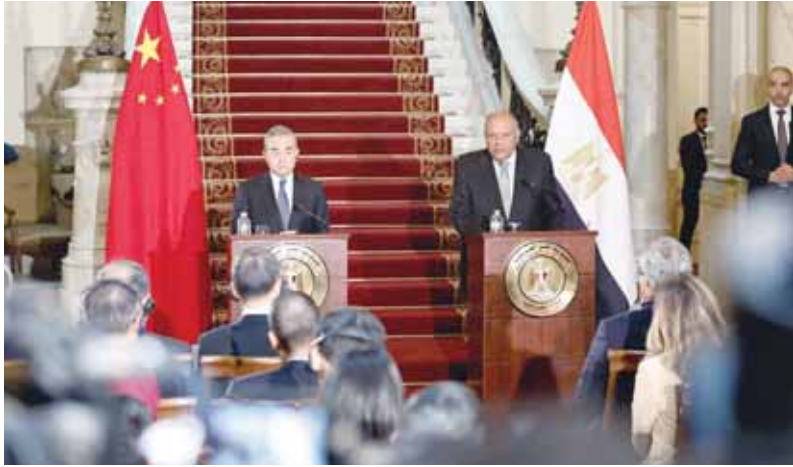
China FM calls for ceasefire and Palestinian statehood

CAIRO: China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi called on Sunday for the establishment of a Palestinian state and a ceasefire in Gaza, where 100 days of the war have killed thousands.

In a press conference with his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Shoukry in Cairo, the top Chinese diplomat said “it is necessary to insist on the establishment of an independent, fully sovereign state of Palestine on the 1967 borders, with east Al Quds as its capital.”

A joint statement from the two ministers urged an immediate end “to all acts of violence, killing and targeting of civilians and civilian establishments”.

Israel launched an intense military campaign in response



Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry (R) and China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi give a press conference following a meeting at Tahrir Palace in the centre of the Egyptian capital Cairo. — AFP

to a deadly October 7 attack on southern Israel .

In Gaza, almost 24,000 people have been killed, the majority

of them women and children, according to the health ministry in the besieged Palestinian territory. Shoukry and Wang called for

“an international summit for peace to find a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestinian cause by ending the (Israeli) occupation and establishing an independent, contiguous Palestinian state.”

The Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank, seat of the Palestinian Authority, are separated by Israeli territory. Both were seized by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has previously called for an “international peace conference” to resolve the fighting.

China has historically been standing with the Palestinian cause and supportive of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. — AFP

Thousands march in Washington, London for Gaza ‘day of action’



South African residents awaits for members of the South African legal team from The Hague, where they represented the country in a two-day hearing against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), at the OR Tambo International Airport in Ekurhuleni, South Africa. — AFP

WASHINGTON: Thousands of pro-Palestine protesters marched in Washington, London and elsewhere as part of a “global day of action” to demand an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza fighting and to oppose US and British support for Israel.

In Washington, large crowds waved Palestinian flags as the mostly young protesters — many wearing the traditional keffiyeh — gathered in a show of solidarity.

“Cease-fire now,” people chanted, while carrying banners and posters that read “Free Palestine” and “End the War on Gaza.”

On a stage a few blocks from the White House, several Palestinian-Americans offered emotional accounts of friends and relatives killed or wounded in Gaza.

They exhorted US President Joe Biden to end military and financial support for Israel.

“President Biden can easily stop this madness” by pressuring Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, one speaker said to wide applause.

London, meantime, saw its seventh pro-Palestinian demonstration since October 7.

Israel vowed to destroy Palestinian groups and launched a relentless bombardment of Gaza that has killed almost 24,000 people, mostly women and children, according to the latest toll from the territory’s health ministry.

Around 1,700 police were on duty to ensure security for the London protest.

“We want to show the people of Palestine we are with them, and to speak up against our government as well,” 27-year-old health service worker Maleeha Ahmed said, who was at the march with her family. — AFP



Pro-Palestinian demonstrators gather in front of the White House during the “March on Washington for Gaza” in Washington. — AFP

Fierce fighting rages on the besieged enclave

GAZA: Israeli tanks and aircraft hit targets in southern and central Gaza on Sunday and there were fierce gun battles in some areas as the war reached 100 days since the October 7.

Communications and internet services were down for the third day running, complicating the work of emergency and ambulance crews trying to help people in areas hit by fighting.

Fighting was concentrated in the southern city of Khan Younis, where Palestinian groups said that they hit an Israeli tank, as well as in Al-Bureij and Al Maghazi in central Gaza, where the military said several were killed.

The military also said its forces destroyed several rocket pits used

to fire missiles at Israel.

Over the past 24 hours, the Gaza health ministry said 125 people had been killed and 265 wounded, bringing the total number confirmed to have been killed since the start of the war to almost 24,000, with more than 60,000 wounded.

The Israeli military says it has shifted to a new phase of the war, focused on the southern end of the territory, where almost 2 million people are now sheltering in tents and other temporary accommodation, after the initial phase centred on clearing the northern end including Gaza City.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has brushed off calls for a ceasefire, saying Israel



Israeli soldiers stand next to tanks at a position in Israel near the border with the Gaza Strip. — AFP

will keep going until it achieves complete victory. The military says, though, the next phase of

the war will see more targeted operations against the movement’s leaders and military positions.

The total number confirmed to have been killed since the start of the war to almost 24,000, with more than 60,000 wounded

On Israel’s northern border with Lebanon, where there has been a constant, low-level exchange of fire between troops and fighters from the Lebanese allies, the military said it killed four armed militants trying to cross the border.

It said several anti-tank missiles were fired into northern Israel,

one of which hit a house in the community of Kfar Yuval, killing one person and causing a number of other casualties.

In Rafah in southern Gaza Strip, Nana, a 17-year-old high school student displaced from northern Gaza, said 100 days of war “turned our life upside down.”

“We demand the occupation not only to end the war but also compensation for the psychological damage of displacement and the hardships endured,” she said.

Mohammad Abu Aweidah, an uncle of the missing children said his son had been “martyred in his sleep” after he’d put him to bed, asking what the infant had done to deserve such a fate. — Reuters



In brief

■ MORONI



COMOROS HOLDS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, POLLS OPENED

Voting was under way in Comoros on Sunday in an election widely expected to hand a fourth five-year term to President Azali Assouman. The polls opened across the Indian Ocean archipelago at 8 a.m. for the 338,940 registered voters out of its 800,000 population. Some opposition leaders have called for a boycott, accusing the election commission of favouring the ruling party. The commission denies this, saying the process will be transparent. “I am delighted with this anchoring of democracy in our country,” Assoumani told reporters after voting in his home town of Mitsoudjé, adding that he hoped for victory in the first round. — Reuters

■ PARIS



FIVE MIGRANTS DIE TRYING TO CROSS THE CHANNEL

Five migrants trying to cross the Channel to Britain died in French waters in the early hours of Sunday, French authorities said. The small boat overturned as it attempted to launch from a beach in Wimereux, south of Calais, an official said, adding that one person in critical condition had been taken to hospital in Boulogne, northern France. Dozens were pulled from the cold water but the overnight rescue effort was complicated as the waters were too shallow for the French navy's boats that came to help, the local prefecture said. — Reuters

■ DAR ES SALAAM



COLLAPSE OF GOLDMINE IN TANZANIA KILLS AT LEAST 22

The collapse of a small-scale gold mine has killed at least 22 people in northern Tanzania following heavy rains, a senior government official said on Sunday. The accident happened early on Saturday in the Simiyu region after a group of people aged between 24 and 38 years old started mining in an area where activity had been restricted due to ongoing heavy rains, Simon Simalenga said, the region's Bariadi district commissioner. “Initially we were told that there were 19 to 20 people who were trapped in the mines but unfortunately we ended up retrieving 22 bodies,” he said, adding that the search and rescue operation was continuing. — Reuters

All remaining hostages seized in Ecuador prison riots freed

QUITO: All remaining 136 prison guards and administrative workers who were seized as hostages during prison riots in Ecuador were freed on Saturday night, prison authorities said. Nearly 180 prison guards and civil servants had been taken hostage by rioting inmates after President Daniel Noboa launched a military crackdown on criminal groups this week, sparking a deadly confrontation with narco gangs in the South American country. “Security protocols and the joint work of the police and the national army enabled the release of all the hostages who were being held in various prisons across the country,” the SNAI prison authorities said in a statement on X. Images broadcast by the police showed the guards, many in tears, exhausted and supported by their colleagues shortly after their release. “We are released (...) Thank God we all got out safely,” a prison employee said in a video posted on social media, waving the Ecuadorian flag and standing in front of one prison in southern Cotopaxi province. Earlier, 41 hostages had been freed, including 24 guards and 17 administration employees. “Congratulations to the patriotic, professional and courageous work of the armed forces, national police and the



A soldier kicks a concrete pole to remove it while patrolling, amid the ongoing wave of violence around the nation, in Guayaquil, Ecuador. — Reuters

SNAI (...) for achieving the release of the prison guards and administrative staff held in the detention centres of Azuay, Canar, Esmeraldas, Cotopaxi, Tungurahua, El Oro and Loja,” he wrote. The crisis was triggered by the escape from Guayaquil prison of one of the country's most powerful narcotics gang bosses, Jose Adolfo Macias, known by the alias “Fito”, who headed the country's main gang “Los Choneros”. Riots erupted in at least five prisons and attacks on security

Security protocols and the joint work of the police and the national army enabled the release of all the hostages who were being held in various prisons across the country

forces following his escape. At least 19 people have died in the violence, including civilians, prison guards and police in the last week, according to SNAI authorities. Authorities said eight “terrorists” were killed and 27 escaped prisoners were recaptured. The SNAI has said it will investigate the causes and those responsible for the prison riots. Hundreds of military personnel and police have been deployed in a manhunt for Fito since Monday, while Noboa announced a 60-day nationwide state of emergency and a nightly curfew. Noboa has vowed not to bow before the violence, giving orders to “neutralise” the criminal groups responsible. “I believe we are going to win and I will not stop fighting until we do,” he said on Friday. Narco gangs often use prisons as criminal offices, from where they manage drug trafficking, order assassinations, administer the proceeds of crime and fight to the death with rivals for power. — AFP

North Korea fires intermediate-range ballistic missile

SEOUL: North Korea fired a suspected intermediate-range ballistic missile on Sunday, Seoul's military said, days after Pyongyang staged live-fire exercises near the country's tense maritime border with South Korea. “Our military detected one suspected intermediate-range ballistic missile launched from the Pyongyang area towards the East Sea at around 14:55,” Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. The missile flew 1,000 kilometres, the JCS added, saying that authorities in Seoul, Washington and Tokyo were analysing the specifications. “We strongly condemn the latest missile launch by North Korea as it is a clear provocation that seriously threatens peace and stability on the Korean peninsula,” it said. Japan's coast guard also confirmed a suspected missile launch by North Korea, citing information from the country's defence ministry, and warning vessels to take care. North Korea's last missile test was of a Hwasong-18 solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), which it fired into the East Sea on December 18. The apparent test comes days after North Korea conducted a series of rare live-fire drills near its maritime border with the South,



People watch a television screen showing a news broadcast with file footage of a North Korean missile test, at a railway station in Seoul. — AFP

prompting counter-exercises and evacuation orders for some South Korean border islands. Leader Kim Jong Un earlier this week branded Seoul his “principal enemy” and warned he would not hesitate to annihilate South Korea, as he toured major weapons factories. “The historic time has come at last when we should define as a state most hostile toward the Democratic People's Republic of Korea the entity called the Republic of Korea (South Korea),” Kim was reported as saying by the official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). Analysts said at the time that the change in language was significant, signifying a shift in Pyongyang's approach to an “ultra-hawkish mode”. In 2023, Kim test-fired a

string of advanced ICBMs including a purported solid-fuel version. At Pyongyang's year-end policy meetings, Kim threatened a nuclear attack on South Korea and called for a build-up of his country's military arsenal ahead of armed conflict that he warned could “break out any time”. Pyongyang declared itself an “irreversible” nuclear power in 2022 and has repeatedly said it will never give up its nuclear weapons programme, which the regime views as essential for its survival. The United Nations Security Council has adopted many resolutions calling on North Korea to halt its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes since Pyongyang first conducted a nuclear test in 2006. — AFP

Top diplomats meet in Davos on Ukraine ‘peace formula’

DAVOS: Ukraine pushed ahead with its peace formula to end nearly two years of war with Russia with a meeting of national security advisers from around the world in Davos on Sunday. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who is scheduled to address the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos later in the week, was not in the opening morning session, which included 81 participants from countries and international organisations. Zelenskiy was represented by his chief of staff Andriy Yermak at Sunday's talks, which were also attended by the US special representative for Ukraine's Economic

Recovery Penny Pritzker, as well as James O'Brien, the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs. As concerns grow about ongoing US support for the war in Ukraine during an election year, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and Secretary of State Antony Blinken are both expected to address the WEF, which officially starts on Monday evening. Switzerland, which hosted the NSA representatives, said the Ukraine peace talks aimed to finalise principles “for a lasting and just peace in Ukraine” at the level of national security advisers. — Reuters



General view during the speech of Andriy Yermak, Head of the Ukrainian President's Office, during the 4th meeting of the National Security Advisors (NSA) on the peace formula for Ukraine, in Davos, Switzerland. — Reuters

The rise in sales of children’s books gives us hope



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

As the book fair season is all set to begin in the Middle East, there are encouraging signs that books are alive and well. Despite worries that physical books would be shelved for newer digital formats, or not exist at all, sales worldwide show encouraging signs.

In May 2023, Bloomsbury, the publisher of the Harry Potter series noted a 17 per cent increase in the sales of children’s books. This is a continuation of the rise in book sales during the pandemic.

In the Al Ain Book Festival of 2023, children’s books were noted as being the largest driver of sales. Similar data comes from North America and Asia.

The Muscat Book Fair held in February 2023 as well as the floating book exhibition, Logos Hope, that docked later in the year showcased a whole range of children’s books, all lapped up by enthusiastic children and their parents.

The reason why children’s books have become popular is not difficult to understand:

they tap into a world of possibilities that a child is ready to explore, they have colourful pictures that stimulate the imagination, and they tell stories that are relatable and fun.

The fact that reading books is important to a child is well known. Data shows how much reading helps a growing child in stimulating the imagination, helping to cope with stress, and even giving them role models. This is in addition to more standard benefits like increasing vocabulary, developing attention span, and inculcating moral values.

A decade ago, physical books were seen to be almost on their way out. Facing tough competition from new forms of entertainment, the market was doubtful about the future of books in their present form.

Of course, the challenge today is how books can compete with technology to retain a child’s attention. The cartoons on a loop, the never-ending offerings on streaming services, and the reels on social media seem to make this challenge even more difficult.

As Publisher’s Weekly said, “audio is the only

CHILDREN’S BOOKS TAP INTO A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES AND HAVE COLOURFUL PICTURES THAT STIMULATE THE IMAGINATION, AND THEY TELL STORIES THAT ARE RELATABLE AND FUN

format gaining share across all super categories” of print, e-book, and audiobook.

It does not have to be so. In fact, technology offers a way in. As research suggests, influencers on social media are driving up sales of books by making young adults and children excited about new books and titles.

In fact, children’s book influencers are in a category of their own, with individuals offering suggestions of books, dividing them into themes and interests, and even inviting writers for interviews. Many of these influencers read books out aloud and have specific books for occasions.

These social media sites can be very useful in giving suggestions about readings, recommendations about reading levels, and even address cultural appropriateness.

As the ultimate aim is to make children read, it should not matter where they read and how they access this content. Technology and social media are now adding the necessary stimulus and encouraging children to pick up a book. This can only be good news.

More queens in store for European royalty as Gen Z rises

TONI CERDÀ, PIA OHLIN

The abdication of Denmark’s Queen Margrethe leaves Europe without a female monarch, but not for long -- a young generation of princesses born in the 21st century will be ascending to thrones across the continent in the coming years. Belgium’s Princess Elisabeth, born in 2001; Catharina-Amalia of the Netherlands (2003); Ingrid Alexandra of Norway (2004); Leonor of Spain (2005); and Estelle of Sweden (2012) -- half of the hereditary monarchies on the Continent are likely to be led by a queen before too long.

Many will be the first to take the throne after the introduction of female succession laws, a privilege previously reserved for male heirs.

Previous queens, such as Elizabeth II of Britain, who died in 2022, had no brothers to inherit the throne.

“Sweden was the first country in the world to adopt a gender-neutral order of succession, in 1980, when Princess Victoria bumped her younger brother down and she became crown princess” retroactively, Swedish royals expert Roger Lundgren said.

Several experts said gender was unlikely to have much of an impact as the future queens embrace their new roles.

“Much of what kings and queens do today, and what they will do in 25 years, is what kings did 200 years ago too -- state visits, receiving ambassadors, ceremonial things,” Lundgren said.

Lundgren also noted that unlike earlier generations of queens, many in the upcoming generation has done some form of military service in their country. In December, for example, Spain’s Hola! magazine showed Princess Leonor in combat camouflage taking part in ski drills with her unit on slopes in the Pyrenees.

Other princesses have studied in elite schools at home or abroad -- both Leonor and Princess Elisabeth of Belgium studied at Atlantic College in Wales -- exposing them more to global affairs and concerns such as feminist causes or the risks from climate change.

“A clearer, firmer footing in the everyday life of the people, in combination with the pomp, castles, jewels and the fairy tale, is the winning concept to keep the monarchy,” said Ebba Kleberg von Sydow, a Swedish influencer and royals expert.

She said the future queens were likely to prove more media-savvy as well, if only to show that monarchies remain grounded and relevant in modern society.

Lundgren noted that while Queen Margrethe “doesn’t even own a smartphone, and is proud of it”, Crown Princess Victoria of Sweden, Denmark’s Crown Prince Frederik and Norway’s Crown Prince Haakon have their own WhatsApp group. — AFP



Adam Nagourney

The writer is an American journalist who covers national politics for NYT

Arctic blast scrambles final weekend of Iowa campaigning

With the final weekend before the Iowa caucuses upon them, Republican presidential candidates are battling two forces — brutally cold temperatures and the threat of low voter turnout — as they navigate snow, icy roads and stiff, subarctic winds, and urge people to show up on Monday night.

As Iowans faced more warnings of blizzard conditions and life-threatening wind chills, former President Donald Trump cancelled two in-person rallies he had planned this weekend, but he added a town-hall event in the evening that was streamed live.

Trump, whose aides have worried that polls showing him with a big lead might lull his supporters into staying home, has predicted the weather might in fact help him because “our people are more committed than anybody else.”

By all indications, Trump has less at stake on Monday than his two main rivals, Nikki Haley, a former UN ambassador, and Ron DeSantis, the Florida governor. Both are looking for a strong showing in Iowa to give them momentum in New Hampshire; some Republicans think DeSantis could have trouble continuing his campaign if he does not take second in Iowa.

Both pushed ahead with campaign events on Saturday. DeSantis was 75 minutes late to his rally in West Des Moines later on Saturday. He spoke for about 10 minutes.

“They can throw a blizzard at us and we are going to fight,” he said. “They can throw wind chill at us and we are going to fight.”

But his willingness to show up in the bitter cold was noted by some Iowa voters.

Richard Marriott of Atlantic, Iowa, said he had planned to see Trump on Saturday but the former president cancelled. “And he’s from New York,” Marriott said.



Former President Donald Trump participates in a livestream in which he’s being asked questions by Iowas attorney general, Brenna Bird, at Hotel Fort Des Moines in Iowa.

“He should be used to the snow. DeSantis is from Florida.”

Haley, who is from South Carolina, joked at a campaign stop that she thought Iowa had been cold in October and November, but the zero-degree weather was showing her the true meaning of the word. “I get it now,” she said to laughs. “I totally get it now. This is

TRUMP AIDES HAVE PREDICTED THE WEATHER MIGHT HELP HIM BECAUSE ‘OUR PEOPLE ARE MORE COMMITTED THAN ANYBODY ELSE’

unbelievable.”

Here’s what else to know: — Building on his criticism of Haley during their debate, DeSantis told voters at his first stop in Council Bluffs that she was too liberal for Iowa Republicans. He also attacked her as representing a “warmed-over, corporate strain of the Republican establishment.”

— Haley mostly ignored DeSantis

during her first stop of the day, other than to argue that polls showed that President Joe Biden would defeat DeSantis were he is the Republican nominee. She instead drilled down on the dominant themes of her campaign: reducing federal spending, securing the border and supporting Ukraine and Israel. “You’ve got the opportunity to look back at the past and continue or go forward and start new,” she said.

— The Trump campaign quickly turned a hotel ballroom in Des Moines into a makeshift studio for a livestreamed town hall. Trump spoke with the state’s attorney general, Brenna Bird, who has endorsed him, and took questions from a friendly audience. He continued a recently adopted strategy of portraying himself as the presumptive nominee and relentlessly promoting his record in office, often by exaggerating or even concocting statistics.

— The snowstorm hindering the final days of campaigning is truly once-in-a-generation. A measurement at the Des Moines airport recorded 22.3 inches of snow so far this week, the most in a five-day period since 1941, according to the National Weather Service.

— The New York Times

Never count on first impression

Very often people count on first impression to evaluate others; however, it is not always the right thing to do! As a book is not always being judged by its cover, people too are to be assessed neither by their appearance nor first attitude. In this regard, have you ever felt that you have been undervalued or misjudged by others, your boss, a colleague or a relative! Possibly, it could be someone whom you have met for the first time, but he/she doesn't know much about you. Likewise, this might happen the other way round as you might underestimate someone for his or her behaviour or decision, which you are not happy or don't agree with!

Such unkind feelings are experienced by many people for different reasons and sometimes happen unintentionally. Generally, people have been created with very distinctive characteristics, skills and abilities. Everyone is bestowed with different physical, mental and emotional features compared to others. People are different in what they are good at based on their capabilities and competencies in perceiving and making things. Each person has his or her own way of doing things!

In this regard, the Sultanate of Oman has been developed with great efforts of the government supported by the people of Oman and with the help of expatriates working here, especially during old days. However, the government's continuous and serious devotion in the nation-building process was behind the fast-growing Renaissance, which happened in a record time. Thanks to late Sultan Qaboos who devoted his time and efforts to build the nation and promised a better future for Omanis.

None of us can deny the role of expatriates living with us, who have contributed in the



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THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUOUS AND SERIOUS DEVOTION IN THE NATION-BUILDING PROCESS WAS BEHIND THE FAST-GROWING RENAISSANCE

development of Oman, regardless of their nationalities. As a matter of fact, we needed their expertise as the country was still young and undeveloped when the Blessed Renaissance kicked off. Involving foreign expertise was very significant at the early stages of the nation-building journey. There is nothing wrong in getting the help of others when paving the way of national development, so Omanis could learn from them. Today, we still have expatriates working in various government and private organisations whose efforts and support are touching different spheres of life.

Nevertheless, expatriates are coming here to make a living in return; this undoubtedly comes as a first priority to them more than serving the nation. Likewise, some started their own businesses and investments in this blessed land of opportunities as the country has become home for many expatriates.

Regardless of the job title of Omanis, they are all competent and capable enough to handle all types of jobs. Therefore, they should not be stereotyped based on the first impression or judgement! Proving the remarkable excellence and hard work of Omanis, many of them are taking leading positions in several leading corporates of different businesses in the private sector. They are even supervising their expat colleagues even from European countries having ample expertise. Being in such jobs is not because they are Omanis, but they are well-qualified. Thus, Omanis are never to be misjudged as obviously evidences are many.

First impression is not always right neither on Omanis nor expats, so mutual trust should be shared between partners. People share expertise, respect and cultures with each other so they could live in harmony wherever they are. Hence, as a human being, it is not who you are, but it is what you do and what you give!

CLOSER TO VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS!



Billowing smoke is seen on the outskirts of the southwestern Icelandic town of Grindavik after a volcanic eruption, on Sunday. Seismic activity had intensified overnight and residents of Grindavik were evacuated, Icelandic public broadcaster RUV reported. This is Iceland's fifth volcanic eruption in two years, the previous one occurring on December 18, 2023 in the same region southwest of the capital Reykjavik. – AFP

Harmonising global green taxonomies

Football (soccer) has been around for centuries, but it did not always look like the game we know today. It did not even look the same across geographies. In some places, players were allowed to use their hands, while in others, goals did not have a crossbar; still elsewhere, pushing an opponent was allowed, though pulling was not. But in the mid-nineteenth century, the rules were standardised, so that teams from different places could compete against one another. With that, football began to expand and develop rapidly. Today, it is the world's most-played sport.

Just as shared rules enabled football's development, a single set of guidelines would accelerate progress in the fight against climate change. The logic is straightforward. Given the scale of the climate challenge, addressing it requires action at all levels of society, government, and the economy. If such a huge number of actors are to work, worldwide, towards a common goal, often through direct collaboration, everyone must operate according to the same principles, define terms and concepts in consistent ways, and measure progress using established metrics.

This is particularly important for the financial sector. If investors are to have enough confidence and clarity to direct trillions of dollars toward the highest-impact projects, they need access to a shared set of criteria for assessing the



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ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE REQUIRES ACTION AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY, GOVERNMENT, AND THE ECONOMY – ALL AROUND THE WORLD

“green credentials” of assets and activities.

At the country level, “green taxonomies” are already having an impact. The year after China published its first “project catalogue” for green bonds in 2015, the value of its green-bond market surged from zero to \$40 billion. But there is a limit to what national action can achieve. Since different jurisdictions define their own standards and metrics, what qualifies as “green” in one country might still be considered “brown” in another, creating uncertainty for investors and undermining their confidence.

The lack of a single shared green taxonomy also fragments the market, creating opportunities for firms to circumvent rules and regulations aimed at boosting sustainability. For example, if a government imposes strict rules on carbon emissions, companies might simply move their high-emitting activities abroad or start importing carbon-intensive goods manufactured in more lenient jurisdictions.

Of course, it would be unrealistic — and unfair — to expect all countries to adopt a single green taxonomy immediately. Each country has its own needs and priorities, faces particular economic and development challenges, and possesses a unique set of

resources with which to achieve its goals. Their green taxonomies must reflect this. For example, Colombia places special emphasis on agriculture, livestock, and forestry — economically vital sectors that are also leading sources of greenhouse-gas emissions and major drivers of environmental degradation.

Again, football can offer some clarity here. While the rules are the same everywhere, leagues around the world operate in different ways, reflecting local conditions. They have different budgets, calendars, and rules for promotion and relegation of teams from one division to another. Ultimately, however, players can move across leagues, and teams can compete across jurisdictions, with relatively little friction. This kind of interoperability must be built into national green taxonomies,

to enable green capital to flow across borders at scale. To this end, policymakers and regulators must identify common design features, align impact metrics and accounting standards, and embrace an “adopt or adapt” approach to the rest, borrowing templates or criteria from others and adjusting as needed. Several initiatives aimed at supporting this process are already underway. In 2021, the International Financial Reporting Standards Foundation created the International Sustainability Standards Board, an independent, private-sector body that develops and approves sustainability reporting standards. The G20 has defined six high-level principles to guide jurisdictions as they develop their own approaches for aligning investments with sustainability goals, thereby helping to ensure comparability and interoperability.

And the Sustainable Banking and Finance Network provides its 86 members in 66 emerging-market countries with toolkits and progress reports.

Once national rulebooks are created, regional harmonisation must follow. Here, too, positive steps are already being taken. The Working Group on Sustainable Finance Taxonomies for Latin America and the Caribbean – with the support of the International Finance Corporation and other multilateral institutions — is helping countries in the region align their frameworks, such as by establishing guiding principles and designing objective classification systems for sectors and activities. Regional forums like Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) should also step up, incorporating the harmonisation of green taxonomies into broader integration plans. The final step is global harmonisation, which the G20 is well-positioned to lead. Brazil should attempt to kick-start the process during its presidency of the group this year, setting the stage for further progress under South Africa's leadership in 2025. Unlike the evolution of football — which took over a century and a half — we do not have the luxury of time. To tackle climate change, a global green taxonomy cannot come soon enough. @Project Syndicate, 2024



Given the scale of the climate challenge, addressing it requires action at all levels.

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Milestone moment for Oman, says FIH chief

HOCKEY OMAN STADIUM TO STAGE OLYMPIC QUALIFIER FROM TODAY

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 14

Sultanate of Oman's brand new hockey facility Hockey Oman will spring into action with the prestigious FIH Olympic Men's Hockey Qualifier 2024 tournament from Monday.

World champions Germany will take on Canada in the opening match of the eight-team qualifying event at the state-of-the-art hockey stadium.

FIH President Dato Tayyab Ikram, who was in town as Muscat hosts three weeks of high-intensity international hockey, opened his remarks by saying that the staging of the Olympic Qualifier is a milestone moment for Oman.

"This is a milestone moment for Oman. I congratulate His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik for the great achievement for sports in Oman with his great leadership. HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, was also instrumental in completing this dream project of Oman Hockey Association (OHA)," Ikram said during the opening press conference at the venue.

Hockey Oman complex, completed in around one and a half years, will host the first ever FIH Hockey5s World Cup from January 24 to 31.

The FIH president appreciated the work of OHA Chairman Dr Marwan bin Juma al Juma and his team for the speedy completion of the hockey facility, which has separate 11-a-side and five-



a-side stadiums with practice facilities.

Ikram said scopes are high for the Hockey Oman facility.

"It is surely up for grabs with regards to a hockey academy in the complex and other related amenities. There are a lot of scopes for the new stadium and the hockey world body is fully committed to support several initiatives at the high-performance venue," he said in a reply to a query.

"Olympic qualification is a dream for all associated with the sport, from players to coaches and officials – also at a personal level. So it is ideal Hockey Oman starts with the Olympic Qualifier featuring top men's teams of the world," Ikram said of the Paris Olympics 2024 qualifying tournament that begins at Hockey Oman stadium on Monday.

Three teams will make it to the Paris Games from the Muscat Qualifier.

TEAM WORK
OHA chief Dr Marwan said the completion of the

facility at Al Amerat was the result of efficient team work by the concerned parties with great backing from the government.

"We have completed the first phase and now it is the time to stage two great tournaments successfully. Our full efforts and focus are now on these events which are prestigious for the country as well as the region itself," he said.

The OHA is hoping to see the hockey enthusiasts flock to the stadium for the Olympic qualifiers, Dr Marwan said.

HIGH-PROFILE HOCKEY
"We have reached out to various private schools and expatriate communities and hockey-loving public to promote the events at the new stadium. We are expecting the hockey enthusiasts to utilise the opportunity for watching high-profile hockey live in Muscat. We invite all to come up and fill in the stadiums to make the event a grand success," he concluded.

World champions Germany take on Canada in opener

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 14

The action of FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier will begin in Muscat as eight teams vie for the three direct tickets to the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

The new Oman Hockey stadium is all set to host matches of the teams divided into two groups. Pool A comprises Great Britain, Malaysia, Pakistan and China while Pool B features Germany, New Zealand, Canada and Chile teams.

Muscat city is among the three cities around the world to host the Hockey Olympic Qualifier besides Valencia (Spain) and Ranchi (India).

The 2024 FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier event will begin on Monday with four matches. World champions Germany will take on Canada in the opener at 14:00 and this match will be followed by the New Zealand and Chile match which will start at 16:15. Then, Malaysia will play against China at 18:30 and Great Britain will face Pakistan at 20:45.

It is expected that the opening round of group matches will be very tough as all the teams will look to register victory to keep their hopes high to progress into the semifinals.

The playing format in the Hockey Olympic Qualifier will be based on a league system from one round as the first and second ranked teams in each pool will advance to the semifinals and the top three teams will secure tickets to Olympic Games.

The third and fourth ranked teams in the pool play classification matches (5th to 8th positions). The group matches will begin on Monday and

will run until Thursday. On Saturday, the semifinal and classification matches will take place while on the following day, the final and the bronze-medal match to decide the three top winners will be staged.



COACHES READY
The team manager of China team, Wang Haiqin, said that the team began their preparations for the FIH Hockey Olympic Qualifier since they had booked the ticket to the Asian Games in China last September. "It was not an easy task to secure the ticket from Asia. Thanks to the team heroes as they had managed to earn one of the tickets to reach the final stage of the qualifier," he said.

Commenting on his expectation on the matches, he responded: "It is expected to be tough matches as all the participating teams are world ranked teams. Furthermore, China are grouped in a very tight group which comprises Germany, who won the FIH World Cup 2023 in India. We will work hard to vie for one of the spots to the Olympic Games. The team attended several training sessions during the last two days in Muscat. It is difficult to talk about the

team's chances but I am assured that the team members will deliver their outstanding performance to secure one of the tickets," he added.

New Zealand head coach Greg Nicol, affirmed that the team had started their preparatory programme a few weeks ago. "The team had organised some joint camps with Malaysia and South Korea teams. The training sessions were stopped during the New Year celebrations. The team arrived in Muscat on January 3 and began their last camp in Muscat. The focus was on physical fitness and creating different technical plans against the opponents. I am confident that our team will produce a good show in the event. We are currently concentrating on the group matches," he said.

"We are very pleased to be here in Oman at these top hockey facilities. It is great to see Oman developed very well in hockey and they have some players who got professional opportunities to play abroad. Moreover, the new hockey infrastructure will support the nation to develop further in hockey," he concluded.

Paul Revington, head coach of Great Britain, said that all the participating teams in this qualifier are top teams. "I am expecting tight competition among the top ranking teams. Our team attended several training sessions at Oman Hockey Stadium in Al Amerat. The weather is suitable now in Muscat and playing at the newly built stadium is great and will reduce the possibility of injury as the old grass sometimes raises chances of injury for the players if they fall down," he said.

Ivory Coast kick off Cup of Nations with 2-0 win over Guinea Bissau

ABIDJAN: Ivory Coast's Seko Fofana and Jean-Philippe Krasso scored in each half as the hosts completed a 2-0 Group A victory over Guinea Bissau in the Africa Cup of Nations opening game played in energy-sapping humidity on Saturday.

Fofana gave his side a fourth minute lead with a superb shot from the edge of the box before Krasso made up for an earlier miss when he acrobatically netted a second just before the hour.

Twice winners Ivory Coast next play on Thursday when they face Nigeria in the biggest match-up in the group, while Guinea-Bissau take on Equatorial Guinea on the same day. The games will again be played at Abidjan's Alassane Ouattara Stadium.

It was a far from perfect performance from the hosts and Guinea Bissau were left to rue several missed opportunities, but Ivory Coast coach Jean-Louis Gasset will know the three points are all that matters at this early stage of the tournament.

The Frenchman's side got a dream start when Fofana curled his shot into the top corner from 20 metres, settling the nerves of the home players and their supporters.



Ivory Coast's midfielder #6 Seko Fofana (L) fights for the ball with Guinea-Bissau's midfielder #8 Alfa Semedo during the Africa Cup of Nations – **AFP**

But after the Ivorians' fast start, Guinea Bissau settled into the contest and created a few chances themselves.

Forward Mama Balde went for a spectacular bicycle kick when he might have opted for a header before he had an excellent chance to equalise with a clear run on goal but his shot was weak and easily saved by Yahia Fofana.

Seko Fofana came close to a second goal when his powerful drive from the edge of the box was tipped onto the crossbar by Guinea-Bissau's Ouparine Djoco, who was a surprise selection over regular goalkeeper Jonas Mendes.

The hosts created another superb opening before the break when Jonathan Bamba fed Krasso in the box only for the striker to turn the ball wide.

Guinea-Bissau started the second half on the front foot but too often their final pass was poor and they wasted promising positions.

The home side doubled their advantage after 58 minutes when Krasso profited from some hesitant defending and took two touches before acrobatically rifling the ball into the net.

—Reuters



DE BRUYNE'S BRILLIANT IMPACT ON CITY'S WIN

ANDY JALIL
NEWCASTLE, JAN 14

The introduction of Kevin De Bruyne as substitute later in the second half of this enthralling game made the difference between the two sides as Manchester City emerged winners at 3-2 against Newcastle, to go just two points behind Liverpool at the top of the Premier League.

De Bruyne, out of action for five months after hamstring surgery, scored within 5 minutes of arrival on the pitch and then provided a vital assist for the added-time winning goal. City manager, Pep Guardiola, jokingly said: "I am so disappointed in him and upset

because he didn't score with the free-kick."

He then said: "The way we play is quite similar without him but to win games we need players like Kevin or Erling (Haaland). We know exactly what we have to do, but he sees something special in the final third. That is not tactical, (it's) talent. We have to take care of him, he is not 22 anymore." De Bruyne's recovery took longer than expected.

City took the lead just over halfway through the first half with Kyle Walker racing down on the right and his cross was met with a superb back-heel flick from Bernardo Silva. But within 10 minutes Newcastle equalised.

Alexander Isak picked up the pass from Bruno Guimaraes and he easily beat Walker before driving his shot from 18 yards into the far corner past Stefan Ortego who, in the eighth minute had replaced the injured goalkeeper Ederson after a collision with Sean Longstaff.

Two minutes later the home side had taken the lead. Anthony Gordon collected a pass from Dan Burn on the touchline halfway up the pitch before moving into the area, with Walker beaten again and then shooting inside the far post to see Newcastle 2-1 up at half-time.

While Newcastle had the better of the first half, their opponents were certainly sharper after the break. But the equaliser didn't

come until the 74th minute with De Bruyne coming on in the 69th minute. His strike from 20 yards found the net, through the legs of defender Fabian Schar and passing just inside the left post into the bottom corner. His previous shot from a freekick near the 18-yard line had crashed into the Newcastle wall.

Just as it seemed honours will be shared in this tie the winning goal was scored in the third minute of added time. De Bruyne showed his class yet again, delivering a long inch-perfect pass to substitute Oscar Bobb who showed fine footwork in beating keeper Martin Dubravka before scoring his first Premier League goal.

Inter thrash Monza with Calhanoglu, Martinez doubles

MONZA: Inter Milan outclassed Monza to chalk up a 5-1 away win in Serie A on Saturday with two goals each from Hakan Calhanoglu and Lautaro Martinez as they moved a provisional five points clear at the top after an exciting game with three penalties.

Inter, who are on a 14-game unbeaten streak in the league, lead the table with 51 points from 20 games ahead of second-placed Juventus who host lowly Sassuolo on Tuesday.

"We had an excellent match, prepared in the best way (possible) in these five days," coach Simone Inzaghi told Sky Sport before his side defend their Italian Super Cup crown.

Inter will play Lazio in Riyadh in the last four in Saudi Arabia on Friday after Napoli face Fiorentina in the other semifinal on Thursday. The final is scheduled for January 22.

Inter got a quick start against Monza as Calhanoglu gave them the lead with a 12th-minute penalty, sending a low shot inside the post after the spot kick was given for handball.

Martinez, whose attempt had led to the penalty, looked disappointed at not taking it himself but the Argentine did double the lead two minutes later from close range.

Monza struggled to get out of their own half in the opening stages but came close to scoring in the 30th minute when midfielder Matteo Pessina nodded the ball home following a free kick but the goal was



Inter Milan's Turkish midfielder #20 Hakan Calhanoglu kicks and scores a penalty during the Italian Serie A football match. – **AFP**

ruled out for an offside.

Inter continued to dominate after the break and Calhanoglu added a third on the hour mark from near the penalty spot, netting after a neat back-heel from Marcus Thuram.

It was the first Serie A double for the Turkiye midfielder who joined Inter in June 2021 after four seasons at AC Milan.

MORE PENALTIES

Pessina eventually pulled a goal back for the home side in the 69th with a spot kick but Martinez then made it 4-1 with another penalty after

84 minutes.

The Argentine, who netted twice in the reverse fixture in August, became the fourth player involved in at least 20 goals in each of the last four seasons across the big five European leagues, joining Mohamed Salah, Kylian Mbappe, and Harry Kane.

Martinez has 18 goals and two assists so far this term. Thuram sealed the win for the visitors two minutes from time after a brilliant cross from Henrikh Mkhitaryan.

"Now we go to Saudi Arabia as (Italian Super Cup) title holders,"

—Reuters

Djokovic comes through Prizmic test in Melbourne opener

MELBOURNE: Novak Djokovic was dragged into a dogfight by talented teenager Dino Prizmic and had to dig deep to open his Australian Open title defence with a 6-2 6-7(5) 6-3 6-4 victory in the first round on Sunday.

At a shade over four hours, it was Djokovic's longest first-round match at a major and he heaped praise on the Croatian qualifier for his performance on his Grand Slam debut.

"He deserved all the applause and all the credit he got tonight, he's an amazing player, so mature ... he really gave me a run for my money," Djokovic said.

"It was an amazing performance for a teenager who never had the experience of playing on such a big stage.

"I started well for a 36-year-old, jeez, if you think about it I'm double his age. I had some good moments (but) physically I'm still finding myself on the court."

The Serbian, who played his first Australian Open a few months before the Croatian qualifier was born in 2005, initially looked fully in control of the contest on the Rod Laver Arena court where he has won 10 of his 24 Grand Slam titles.

Prizmic had already shown glimpses of the weapons he possesses and broke the top seed with a brilliant crosscourt winner early in the



second set, forcing Djokovic to raise his game to break straight back.

The 18-year-old world number 178, who needed a medical timeout to get some strapping on his thigh early in the match, was a man transformed, however, and kept up his level to even up the contest in the tiebreak.

That merely set the tone for an enthralling third set in which Djokovic was put under intense pressure by his athletic opponent, making 20 unforced errors and facing six break points.

Djokovic broke Prizmic at the start but the teenager kept ripping huge forehands and stayed with the world number one in several rallies to put the match back on serve before breaking again for a 3-2 lead after a 15-minute battle of a game.

— Reuters



Vietnam's Le Pham Thanh Long in action with Japan's Takumi Minamino. – REUTERS

DOHA: Asian Cup favourites Japan survived a scare in their tournament opener on Sunday against Vietnam before winning 4-2 in a roller-coaster clash.

Hajime Moriyasu's side are looking for a record-extending fifth Asian title and looked set for a comfortable start to their campaign in Qatar when Takumi Minamino gave them an 11th-minute lead.

But Vietnam, who are coached by Japan's 2000 Asian Cup-winning boss Philippe Troussier, turned the game on its head with two goals midway through the first half.

Japan came roaring back before half-time, Minamino scoring a second before Keito Nakamura curled home a sublime effort to send them into the break with the lead.

The second half was a far more sedate affair until Japan substitute Ayase Ueda made the win safe with a fourth goal in the 86th minute.

Japan and Vietnam met in the quarter-finals of the last Asian Cup in 2019, with Japan winning 1-0 before losing to Qatar in the final.

Moriyasu left Kaoru Mitoma out of his matchday squad as the Brighton winger continues his comeback from an ankle injury.

Real Sociedad forward Takefusa Kubo started on the bench but Minamino showed that Japan still had plenty of attacking talent when he opened the scoring early in the first half.

Yukinari Sugawara drilled a ball into the box that deflected off a Vietnam defender and former Liverpool attacker Minamino pounced on the rebound.

Vietnam hit back four minutes later when Nguyen Dinh Bac glanced a looping backwards header over a stunned Japanese defence from a corner. And more was to come when Vietnam took the lead in the 33rd minute.

FREE KICK

Defender Bui Hoang Viet Anh got his head to a free kick swung into the far post and Japan goalkeeper Zion Suzuki could only parry his effort into the path of the onrushing Pham Tuan Hai, who stuffed the ball home.

There was still time for Japan to turn it around before the break.

First, Liverpool's Wataru Endo picked out Minamino in the box and the Monaco forward rolled a precise first-time shot just inside the far post.

Then Nakamura put Japan back in front with a jaw-dropping strike from the edge of the box in first-half injury time.

The tempo dropped significantly in the second half but Ueda notched Japan's fourth with a well-taken strike with just minutes remaining.

Indonesia play Iraq on Monday in the other opening game in Group D.

— AFP

Japan survive Vietnam scare to start Asian Cup title bid

AL ASWAD COUNTING ON BAHRAINI TEAMWORK

Tiredness not a factor for Korea's Hwang

DOHA: Hwang Hee Chan has no intention of using fatigue as an excuse when Korea Republic embark on their journey to win their first AFC Asian Cup title since 1960 when they take on Bahrain in Group E on Monday. Komail Al Aswad, meanwhile, wants his Bahrain side to relish the challenge of facing one of Asia's best and prove themselves worthy of a place in the knockout stage of Qatar 2023. A whole host of Korea Republic players come into the tournament with plenty of minutes under their belt but Hwang does not see that as a burden.

With 11 goals and three assists in all competitions for Wolverhampton Wanderers in the 2023/24 English Premier League thus far, Hwang is having a prolific season in Europe and the forward said Korea are fully focused on the task ahead.

"The team has been performing exceptionally well in terms of our buildup, and the training has proven to be effective," said Hwang. "The first match

is crucial, and we are fully prepared for tomorrow's game."

"It's a very important tournament, playing here in the AFC Asian Cup. I don't believe it's an issue whether for us coming from Europe or those playing in K League because we don't discuss how fatigued or packed our schedules are in our respective leagues.

"When we come together, we focus on what kind of results we want to achieve for Korea Republic, how much we can contribute, and I've been preparing for this well.

"As players, we have prepared thoroughly, aiming to win all the games and approaching each match one at a time."

Al Aswad, meanwhile, is banking on a collective effort to ensure that Bahrain start the campaign on a positive note as they look to at least repeat their 2019 feat of reaching the Round 16.

The 29-year-old midfielder, who played



a pivotal role in helping Al Riffa SC reach the AFC Cup 2023/24 Zonal semi-finals, is expecting his teammates to work tirelessly against the Taeguk Warriors at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

"The atmosphere is positive, and we are focused on our opponents," said Al Aswad. "The first match is always tough, especially against Korea Republic, but hopefully, we will put in a good performance even though Korea Republic are the favourites in the group.

"Our objective is to advance to the next round. We want to perform well in all our matches, and our preparations have been thorough. We are confident of achieving the desired result."

"In terms of familiarity with the Korean players, I have played against most of them in the previous edition of the Asian Cup. There is no doubt that they are world-class players, but we will be relying on our teamwork to deliver our objective." — AFC



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Nazdaher facilitates RO 828m investment opportunities in diverse sectors in Oman

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 14

In a significant stride towards fulfilling the goals of Oman Vision 2024, the Oman National Programme for Investment and Exports Development (Nazdaher) announced the successful facilitation of investment opportunities worth an impressive RO 828 million in 2023. This milestone achievement underlines the country's commitment to diversifying its economy and promoting growth in non-oil sectors.

In a post, Nazdaher showcased its achievements and accomplishments for 2023.

Nazdaher has played a pivotal role in conducting studies, monitoring projects, and enhancing the investment environment across various sectors such as tourism, mining, sports, energy, culture, logistics, information & communication technology, manufacturing industries, health, and food security.

Through its relentless efforts, the programme has actively engaged with both local and international investors, showcasing Oman's potential as an attractive investment destination.

One of the key initiatives led by Nazdaher in 2023 was the establishment of several



To propel Oman's foreign trade and enhance international performance, Nazdaher crafted and implemented the executive programme for the foreign trade system.

development labs, which have acted as catalysts to stimulate investment in various sectors. As a result, a remarkable total of 37 investment opportunities were developed, promising lucrative returns to those who invest in Oman's future success.

To ensure effective negotiation and engagement with investors, Nazdaher created the National Negotiation Team, responsible for representing the government in negotiations and providing incentives to potential investors.

Meanwhile, the Investment

Development Team, comprising investment analysts, was set up to empower governmental bodies in achieving sector-specific investment objectives.

Another important aspect of Nazdaher's strategy was the launch of the Invest Oman lounge, operated by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP). Serving as a dedicated platform to support and guide investors, the lounge has witnessed numerous successful collaborations and transactions.

Nazdaher further augmented its investment ecosystem by implementing the Investment System Platform. This comprehensive monitoring system integrates all investment-related entities across the Sultanate of Oman, ensuring seamless coordination and information sharing among stakeholders.

Additionally, the Interactive Investment Map on Invest Oman Platform provides detailed information on geographical coordinates, services, financial criteria, and feasibility studies

NAZDAHER HAS PLAYED A PIVOTAL ROLE IN CONDUCTING STUDIES, MONITORING PROJECTS, AND ENHANCING THE INVESTMENT ENVIRONMENT ACROSS VARIOUS SECTORS SUCH AS TOURISM, MINING, SPORTS, ENERGY, CULTURE, LOGISTICS, INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY, MANUFACTURING INDUSTRIES, HEALTH, AND FOOD SECURITY.

of various projects, enabling investors to make informed decisions based on comprehensive data.

To propel Oman's foreign trade and enhance international performance, Nazdaher crafted and implemented the executive programme for the foreign trade system.

This initiative aligns closely with the ambitious targets set by Oman Vision 2040, ensuring that Oman's foreign trade sector exceeds global benchmarks and achieves sustainable growth.

In parallel, Nazdaher introduced a wide range of measures to promote and nurture foreign trade. Through close collaboration with MoCIIP, 14 initiatives were unveiled, focusing on export, import, and re-export domains.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Phase 1 construction of luxury AIDA project begins



Covering an area of 3.5 million sq metres, AIDA combines luxury golf, residential, and hospitality elements.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 14

Dar Global, the luxury international real estate developer, has commenced the first phase of construction on AIDA, a significant urban development in Oman, with Qurum Stone Development appointed as the main contractor.

The initiation of this premium mixed-use project, which is poised to transform luxury living in Oman, follows strong customer and investor interest.

AIDA, a joint venture with Omran Group, Oman's primary organisation for tourism development, combines luxury golf, residential, and hospitality elements. It is slated for Phase 1 completion in 2027.

Located by the sea and 130 metres above sea level, AIDA is a unique gated community and golfing destination. It harmonises with its natural surroundings, offering stunning sea views and homes that blend into the cliffside, capitalising on the site's environmental and topographical uniqueness.

Ziad El Chaar, CEO of Dar Global, said: "With our track record of top-tier residential projects, we're thrilled to introduce a world-class experience in Oman through AIDA. This project signifies our dedication to enhancing value and boosting Oman's tourism and real estate sectors.

It's a key step in our strategy to grow our luxury development portfolio in prime locations, enriching the investment landscape."

The 3.5 million square metre property, located just 10 minutes from Downtown Muscat, aims to set new standards in architectural excellence, environmental sustainability, and bespoke living. The landmark project's opulent mansions, limited-edition villas and sophisticated apartments will further elevate Oman's global stature as an attractive tourist, residential, and investment destination.

Bank Muscat posts RO 212.45m net profit

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat, the flagship financial institution in the Sultanate of Oman, announced its preliminary unaudited results for the year ended December 31, 2023.

The Bank posted a net profit of RO 212.45 million for the period compared to RO 200.75 million reported during the same period in 2022, an increase of 5.8 per cent.

The key highlights of the results for the year are as follows:

- 1) Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 374.82 million for the year ended December 31, 2023 compared to RO 344.86 million for the same period in 2022, an increase of 8.7 per cent.
- 2) Non-interest



income was RO 138.0 million for the year ended December 31, 2023 as compared to RO 135.18 million for the same period in 2022, an increase of 2.1 per cent.

3) Operating expenses for the year ended December 31, 2023 was RO 196.39 million as compared to RO 184.52 million for the same period in 2022, an increase of 6.4 per cent.

4) Net Impairment for credit and other losses for the year ended December 31,

2023 was RO 64.66 million as against RO 59.94 million for the same period in 2022.

5) Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased by 4.9 per cent to RO 9,877 million as against RO 9,417 million as at December 31, 2022.

6) Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits increased by 9.1 per cent to RO 9,438 million as against RO 8,647 million as at December 31, 2022.

Tender

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Mada'yn) announces the following Tender:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Last date of Buying	Date of Submission	Type of Work	Register Degree	Fee (R.O.)
3/2024/ PEIE/ HQ-3	THE CONSTRUCTION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX AT NIZWA INDUSTRIAL CITY	01-02-2024	22-02-2024	CONSTRUCTION	THIRD AND ABOVE	150

Interested Companies registered with Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents from the E-Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document. Tenders should be submitted on line on given website.

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

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

Note: Bid Submission will be online only.

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

madayn.om

Samsung, MHD-ITICS showcase state of art air conditioning solutions



MUSCAT: Samsung along with their independent retailer (IR) distributor Mohsin Haider Darwish (ITICS), recently hosted a Residential Air Conditioners (RAC) dealer meet in Muscat and Suhar.

Attended by a more than 200+ guests consisting of wholesalers, dealers and key buyers, the events were a resounding success.

The events served as a pivotal platform to promote Samsung's cutting-edge air conditioning solutions with products such as wind-free premium models and energy efficient inverter air conditioners.

One of the primary objectives of the channel partner meet was to empower and equip dealers with the knowledge and tools necessary to effectively market and sell Samsung air conditioners.

The events aimed to foster a deeper understanding of the key features that set Samsung AC units apart in the market, emphasising their reliability, energy efficiency, ease-of-use and advanced technological capabilities.

The key goal of the meet was to increase the product spectrum availability in the market and thereby grow the market share of Samsung air conditioners exponentially.

Further by ensuring a wider reach of Samsung air conditioning solutions across the Sultanate of Oman, also confirm that all solutions are readily available to cater the diverse needs of the consumers.

The KBM from Samsung, Mike Seo mentioned, "Our partnership with Mohsin Haider Darwish LLC (MHD-ITICS), has

helped us increase our market share in the IR channel. By introducing the new state of the art solutions, we aim to ensure that Samsung air conditioners become the preferred choice for air conditioning across Oman.

The insights shared and partnerships forged with the channel partners during this event, will be instrumental in propelling Samsung's market reach and solidifying our position as a leader in the air conditioning industry. Samsung remains committed to innovation and customer satisfaction."

The distinguished team from Samsung who graced the event included: Mike Seo — KBM for AC Business SGE, Ayman al Hamlawi — Head of AC Business SGE; Arun Kumar — Product Manager RAC, Abdallah Omari — Technical Manager SAC, Ismail Noorullah — Key Account Manager RAC. The meeting went beyond product-centric discussions and delved into strategic aspects of marketing and sales.

Participants engaged in fruitful discussions about effective marketing strategies and sales techniques to further enhance the promotion and sales of Samsung air conditioners. This was followed by lucky draws and several round of quizzes to keep the sessions more engaging.

Samsung air conditioners is distributed in the independent retailer network by Mohsin Haider Darwish LLC (MHD-ITICS).

MHD-ITICS has been a key player for air conditioning solutions in Oman with a wide sales network and service solutions availability.

Own any Toyota with exclusive Toyota For sure benefits

MUSCAT: Own your favourite Toyota from the vast range and get exclusive Toyota For Sure benefits. The benefits include service up to 5 years / 50,000 kms (whichever is earlier) and insurance of 1 year (depending on the models). Apart from that customers can also avail attractive instalments (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year.

EMI calculated are for base models with 20 per cent down payment for 10 years. Loan approval is based on the sole discretion of banks. Terms & Conditions apply. Customers can visit any Saud Bahwan Automotive showroom for exact details.)

In Oman the Toyota range includes popular models like the Toyota Land Cruiser which is available with attractive instalments starting from RO 206.

The Land Cruiser leads the pack with its powerful performance and inspiring capability. Powering the Land Cruiser is a choice of two powertrain options.

The popular pick-up choice of many in Oman — the Toyota Hilux is available as rugged Hilux with J-Deck and the sporty 4.0 Litre V6 Hilux Adventure with the A Deck. The 4.0 Litre V6 Toyota Hilux Adventure is a truly exciting mean machine that's been developed by Toyota to get



your pulse racing. The Toyota Crown is available with attractive instalments starting from RO 197.

The Toyota Crown with its exceptional design, stunning technology and a host of features is becoming popular with enthusiasts here in Oman. The Crown comes exclusively with a choice of two environment friendly powertrains.

The Toyota Camry is available with attractive instalments starting from RO 103. The reliable partner for many customer — the Toyota Camry is available with a choice of three powertrain options. They include a 2.5-litre four-cylinder Dynamic Force engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg.m

of torque which is paired with an eight-speed Direct-Shift Multi-mode automatic transmission.

The Toyota Yaris is available with attractive instalments starting from RO 60. Toyota Yaris promises a dynamic driving experience thanks to its four-cylinder engine that is equipped with 16-valve DOCH and dual VVT-I. The vehicle is available with 1.5-litre capacity engine that delivers smooth acceleration and a quick response, producing 105 horsepower and 138 Nm of torque with fuel consumption of 20.5 km/l.

Specifications of vehicle imported from Toyota Motor Corporation are as per the GSO

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

For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman, www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, and instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/. For any further details and to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Saud Bahwan Automotive Showroom.

OAB receives BNY Mellon's STP Excellence Award

MUSCAT: Oman Arab Bank (OAB) proudly announces its receipt of the 'Straight Through Processing' (STP) Excellence Award from the Bank of New York Mellon (BNY Mellon). This recognition, consistently earned since 2018, highlights OAB's leading position in the financial industry, emphasising its excellence in secure transaction processing and automotive processes.

Asma al Zadjali, Chief Banking Operations Officer at OAB, expressed her gratitude, stating, "We are honoured to be recognised by BNY Mellon for our excellence in STP. This award underscores our commitment to



customer service and integrating cutting-edge technology into our banking processes, further enhancing our position in the financial sector."

She added, "The accelerated pace of processing times is a notable advantage arising from OAB's embrace of automation. This enables transactions to be executed much faster than traditional manual processes."

OAB's innovations in automation lead to smoother experiences for its customers, including modification-free rates, instant transactions, and highly accurate outcomes.

The STP Excellence Award from BNY Mellon serves as a testament to how OAB leverages operational and technological excellence to deliver high-quality customer experience.

BankDhofar sustains customer value with innovative strategies

MUSCAT: BankDhofar, at the forefront of innovation in Oman's banking and financial services landscape, is dedicated to fostering sustainable growth for its customers through a comprehensive suite of cutting-edge financial solutions offered by its Investment Banking Division.

Comprised of a dynamic team of market-savvy professionals boasting leading-edge industry expertise, analytical acumen and compelling communication skills, the Investment Banking excels in assisting clients in realising their capital-raising objectives, M&A goals, investment funds and portfolio management and other strategic milestones.

The division's consistent success is underscored by its continuously expanding and diverse client base, encompassing startups to well-established corporations and inclusive of public and government sector organisations.

Demonstrating strategic proficiency in the structuring of project finance, the Investment Banking unit is widely acknowledged for its keen understanding of client needs.

Leveraging its robust relationships with



local and regional banks, the division adeptly arranges project finance and syndicated loans.

Crucial to its success is the ability to harness the formidable in-house network and professional expertise of its sister departments,

collectively reinforcing BankDhofar's dominant presence in Oman's financial services sector.

This seamless and integrated support empowers BankDhofar to provide best-of-breed financial solutions tailored to the specific requirements of its clients — all within challenging timeframes and cost commitments. Noteworthy among these offerings is the Corporate Finance department, renowned for its cutting-edge solutions in equity and debt capital markets, covering mergers and acquisitions, divestitures, equity placements, and various corporate finance needs.

Insights and inputs from corporate finance are instrumental in identifying ideal buyers, partners, or targets for client business interests. Additionally, their expertise is harnessed to support client funding requirements for debt and equity through the creation of optimal structures in a timely and efficient manner.

Further enriching the capabilities of the Investment Banking Division is the Asset Management Department, recognised for effectively managing client assets in a productive, profitable and sustainable manner.

Muzn introduces Tijarah account to empower businesses

MUSCAT: In a strategic move to empower businesses, National Bank of Oman Islamic Banking window Muzn has introduced Muzn Tijarah Account, providing a unique solution for its valued customers.

This Sharia-compliant product is designed to offer corporates, SMEs, charity organisations, and entrepreneurs an innovative solution to generate compelling returns on their excess cash reserves. Muzn Tijarah operates as a tiered profit-earning account allowing businesses to earn on every riyal deposited. As the deposited amount increases, so does the expected profit rate.

Salima al Marzooqi (pictured), Chief Islamic Banking Officer of Muzn, said: "We at Muzn, have been always at the forefront to empower businesses with innovative solutions for their ever-evolving needs.

We are delighted to introduce the Muzn Tijarah Account, presenting a distinctive solution for businesses to effectively manage liquidity or surplus funds in a lucrative manner. This initiative reflects our commitment to providing innovative and flexible banking solutions; empowering our customers to make the most of



their financial resources." Based on the principles of Wakalah bil Istithmar, the Muzn Tijarah account directs funds into a Sharia-compliant investment pool. Profit accrual on the daily closing balance is a unique feature of this account, with the earned profit credited at monthly intervals. Unlike traditional Wakala fixed deposit accounts, the Muzn Tijarah Account offers flexibility with no fixed maturity term and no withdrawal limits.

The Muzn Tijarah Account offers the advantage of higher profit rates as one increases their deposits. It serves as a flexible deposit account, with no minimum balance charges, providing a cost-effective solution for efficiently managing excess liquidity.

Muzn also offers the flexibility of linking a Tijarah account with the customer's current account.



ME's first low-carbon cement plant planned in Oman

CONRAD PRABHU

MUSCAT, JAN 14

A Spanish-based engineering firm has revealed that it has been contracted by an Omani client to supply a cement plant based on its innovative low-carbon cement technology.

Madrid-headquartered IPIAC said in a post that its LC3 cement plant — based on technology that prioritises the use of calcined clays over conventional clinker — will cut carbon emissions associated with cement production by around 40 per cent.

“Very proud that IPIAC will be pioneering the introduction of LC3 — Low Carbon Cement — in a new region of the world,” said Alberto Putin, General Manager — IPIAC, in the post. “IPIAC is now introducing this disruptive technology in Oman,



Cement production based on a blend of limestone and calcined clay is gaining traction as the global industry seeks to mitigate CO2 emissions.

which will be the first country in the Middle East region to use

calcined clays to reduce its clinker factor (to mitigate CO2 emissions

up to 40 per cent) in its cement and concrete production,” he

further noted.

According to experts, LC3 is a relatively new type of cement produced from a blend of limestone and low-grade clays found in abundance in many parts of the world, including the Sultanate of Oman.

Unlike clinker, which is produced in a kiln heated to temperatures ranging from 1,200 — 1,350 degrees C, calcined clays require temperatures of just 600 — 700 degrees.

Furthermore, cement and concrete made from this blend are found to be durable, cost-effective and hence more environmental sustainable.

IPIAC says it plans to ship the plant machinery for the Omani LC3 cement project in ‘plug and play’ mode, with all parts and equipment assembled in flat-rack containers.

The plant manufacturer is credited with conceptualising and establishing the first LC3 pilot project in Cuba, and the first greenfield plant in the Ivory Coast in 2020. It is currently developing a calcined clay plant in Angola.

Underscoring surging global interest in LC3 based cement production, the COP28 UAE Presidency last month named Swiss-based École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL), a pioneer in LC3 production, as one its Energy Transition Change-makers in the Heavy Emitting Sectors category.

LC3, says the Swiss institute, has the potential to eliminate 500 million tonnes/year of global CO2 emission by 2030.

Around nine plants around the world currently produce LC3 cement, with a further 20 planned before 2025, according to EPFL.

Nazdaher facilitates RO 828m investment opportunities in Oman

FROM PAGE 13

These proactive steps fostered fruitful partnerships with local banks and financial institutions, leading to the signing of 14 strategic technical cooperation agreements.

Moreover, Nazdaher addressed critical challenges faced by investors by establishing the fast-track team, operating from the Invest Oman lounge.

This dedicated team swiftly addresses concerns and obstacles, ensuring a seamless

business experience for investors in Oman.

Nazdaher's tireless efforts also contributed to the mining sector's growth and development.

The programme oversaw the signing of 12 pivotal concession agreements, paving the way for strategic advancements in this vital industry.

Additionally, cooperation between Nazdaher, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning ensured efficient allocation of land plots, further supporting investment initiatives.

With a proactive investment marketing approach, Nazdaher engaged in 150 meetings with potential investors, resulting in 39 companies expressing interest in investing in Oman.

Furthermore, 14 companies advanced to later stages of negotiation, highlighting the success of the programme's targeted methodology. Thirteen letters of investment intent were signed, indicating a promising outlook for the Sultanate of Oman's economic landscape.

OPAZ organises certified innovation training programme for employees



The programme aims to provide participants with a basic understanding of science.

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) organised the training programme titled “Certified Innovation Professional”.

In addition to professional skills in innovation and development, the programme aims to provide participants with a basic understanding of science.

The design and structure of this vocational training programme reflects OPAZ's conviction that it is critical to certify its professional cadres and offer a welcoming workplace that fosters kindness and creativity. Given the global changes in the business world, programme participants received training on a range of foundational skills related to business innovation.

These included managing innovation projects and their various forms, maximising the use of creativity, coming up with ideas and brainstorming, and attaining best practices in professional training. Employees also received training on how to create open horizons that can lead to success in the workplace and how to design and use innovation spaces.

The five-day training programme was attended by several staff members from OPAZ and the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. OPAZ has designated training programmes for staff members in the training plan for 2024 with the aim of enhancing and qualifying these skills and competencies.

MSX launches liquidity provider service

MUSCAT: The Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) celebrated the inauguration of its liquidity provider service as part of the Market Making Initiative, in collaboration with the National Programme for Financial Sustainability.

The CEO of the Muscat Stock Exchange, Haitham bin Salem al Salmi, explained that the aim of the service is to create liquidity for selected and agreed-upon stocks.

The Muscat Stock Exchange aims to enhance stock liquidity, ensuring that there are always stocks available for purchase and sale in the chosen securities.

This service is a crucial step towards upgrading the Muscat Stock Exchange to an emerging exchange by meeting the essential requirements, with liquidity being one of the key factors.

Currently, the Muscat Stock Exchange is actively working with listed companies, especially those with significant market



MSX officials and guests ring the bell for the inauguration of liquidity provider service.

capitalisation, to provide this service. Additionally, there are plans to establish dedicated funds to enhance liquidity in the upcoming days.

Mustafa Ahmed Salman, Chairman of the United Securities

LLC, highlighted that the liquidity provider is a mechanism for stock trading.

It enables the daily presentation of buying and selling offers with a spread of approximately 2 per cent between bid and ask. This

THE MUSCAT STOCK EXCHANGE AIMS TO ENHANCE STOCK LIQUIDITY, ENSURING THAT THERE ARE ALWAYS STOCKS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE AND SALE IN THE CHOSEN SECURITIES.

contributes to generating good trading volumes for the stocks.

Furthermore, it is expected to lead to positive stock price movements, improved liquidity, attract new investors, and facilitate the listing of these stocks in global markets.

Salman emphasised the numerous advantages of the liquidity provider service and expressed hope that other companies would soon adopt and use this service.

He mentioned that this service has already been successfully implemented in global markets and some regional markets, serving stock exchanges significantly. — **ONA**

SHORT TAKES

NEW DELHI

India, US seek to bolster trade ties

India and the United States have agreed to bolster trade ties and deepen cooperation in areas such as critical minerals, the United States Trade Representative Katherine Tai (pictured) said on Saturday.

India's trade minister Piyush Goyal and Tai held their annual trade policy talks in New Delhi on January 12. Tai is on a three-day visit to India. During talks between Tai and Goyal, India said it was interested in a bilateral critical mineral



partnership.

Washington and New Delhi would exchange information to deepen their partnership in this area, said an official, who didn't wish to be named as discussions are not public. — **Reuters**

BUCHAREST

Romanians protest about subsidies and taxes

Romanian farmers and truck drivers continued sporadic protests across the country on Sunday as negotiations with the coalition government over high insurance rates and slow subsidy payments resumed.

Convoys of tractors and trucks began gathering five days ago on national roads slowing or blocking traffic.

Farmers and hauliers also briefly blocked a border crossing with Ukraine in northeastern Romania.

They are demanding the government address high insurance premia and excise levels on diesel fuel, loan moratoriums, the time taken to pay farm subsidies and drought damages as well as technical measures to reduce long waiting times at border crossings.

Truckers have also asked that lorries coming from the EU have a separate line at border crossings and in Constanta port than trucks from outside the bloc, including Ukraine. — **Reuters**

WASHINGTON

US banking giants shed over 17,000 employees

Wells Fargo, Bank of America and Citigroup reduced their workforces by a combined 17,700 last year.

As dealmaking dried up and demand from borrowers softened last year, banks laid off employees or stopped replacing those who left. JPMorgan Chase, the nation's largest lender, bucked the trend by bolstering its ranks for a third straight year.

Challenging times for the industry could persist this year



as weakness in commercial real estate and tougher proposed capital rules could prompt banks to pull back on lending. Wall Street businesses suffered last year as economic uncertainty weighed on dealmaking. — **AFP**

EU's energy security drive may have gone too far



LISA JUCCA

The writer is Breakingviews' European Business Editor. Based in Italy, she focuses on key corporate trends across the European Union.

Europe may have overplayed its energy security strategy. President Vladimir Putin's 2022 attack on Ukraine exposed the European Union's heavy dependence on cheap gas imported from Russia, chiefly via pipelines.

To address the imbalance, the bloc rushed to add facilities to import liquefied natural gas (LNG)

by sea from friendlier nations. But with renewable power set to depress fossil fuel demand, some of the newly built infrastructure risks becoming redundant.

Putin's invasion of Ukraine created a seismic energy shock. The year before the invasion, Europe imported some 155 billion cubic metres (bcm) of discounted Russian gas, representing around 40% of its total gas consumption of 412 bcm, according to European Commission data.

Drastically cutting reliance on Moscow's fuel, as EU nations agreed to do in March 2022, called for a Plan B. After identifying LNG as a key part of the energy mix, Europe rushed to upscale its capacity to turn billions of cubic metres of LNG imports, chiefly from the United States, back into a usable gaseous form.

By and large, this has been a success. Putin's gamble that the EU would crack and collapse under the costly challenge of keeping its population warm and its factories open did not work.

Between the start of the war and August 2023, the 27-nation bloc added six LNG terminals to its pre-existing network of around 20 regasification facilities and expanded one French site, according to the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis' (IEEFA) LNG tracker. That has added 36.5 bcm of regasification capacity.

The rush to secure sufficient gas means the EU may end up with 19 more LNG terminals in 2030 than in 2022.

All this is despite the fact that the region is likely to continue to rely on pipeline imports from Norway, North Africa and Azerbaijan for the bulk of its gas requirements, and also on some local production.

Building a bit of a gas import buffer makes sense. Demand for the fossil fuel during the colder winter months can be double what the continent needs in the summer.

LNG also offers more flexibility on imports and prices than

pipeline gas. And Europe is not alone in adding liquefaction capacity to ensure energy security.

The International Energy Agency believes LNG projects under construction globally will add 250 bcm to the world's annual liquefaction capacity by 2030, almost 50% more than the 540 bcm approximate level of LNG traded in 2022.

The augmented global capacity should prevent a repeat of the 2022 energy crisis in Europe, when prices of the benchmark Title Transfer Facility contract for next-month delivery spiked to above 300 euros per megawatt hour, 10 times higher than the current 31 euros per megawatt hour, LSEG data show.

But infrastructure overabundance raises question marks about the financial viability of all the LNG terminals countries put on the launchpad during the energy crisis, chiefly with taxpayers' money.

In Italy, which depended on Moscow for around 40% of its gas imports, \$17.5 billion Milan-listed gas network operator Snam has invested over 1 billion euros to acquire and install two floating LNG terminals off the coast of Tuscany and in Ravenna.

Those investments, however, may turn out to be a bit of a waste. It's one thing to have a buffer against future energy shocks, but if countries treble their renewable energy capacity and move away from fossil fuels already this decade, as agreed in December at the COP28 meeting, gas demand may fall more rapidly. Europe might then need even less LNG import capacity.

Infrastructure projects tend to repay their big upfront costs with decades of cash flows. Were these not to materialise, the likes of Snam could face impairments. So could port company Buss Group, buyout fund Partners Group, \$4.5 billion Spanish energy firm Enagas and \$38 billion US giant Dow, which have invested in the construction of the onshore Hanseatic Energy Hub in the German city of Stade, slated to be ready in 2027.

Berlin might have to explain to taxpayers why it is doing the same.

LNG's public and private investors do have some cause for comfort. Governments could sell or lease back the floating LNG facilities they have installed, perhaps to Far East Asian or Indian players.

Investors could also repurpose onshore terminals to operate them with low-carbon hydrogen or ammonia, or use them for carbon capture. And if the pace of decarbonisation is inadequate, the need for gas will stay elevated.

Still, if regasification capacity greatly outstrips demand, offloading the LNG terminals may have to come at a discount. Hydrogen has potential, but may only become a commercially viable and scalable alternative for gas by 2050, Deloitte reckons.

To avoid having to deal with stranded gas infrastructure, European governments may need to consider scaling back some of their projects now. — **Reuters**

What the global economy and security require

The global order is undergoing significant changes that demand a new economic-security agenda. From hot wars and localised insurgencies to great-power standoffs, geopolitical conflict has made the complex relationship between economics and security a daily concern for ordinary people everywhere.

Complicating matters even more is the fact that emerging markets are gaining economic clout and directly challenging traditional powers' longstanding dominance through new networks and strategic alliances.

These developments alone would have made this a tumultuous period marked by economic instability, inflation, and supply-chain disruptions.

But one also must account for rapid technological advances — which have introduced new security risks (such as arms races and cyber threats) — as well as natural risks such as pandemics and climate change.

To navigate this dangerous new world, we must reckon with three interrelated dimensions: the effects of geopolitics on the global economy; the influence of global economic relations on national security; and the relationship between global economic competition and overall prosperity.

Each pathway sheds light on the multifaceted interplay between economics and security. We will need to understand all of them if we are to tackle the varied and complex challenges presented by our highly interconnected global system.

As recent years have shown, geopolitics can profoundly affect the global economy, reshaping trade, investment flows, and policies sometimes almost overnight. Aside from their devastating human toll, wars like the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Israel's campaign in Gaza often reverberate far beyond the immediate theater of conflict.

For example, Western-led sanctions on Russia, and the disruption of Ukrainian grain exports through the Black Sea,



CARLA NORRLÖF

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caused energy and food prices to soar, resulting in supply insecurity and inflation on a global scale.

Moreover, China has deepened its economic relationship with Russia following the mass exodus of Western firms in 2022 and 2023.

Similarly, Israel's bombing of Gaza has destabilised the entire Middle East, especially tourism-dependent neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. Meanwhile, Yemeni Ansar Allah rebels, have been attacking cargo ships in the Red Sea, leading international shipping firms to suspend or adjust their routes, and directly impeding trade through the Suez Canal — a major artery of global commerce.

We are witnessing the destabilising effects of natural threats as well. The Covid-19 pandemic drove a massive shift away from cost-effective "just-in-time" supply chains to a "just-in-case" model aimed at strengthening resilience during disruptions. And, more recently, an El Niño-induced drought has diminished the capacity of the Panama Canal — another major artery of global commerce.

Whether for geopolitical or ecological reasons, rerouting around these new bottlenecks inevitably increases shipping



Israel's bombing of Gaza has destabilised the entire Middle East, especially tourism-dependent neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon.

IF AMERICA AND ITS ALLIES ARE TO MAXIMISE BOTH SECURITY AND PROSPERITY IN THE COMING YEARS, POLICYMAKERS AND STRATEGISTS WILL HAVE TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEX INTERPLAY OF FORCES THAT IS MAKING THE WORLD MORE ADVERSARIAL AND FRAUGHT WITH RISK. THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT DEMANDS A COMPREHENSIVE NEW ECONOMIC-SECURITY AGENDA.

costs, causes delivery delays, disrupts global supply chains, and creates inflationary pressure.

Turning to the second dimension — the implications of global economic relations for national security — it is clear that countries will be more likely to adopt bold or aggressive security policies if they already have a web of economic ties that can either attract support or dampen opposition.

China, for example, is counting on economically dependent countries within its Belt and Road Initiative to accept its political influence and longer-term bid for hegemony. Many countries also now rely on China for critical defence-related supply-chain components, which leaves them vulnerable diplomatically and militarily.

More broadly, global connectivity, in the form of economic networks and infrastructure, is increasingly

technology transfers, intellectual-property theft, and reverse engineering.

The third dimension — the relationship between global economic competition and prosperity — has been complicated by these first two dynamics, because the pursuit of material well-being now must be weighed against security considerations.

Discussions in this area thus centre around the concept of economic security, meaning stable incomes and a reliable supply of the resources needed to support a given standard of living. Both Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan and President Joe Biden's "Build Back Better" plan reflect concerns that economic relations with China harm US prosperity.

The challenge for the US and its allies is to manage the tensions between these varying economic and security objectives.

There is a potential conflict between adapting to market- and geopolitically-driven shifts in economic power and sustaining the economic strength to finance a military force capable of protecting the global economy.

The US, as the dominant power, must remain both willing and capable of preserving an open, rules-based global economy and a peaceful international order.

That will require additional investments in military capabilities and alliances to counteract territorial aggression and safeguard sea lanes, as well as stronger environmental policies and frameworks to distribute global economic gains according to market principles.

By attempting to mitigate security risks through deglobalisation (reshoring, onshoring, and "friend-shoring"), we risk adding to the economic and security threats presented by a more fragmented world.

Though economic ties with rivals can create dangerous dependencies, they also can act as a safeguard against hostility.

All governments will need to grapple with these tensions as they develop a new economic-security agenda. The world is quickly becoming more adversarial and fraught with risk. To maximise both security and prosperity, we will have to understand the complex interplay of forces that are creating it.



Ghana agrees debt restructuring deal with official creditors

ACCRA: Ghana has reached a deal to restructure \$5.4 billion of loans with its official creditors, the finance ministry said on Friday, a milestone in the country's quest for debt relief as it charts its way out of the worst economic crisis in a generation.

The agreement with bilateral lenders including China and France was key to unlocking new International Monetary Fund (IMF) financing and will allow Ghana to access another \$600 million under its \$3 billion bailout programme.

IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva welcomed the announcement in a statement, adding the agreement "clears the path for IMF Executive Board consideration" of the first review of Ghana's program.

The West African country, which defaulted on most of its overseas debt in December 2022 after debt servicing costs soared, restructured most of its local debt and also needs to reach a deal with private holders of about \$13 billion in international bonds.

"Thank you to our bilateral creditors for their support & cooperation, that has today



An image of Ghana Commercial Bank.

enabled us to reach agreement with our Official Creditors on comprehensive debt treatment under the G20 Common Framework," the office of Finance

Minister Ken Ofori-Atta said on X.

The ministry later published a statement saying terms were "expected to be formalised in a

memorandum of understanding" which will be dealt with bilaterally with all creditors.

An index tracking Ghana's bonds had rallied this week,

more than recovering the early year losses, partly as the market anticipated an agreement. Spreads in the benchmark index tightened to 2,828 basis points from 2,964 a week ago.

The ministry said the agreement will support ongoing engagements with bondholders and other commercial creditors.

"The Ghana agreement is in line with our expectations that we will see a number of EM countries emerge from default in 2024," said Shamaila Khan, head of fixed income for emerging markets and Asia Pacific at UBS Asset Management.

"Distressed EM sovereign hard currency debt will continue to be a sector that outperforms this year," she added.

CUT-OFF KEY

There was no mention of the "cut-off date" - the date after which new loans signed with bilateral creditors will not be restructured — which emerged recently as a stumbling block to an agreement.

Two sources said earlier on Friday that Ghana's official creditors had agreed to restructure debts that were extended to the

country up until December 2022.

The gold and cocoa producer aims to cut \$10.5 billion from its external debt repayments and interest costs that were due from 2023 to 2026 and implement an IMF reform programme.

Ghana first sent "working proposals" for the debt restructuring to the official creditor committee in June 2023, having been locked out of international capital markets and seeing inflation spiral in the lead-up to its default.

Ghana is aiming to restructure \$20 billion out of total external debt that was about \$30 billion at the end of 2022, according to a government presentation to investors.

The debt is being restructured under the Common Framework, a process set up during the Covid-19 pandemic by the Group of 20 economies.

Chad, Ethiopia and Zambia have also made debt relief requests under the platform, which has seen slow talks due to coordination issues and disagreements over assessing comparability of treatment between different types of creditors. — Reuters

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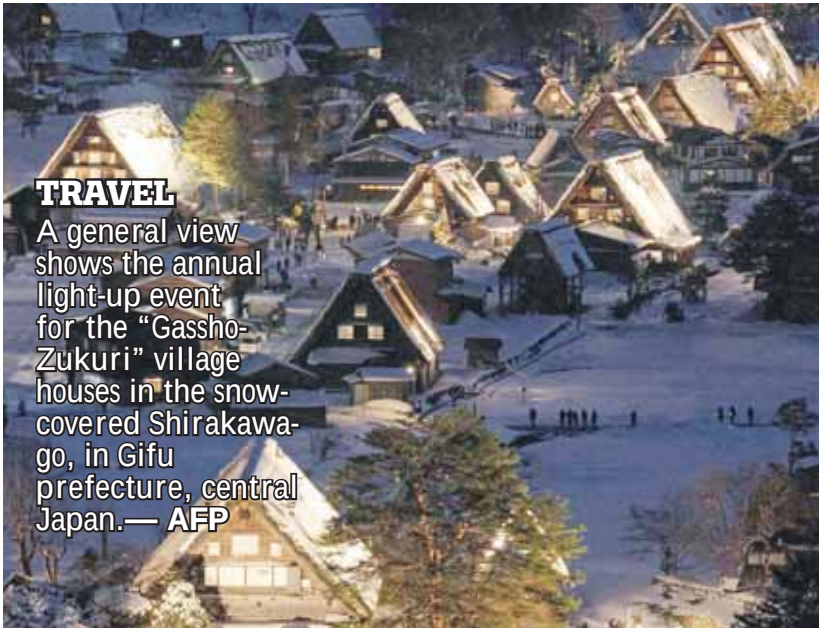
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LIFESTYLE
A participant flies a kite resembling a hawk during a kite festival held in New Delhi. — AFP



TRAVEL
A general view shows the annual light-up event for the "Gassho-Zukuri" village houses in the snow-covered Shirakawa-go, in Gifu prefecture, central Japan.— AFP



FASHION
Bollywood actors Farhan Khan and Shibani Dandekar pose for photographs during the wedding reception ceremony of actor Amir Khan's daughter, Ira Khan, in Mumbai. —AFP



MUSIC
Figure of French organised crime, who became a writer, director, musician and luthier upon his release Frank Henry aka Frankus or l'Armurier poses during a photo session in Paris. — AFP



PHOTOGRAPHY
A woman poses for photos at the beach as the sun sets in the Kerobokan district on Indonesia's resort island of Bali. — AFP

art & life

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Omani wildlife exhibition 'Hidden Nature' held

BALQEES AL ORAIMI

AN Omani wildlife exhibition titled 'Hidden Nature' hosted by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in strategic partnership with the Omani Society for Arts, opened on January 8, Monday. The exhibition was held under the auspices of Azzan bin Qasim al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism. The exhibition includes 51 artistic paintings. Two themes of Omani wildlife, 'Insects' and 'Reptiles', saw the participation of seven Omani photographers

who are experts in photographing wildlife, and paintings displayed with scientific names registered in scientific institutions in the Sultanate of Oman. The exhibition will last for two weeks. The participation of several artists includes the display of live specimens and the presentation of research papers on wildlife. Ahmed al Busaidy presented a lecture on Omani snakes explaining their types and methods of dealing with them. The exhibition also includes a practical workshop for photographers and in close-up photography presented by professional photographers.





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How to get fit without going broke



IF YOU HAVE a limitless budget, there is no question that you can get into shape. You can hire top-flight trainers, buy yourself a Peloton or a Tonal smart gym, and then splurge on bikes, kayaks and windsurfing gear.

For most of us, though, shelling out thousands of dollars on fitness equipment isn't practical, especially if you suspect it will end up in a dusty closet once your New Year's resolution wears off. But here's a little secret: Getting in shape doesn't have to cost a fortune.

"I can go to the beach for free," said Milo Bryant, a trainer based in San Diego. "I can pick up some hundred-pound rocks and carry them." Bryant (who has also been known to push cars for a workout — he recommended mid-size sedans for beginners, only on flat surfaces) said bear crawls are another great, cheap exercise. "You do bear crawls going down steps, your upper body is dying by the end," he said.

Bryant noted that he eventually had to start working out at night to avoid all the stares as he lugged rocks around and crawled on steps. But there are plenty of other ways to get a solid workout for less money than a trip to TGI Fridays.

BUILD A CHEAP HOME GYM.

There is a reason every good "Rocky" movie has a jump rope scene: It's an incredible workout. A \$10 jump rope might be the single best cheap workout tool there is.

Try a Tabata-style routine, with 20 seconds on and 10 seconds off, and see if you can go for 10 or 20 minutes. For more upper body work, try weighted ropes, between a half pound and 1 pound to start.

Those who don't feel comfortable jumping can let the rope hit the ground and then step over it, said Gwen Gates, a coach at the Logan Health Medical Fitness Center in Kalispell, Montana. "Someone who's maybe rehab-



bing an injury," she said, "it's going to get your heart rate up, because you're taking your knees up."

Battle ropes are another great way to work the arms and get some cardio with little risk of injury. And while most tend to start at \$50, nothing is stopping you from making one with supplies from the hardware store.

If you want to do bench presses, dead lifts and curls but don't have space or the budget for barbells, consider using exercise bands, like the ones physical therapists often use. A full set shouldn't cost more than

\$20 and the only limit to their uses is your imagination.

Bryant likes to put a set around his ankles or knees, then put his hands on the floor with another band around his wrists, and walk sideways, stretching them as he goes.

"I start everybody off with the yellows because the yellows are typically the easiest ones," he said, adding, "You want to be able to move."

Kettlebell workouts are popular these days, but the weights tend to be pricey. So Brad Roy, who works with Gates and is the editor of the American College of Sports Medicine's

Health & Fitness Journal, suggested medicine balls instead. They can be used in similarly dynamic moves and start around \$20, though it's important to get instruction from a trainer to avoid injury.

Gates suggested picking an amount of weight that you can hold in front of you during a squat. Once you feel comfortable with that, try squatting while holding the ball above your head.

UP YOUR WALKING GAME.

Want to really get back to basics? Try an approach that dates back to the Pleistocene. What our ancestors called

"walking or running with weight on your back," and what we now call rucking, is one of the easiest ways to build strength, stamina and muscular endurance while taking the dog for a stroll or buying a loaf of bread. Fancy rucking backpacks start at around \$100, but you can achieve the same thing by just putting a few books or water bottles in whatever backpack you have.

If you happen to find some pullup bars or other exercise tools on your walk, leave the backpack on while you use them. If not, find a playground. Bryant said there are hundreds of exercises you can do on a playground, from step-ups to tricep dips. If you don't have a playground, he said, try walking backward up a slope. This will target your quads, and small studies suggest it may improve balance, stability and overall fitness more than walking forward.

You could also try walking with poles, Roy suggested. These start at around \$25 and make great exercise for the arms and shoulders as you push down on them and propel yourself forward, he said. They're just as useful on a sidewalk as they are on a trail. Make sure they are adjusted so that your forearms are parallel to the ground and your elbows are at 90-degree angles.

For people who are considering walking with a cane, Roy often recommends trying one or two trekking poles instead, which encourage better posture than leaning over a cane.

Lastly, Roy added, if you want to pick up the pace and you have access to a tennis court, you might try pickleball, which starts at \$30 for paddles and balls (though \$100 gets you a better set).

Among older adults especially, pickleball builds hand-eye coordination and improves balance, to say nothing of the fitness benefits, he said. "It's an awesome activity." — **NYT**

Spotlight on nature and cinema at Al Ghafa International Film Festival in Musandam

RUQAYA AL KINDI

The activities of the Al Ghafa International Film Festival for Environment and Climate are being held from January 15 to 18 in Musandam Governorate.

Held under the auspices of Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Governor of Musandam, the festival is organised by Dreams Art Production, a centre specialising in dramatic and artistic cinematic production for over two decades.

Jassim al Battashi, the Head of the festival, says the festival aims to 'Enhance awareness among those working in cinema as well as the public about the importance of climate change and environmental preservation.'

He adds that the "festival also seeks to promote Oman and enhance its role in serving the environment at the global level and among international organisations. It also seeks to create generations who innovate in producing artistic works that serve the environment and climate."

Al Battashi points out that the festival is considered the first of its kind in the Gulf and the Arab region, specialising entirely in the field of environment and climate. The targeted topics are many and these include pollution, climate change, food security, waste management, forest fires, plastic damage, environmental sustainability topics, soil degradation, air pollution, renewable energy, desertification, water pollution, wildlife, marine environment, nature and mountains, cities and rural areas, environmental solutions and innovations.

The festival includes various activities and will be attended by researchers, specialists, media professionals, and artists from inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The second day sees the launch of the scientific and artistic symposium under the slogan 'Cinema and The Magic of Nature, Musandam National Park.' It will be held under the auspices of the Governor of Musandam, and several specialists will participate. The topics presented will be namely 'Natural Reserves and Climate Change,' 'Climate Change and its Impact on the Water Sector', 'Utilising Cinema in Serving the Environment,' and 'Environment and Climate in the Artistic Works.'

The festival hosts experts from outside the Sultanate of Oman to share their countries' experiences in this field. 'The efforts of Qatar in eco-tourism' and 'The Saudi environmental initiatives and their impact on the Gulf Cooperation Council,' will also be presented.

The festival will be accompanied by a screening of the short films that qualified in the competitions launched last January on the festival's social media platforms (@ghafa_film). All attendees will have the opportunity to watch documentaries, feature films, and animation films that innovatively discuss environmental and climate issues.

The Omani Astronomical Society will participate in the astronomical observatory event during the festival days, where the public will have the opportunity to experience the astronomical observatory to view the sun, moon, and stars.

The photography art exhibition 'Features of the Nature of Musandam' will also be opened and a folk heritage exhibition will be held with the participation of the Omani Women's Association in Khasab. Dr Wafa al Shamsi, writer and researcher, will participate in a training workshop to enable the participant to master the skill of creative writing in the field of the environment in a way that serves the Omani identity.



There will be cultural tours through which guests can learn about Musandam Governorate, its culture, history, and picturesque nature. The festival activities conclude on January 18, Thursday.

Al Battashi mentions the reason for choosing Al Ghafa to be the festival symbol as it is considered one of the perennial local trees that endures difficulties and grows in various terrains. "According to studies published for a period ranging from 200 to 300 years and more, Omani people in particular have a deep connection to this tree. It is very famous and cherished by Omanis and some Gulf countries, and hence chosen as a unique main theme for the festival," he adds.