

Strategy launched to drive digitalisation

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the nation's largest oil and gas producer, says it is leading a cross-sector effort to accelerate digitalisation across industry in the Sultanate of Oman. The pan-industry strategy is a joint initiative of government entities and industrial organisations, according to Dr Rajaa al Kiyumi, IT Infrastructure Projects Delivery Lead at PDO. **SEE P13**



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OMAN OBSERVER

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MALAYSIA'S LIM APPOINTED AS SULTANATE OF OMAN HOCKEY HEAD COACH



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CHINA'S PROPERTY DISTRESS SOURS STEEL SECTOR



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A SIMPLE GUIDE WHEN HIKING IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY BELGIUM KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of thanks from King Philippe of the Kingdom of Belgium in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on his country's National Day. In the cable, King Philippe expressed his utmost appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan's sincere sentiments, wishing him good health and well-being.

— ONA

ISLAMABAD

'AFGHANS DESERVE TO BE SUPPORTED'

The Sultanate of Oman participated in the extraordinary session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states' Ministerial Council, held to discuss the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. "Afghan people deserve to be supported at this delicate political juncture and the Sultanate of Oman is working hand-in-hand with other members of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to find the best ways to help Afghanistan and its people and back all measures undertaken by the OIC to handle the situation, Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Diplomatic Affairs Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry and head of Sultanate of Oman's delegation, said. **SEE P2**

HISTORY OF THE LAND



The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has extended the exhibition on the Geological Heritage of the Sultanate of Oman themed 'Sustainability and Job Opportunities' until January 15, 2022. The exhibition held in the Museum of the Frankincense Land in Salalah is organised by the ministry in cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman and Geological Society of Oman. **SEE P3**

COVID-19 INFECTIONS RISING, 60 CASES IN 3 DAYS

ZAINAB AL NASSRI @zainabalnassri

For the 40th day in a row no deaths related to Covid-19 were reported in the Sultanate of Oman, yet, infections continue to rise, as the Ministry of Health recorded 60 new cases of the virus in last 3 days, bringing the total number of cases registered in the country to 304,843 cases.

The number of new inpatients in hospitals stood at zero, keeping the total number of inpatients 9, of which 2 are in intensive care. On Saturday, the World Health Organization said that 89 countries had detected infections with the Omicron mutant of the coronavirus, adding that the number of infections doubled within a day and a half and three days in areas experiencing a local outbreak.

It said in a statement that Omicron is spreading rapidly in countries with high levels of vaccination in the population, yet, it was not clear whether the cause was the ability of the virus to resist the vaccine, its increased ability to spread, or both. Regarding the effectiveness of vaccinations, experts said that the person recovering from a previous infection is estimated to be protected from infection by only 20 per cent and the recipient of two doses of the vaccine will be protected from infection only by about 30-35 per cent , but from severe infection by 70 per cent .

Omicron less efficient at attacking lungs

LONDON: British research has found Omicron might be less efficient at attacking the lungs than earlier Covid-19 variants. The Cambridge Institute of Therapeutic Immunology and Infectious Disease study concluded mutations on the virus's spike protein, which makes it able to avoid antibodies, may also reduce how it replicates in the lungs and causes severe disease. "These observations highlight that Omicron has gained immune evasion properties whilst compromising on properties associated with replication and pathogenicity," the study's abstract stated. Study leader Ravi Gupta, a professor of clinical microbiology at Cambridge, said there are still challenges ahead despite the seemingly positive findings. — dpa

Dr Zaid al Hinai, a Consultant on Paediatric Infectious Diseases at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, said: "With the emergence of the Omicron strain, the two doses of the vaccine lost a large part of its ability to reduce the spread of the virus, and a small part of its ability to protect against severe infection. The (third) booster dose restores this protection significantly, and therefore its role is important in the continuing pandemic control and risk reduction."

Changes in PCR rules for travel

STAFF REPORTER Muscat, Dec 19

The Civil Aviation Authority issued a new circular on the travel between the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates to all airline operators as per the Civil Aviation Law. The circular stated that the citizens of the Sultanate of Oman and the UAE when travelling between the two countries will be required to register in emushrif.om by uploading the Covid-19 vaccination certificate and a negative result of Covid-19 PCR test conducted within 14 days prior to the scheduled time of arrival in the Sultanate of Oman.



The other conditions include that aircraft operators shall verify that any passenger travelling to the Sultanate of Oman has met the requirements. Air operators shall notify the passengers, prior to arrival, to prepare their documents for verification by the immigration and upon request by the airport's staff. Aircraft operators shall be

fined in the event of carrying a passenger who has not met the travel requirements to the Sultanate of Oman. For other travellers, if vaccinated, will have to present a negative result of the PCR test, or a reservation for Covid-19 PCR test upon arrival to the Sultanate of Oman. Registration in the emushrif.om is mandatory. If not vaccinated, a negative result of PCR test must be provided, reservation for PCR test upon arrival to the Sultanate of Oman and confirmed reservation of institutional quarantine except for Omanis and other categories excluded from the institutional quarantine.



INSIDE



RALLY IN SUDAN 3 YEARS AFTER PEOPLE REVOLT STARTED

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DUTCH STREETS DESERTED AS SNAP COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

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Investment in agri-fishery sector to generate 1,600 jobs

KABEER YOUSUF @kabeeryousef

As many as 1,600 Omanis can look forward to work with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAF-WR), according to the General Directorate of Animal Wealth at the Ministry. The ministry has earlier announced a total investment for all RO 411 million in 29 which will create more employment opportunities. Out of these,

as many as 11 projects are in poultry and animal husbandry. "These initiatives will also enhance the food investment sector in the Sultanate, which has witnessed significant growth over the past years," Dr Saud bin Hammoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture Fisheries and Water Resources, has said. Besides, village-based agriculture and fisheries industries and home-based poultry businesses will be receiving a major boost as the ministry's



RO 12 million investment in the agricultural sector is implemented, according to the sources at the Poultry Projects Development Department at the Ministry. A number of projects which are expected to begin production in the coming months based on the nature of the initiatives will also create 316 job opportunities for Omanis, according to the Director General of Animal Wealth at the ministry. "The four agreements signed

last week aim to invest in the agricultural sector to enhance food resources in the Sultanate of Oman through the use of modern agricultural technologies," said Eng Khalfan al Shargi, General Director of Animal wealth at the ministry. "There are 4 projects currently identified in order to provide the support out of which two are for animal wealth. Rabbit rearing and another one for ruminants, sheep and goats are currently under the pipeline," he added.



Afghan people ‘deserve to be supported’ at this juncture

Sultanate of Oman attends OIC extraordinary session on Afghanistan

ISLAMABAD: The Sultanate of Oman participated in the 17th extraordinary session of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states’ Ministerial Council, held here to discuss the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

The Omani delegation was headed by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Diplomatic

Affairs Under-Secretary at the Foreign Ministry.

Al Harthy gave a speech in which he affirmed that the “Afghan people deserve to be supported at this delicate political juncture”.

The Sultanate of Oman is working hand-in-hand with other members of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to find the best ways

to help Afghanistan and its people and back all measures undertaken by the OIC to handle the situation, said Al Harthy. The Ministerial Council underscored its member states’ solidarity with the Afghans in their endeavours to establish peace and enjoy unity, stability, sovereignty and prosperity.

The Council urged OIC

member states and the international community to concentrate on providing quick humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people. The Sultanate of Oman’s delegation included Shaikh Mohammed bin Omar al Marhoon, Sultanate of Oman’s Ambassador to Pakistan and officials at the Foreign Ministry.

— ONA

Cooperation with Hungary reviewed



MUSCAT: Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ashshura, received Dr Tibor Szatmári, Ambassador of Hungary to the Sultanate of Oman, at the premises of Majlis Ashshura, on Sunday.

Al Nadabi commended the developed bilateral relations between the two friendly countries.

The meeting discussed aspects of cooperation between the Sultanate of Oman and Hungary in various fields, especially those related to legislation. It also discussed the visit of László Kövér, Speaker of the National Assembly of Hungary to the Sultanate of Oman during the upcoming period.

During the meeting, Al Nadabi briefed the ambassador about the march of Majlis Ashshura and its legislative development especially with the issuance of the Basic Law and the Law of the Council of Oman. He also spoke about the role played by Majlis Ashshura through its office, standing committees and the General-Secretariat to realise its objectives.

The ambassador praised the development witnessed by the Sultanate of Oman in all fields under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, looking forward to the relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Hungary witnessing further progress and prosperity.

RNO-PAKISTAN NAVY DRILL



MUSCAT: The Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) concluded its participation in the naval drill (Al Thamar Attayyib), which was carried out jointly with the Pakistani naval forces from December 13 to 18. The drill comes within the framework of the RNO’s annual training plans, aiming at exchanging expertise with friendly countries to sustain the readiness level of the RNO fleet and personnel on various marine disciplines in line with their national tasks. — ONA

‘Light Forum’ helps CAS students brighten photography skills

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, DEC 19

The Photography Group of the Student Services Centre at the College of Applied Sciences in Nizwa organised the first Light Forum recently. The three-day programme included a range of activities including an exhibition, a practical workshop, and various competitions.

The opening ceremony of the exhibition and the launch of the group’s official logo were held under the auspices of Dr Mohammad bin Juma al Kharousi, Dean of the college. Members of the academic, support and administrative bodies, and a number of students participated.

The exhibition included 55 images distributed over six different types of photography: black and white, foods, portrait, products, buildings, and nature.

The Akasah shop participated in the exhibition, which gave information on the types of cameras and equipment



associated with them. The exhibition also had studio for photographing guests and visitors.

A practical workshop on Photoshop, led by photographer Mohammed al Shueili, introduced many applications to edit images using the tool. The preparations one needs to make before taking a photograph, the importance of adjusting the background to enhance

quality of the image and other such technical aspects were discussed. The participants tried to practise what they learned at the workshop.

The forum’s activities included a Short Video Challenge competition, which required shooting and editing a short film inside the university campus, and a photography contest.

The entries for competitions were collected at the end of the

forum. The competitions were conducted to encourage and motivate students in the field of photography, and also to hone their skills and talents.

The photography group seeks to promote active participation in local and international competitions and various exhibitions. Its vision is to spread creativity around the world, characterised by quality and trust.



Geological heritage exhibition extended

SALALAH: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism has extended the exhibition on the Geological Heritage of the Sultanate of Oman themed, "Sustainability and Job Opportunities" until January 15 next year.

The exhibition, being held in Museum of the Frankincense Land, is organised by the ministry in cooperation with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) and Geological Society of Oman (GSO).

Osama bin Mohammed al Rowas, Director of Museum of the Frankincense Land, said in a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA) that the exhibition witnesses a great turnout of visitors of all categories since its opening on November 15, 2021. The opening ceremony coincided with the country's celebrations of the 51st Glorious National Day.

He added that the exhibition targets academics, teachers, university and school students, and those interested in geology and the winter tourism season, which began in October.

The director of the museum noted that the exhibition on geological heritage sheds light on the diversity of the Sultanate of Oman's geological heritage and raises awareness of the



importance of preserving it.

It also seeks to introduce the geological heritage sector and the potential job opportunities therein as part of the strategic objectives of Oman Vision 2040, as well as its executive programmes aiming to enhance citizenship, identity, heritage and national culture.

Statistics recorded 3,190 visitors, including more than 30 school and university visits to the

exhibition from November 15 to December 15.

The exhibition constitutes six corners, some of which are the richness of the country's geological heritage, its diversity and natural geological history. It also showcases unique geological heritage pieces and fossils, some of which belong to extinct animals like dinosaurs and elephants. A training workshop was held on the sidelines of the



Osama al Rowas

THE EXHIBITION, BEING HELD IN MUSEUM OF THE FRANKINCENSE LAND, IS ORGANISED BY THE MINISTRY OF HERITAGE AND TOURISM IN COOPERATION WITH PDO AND GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF OMAN



exhibition from December 12 to 14, with the participation of experts in geological heritage and specialists from the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. The workshop aimed to introduce job opportunities in this sector, as well as empowering those interested in the field.

The workshop also attracted more than 50 participants from institutions and individuals, during which they had two-day

lectures. On the third day, the workshop concluded with a field visit to geological sites in Dhofar Governorate.

The exhibition comes as part of the programmes of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to develop and diversify the museum system in the Sultanate of Oman and to enhance the contributions of the heritage sector to economic activity.

— ONA

Cooperation sought for improving ABHS services



AMMAN: The Sultanate of Oman concluded its participation in the meetings of the Arab Board for Health Specialisations (ABHS), held in Amman, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

The ABHS Supreme Council's extraordinary meeting was held under the chairmanship of Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health,

President of the ABHS Supreme Council and the Head of the Executive Council.

The meeting saw the participation of Dr Omar bin Awad al Rawas, Secretary-General of the ABHS, and other members of the ABHS Supreme Council.

The meeting underscored the importance of cooperation to

improve the services offered by the ABHS through supporting scientific development, sharpening the skills of health workers in Arab countries, representing distinguished physicians based on international standards, as well as enhancing the participation of Arab Maghreb countries in the ABHS.

— ONA

ARAB CULTURAL CONFERENCE



DUBAI: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, took part in the opening of the 22nd session of the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Cultural Affairs in the Arab World. The Sultanate of Oman's delegation is headed by Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture. — ONA

Tender Notice

Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI), announces following E-Tenders for 2021:

Tender Number	Tender Name	Deadline for Specifications Request	Deadline for tender bids	Tender Price
30/2021	Review the Operational Manual of the Internal Audit Department	28 Dec 2021	10 Jan 2021	25 OMR

Interested companies registered with Tender Board may obtain Tender document from the E.Tendering website: <http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. The Vendors must provide electronic bank Guarantee issued by any bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (2%) of the Tender value valid for (120) days on website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> and addressed to Public Authority for Social Insurance.

CORRESPONDANCE:

1. Tender inquiry : All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at E-Tendering system (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
2. E-Tendering system inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number: Tel : +968 24402200 , E-mail : etenderhd@ita.gov.om

PASI is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other tender that may be received

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TAPPING

TOURISM, WHICH WAS SEEN AS THE MAIN PILLAR OF THE GCC NON-OIL DIVERSIFICATION POLICY,

THE HUGE

SUFFERED SETBACK WHEN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SHUT DOWN ALL BORDERS. ECONOMIES ARE NOW

GCC TOURISM

BACK ON THE RECOVERY PATH AND THE MEGA-EVENTS ARE NOW ATTRACTING MILLIONS OF VISITORS

POTENTIAL

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The recently concluded GCC Summit called for joint action of young people and the private sector to play greater roles in economic diversification efforts.

It also called for efforts to improve the infrastructure connectivity that will help citizens and residents of the GCC to move around swiftly and with minimum restrictions. Tourism, which was seen as the main pillar of the GCC non-oil diversification policy over the last two decades, suffered a big setback when the Covid-19 pandemic shut down all borders (land, sea and air).

Economies are now back on the recovery path and the mega-events, such as the Expo 2020 in Dubai, are now attracting millions of visitors.

The Fifa World Cup to be held in Qatar next year is expected to attract millions of visitors and some joint efforts will help other GCC members to draw some of these visitors, who will be travelling to the region from all over the world.

Apart from boosting transport connectivity, it is also important to have liberal visa policies for both citizens and residents of the GCC.

Maithaa bint Saif al Mahrouqiyah, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Tourism, said the integration of the tourism sector between the Gulf countries should not be seen as a competition.

“We seek to open more recreational tourism projects to attract family tourists from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries,” she said. With the opening of the direct road to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,

the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman is expecting an influx of tourists from the other side in the coming years.

Both sides are expected to increase the number of flights between the two countries.

“I see a big potential for the road tourism between the two countries in the coming years. Saudi Arabia is a vast country and has plenty to offer to tourists, so is the Sultanate of Oman as a gateway to the Arabian Peninsula. The Empty Quarter region itself is an attraction and will attract visitors if facilities are developed for motorists on both sides of the border,” said a travel operator who has some experience of taking pilgrims from the Sultanate of Oman to the Saudi holy cities for Umrah.

“It is a big opportunity in the Sultanate of Oman for tour operators to start operations in the Empty Quarter. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism will be announcing

appropriate incentives, including the development of facilities, to get tourists from the GCC,” sources in the travel and tourism told the *Observer*.

“If people can drive 1,000 km to Salalah from Muscat, they will be able to do so to Saudi Arabia also in the coming months,” they said.

The Under-Secretary also said that citizens from 103 countries are now allowed to enter the Sultanate of Oman without securing a prior visa and can stay for up to 14 days.

At the same time, citizens from 27 out of these 103 countries can enter the Sultanate of Oman without a prior visa only if they have a Schengen visa in their passport, or have entry visas to the US, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, or Japan. The 27 countries are India, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Costa Rica, Kyrgyzstan, Nicaragua, Armenia, Panama, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkmenistan, Honduras, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Laos, Albania, Bhutan, Peru, Salvador, Mexico, Vietnam, Cuba and the Maldives. Several citizens and residents of the UAE and the Sultanate of Oman cross the land border daily for work and tourism purposes. Recently, Kuwait announced that some GCC expatriate professionals (53 nationalities) with residency for more than six months in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Oman can apply for an online tourist visa. The professions include consultants, doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers, media staff, managers, businessmen, and diplomatic corps. Upon arrival, a visa fee of 3KD may apply after obtaining the visa at the border entry point.

It is a big opportunity in the Sultanate of Oman for tour operators to start operations in the Empty Quarter. The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism will be announcing appropriate incentives, including the development of facilities, to get tourists from the GCC

TRAVEL AND
TOURISM
SOURCES





Symposium discusses legacy of Ahmed bin Majid

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, DEC 19

A symposium was organised by Nizwa University and Al Khalil bin Ahmed al Farahidi Center to celebrate the inclusion of the Sultanate of Oman's legendary navigator and cartographer Ahmed bin Majid in the list of influential world personalities by Unesco.

The symposium was held under auspices by Prof Dr Abdulaziz bin Yahya al Kindi, Vice President for Academic Affairs, and was attended by Dr Issa al Ameri, Dean of Education and Arts College, heads of departments, academics, researchers, students from the Sultanate of Oman and abroad.

ProfDr Al Kindi, stressed the importance of the symposium and thanked the organisers. Then Dr Khalifa al Qasabi, Head of the Department of Education and Human Studies, gave a speech in which he talked about Ahmed bin Majid and his role in the science of maritime navigation.

Dr Suleiman al Husseini, Director of the Al Khalil bin Ahmed al Farahidi Center, gave a speech about Al Khalil bin Ahmed al Farahidi Center and its role in Arab and Islamic Studies.

The symposium was moderated by Dr Salim bin Mohammad al Hinai, Assistant Professor at the

University of Nizwa. Dr Mohammad bin Hamad al Shuaili presented a working paper in which he reviewed the political situation of the Islamic world during the time of Ahmed bin Majid, when foreign powers invaded the Sultanate of Oman.

Al Shuaili pointed out that Ahmed bin Majid had lived during the first Al Nabahani period and therefore did not meet with the Portuguese directly.

The second working paper by Dr Mohamed bin Nasser Bu Hijam from Algeria discussed the theory of Ahmed bin Majid of bringing Portuguese to India.

The paper said although long identified in the West as the navigator who helped Vasco da Gama find his way from Africa to India, contemporary research has shown Ibn Majid is unlikely even to have met da Gama.

The paper also discussed the contributions of Ahmed bin Majid in cartography and science of maritime navigation, which helped ships to avoid dangers in the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea or the Mediterranean.

Dr Hamad bin Juwaid al Ghailani's paper spoke about the sailor's works on navigation and maps.

Professor Khaled al Rahbi in his working paper spoke about articles, research and documentaries on Ahmed bin Majid.

ROP RECRUITS FEMALE BATCH



MUSCAT: A new batch of female citizens with the general education diploma (GED) qualification has joined the Royal Oman Police (ROP) after passing evaluation tests and personal interviews that were conducted in coordination with the Ministry of Labour. The new batch has joined the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences to receive military training and academic courses.

WHAT IS YOUR WHY?

DR NISMA HARIS

If you are unable to ascertain what you are looking for, be daring enough to create one; even if it seems inconceivable in the beginning.

So was the impeccable vision of the leaders of this resplendent land who pulled out all the stops for the betterment of the Sultanate of Oman. Reminding us that no matter what strong determination is the master key to prosper and flourish. Their genuine and unwavering efforts became the reason for an array of mankind to aspire to achieve their ambitions and goals. Likewise, we all have immense potential in ourselves for doing tremendous constructive stuff. Each of us is blessed with a unique set of capabilities and some of us are even privileged enough to serve society and community in numerous ways.

If that being the case, what makes a healthy and progressive society or a community? Education, empowerment, skill set enhancement and regular



contribution to society is the basic toolkit for individual progress and thereby, social progress.

Hence, social progress is only possible when the individuals are willing to grow, willing to groom their personalities, willing to learn something new irrespective of age and gender biases, and last but not the least how happy and contented we are being at an individual level. What are my capabilities and how I am streamlining them towards uplifting others? A question we should be asking ourselves from time to time.

Pandemic became an excuse for so many people to become sluggish not just physically but mentally and emotionally as well. Some of us went totally

into a hibernation state out of fear; became paranoid, cut off with everyone. However, at the same time, the other set of people became super active in serving society in one of the global catastrophes in whatever capacities they can (of course with the pandemic protocols).

When you are so thoughtful towards people; their issues, you can chalk out ways to uplift each other and this is empowerment. We need not do something really big but by being empathetic and reflective towards our families, the people in our circle can do wonders. Empowerment begins with us.

The crux is we have our own set of enormous capabilities but we limit ourselves from achieving anything. It's all in our heads. Some of us are good at cooking, painting, sketching, calligraphy, gardening, or photography but we restrict ourselves from utilising this positive energy of ours. We never know that there are a whole lot of people out there for whom you can be a source of tremendous assistance.

The hurdles on the way should never stop us from pursuing our ambitions. When a child takes his first steps on his own, he has a contented smile on his face, he has this confidence that he can walk smoothly or run shortly. Likewise, your baby steps towards your goals in the right direction give you enough confidence to keep going. When you learn to empower yourself, you have the spirit to empower others, and hence, you play an active role in making lives better, bringing smiles and satisfaction to the faces of people around you.

Encapsulating, how far we have come and how long we still have to go to contribute towards building a society that our founder envisioned.

So, what is your why? High time we need to introspect ourselves.

(The author is a General Physician, Content Creator, Health and Wellness Adviser. She is based in Salalah and can be reached at www.healthyvows.com / dr.nisma.healthyvows@gmail.com)



إعلان مناقصة Tender Notice

The Internal Tender Committee at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology In AL Khuwair invites for the Following Projects:

TENDER NO	TENDER NAME	DATE OF PUBLISHING	LAST DATE TO PURCHASE TENDER DOCUMENT	SUBMISSION DATE	COMPANIES WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THIS TENDER	DOCUMENT PRICE
MT CIT 69/2021	CONSTRUCTION OF BATINAH EXPRESS WAY (PACKAGE - 7, SABLA AREA BALANCE WORKS)	20/12/2021	26/12/2021	9/1/2022	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (FIRST CLASS)	(250/-) TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY OMANI RIAL NON-REFUNDABLE
MT CIT 71/2021	CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR SUPERVISION OF REPAIR DAMAGED AREAS OF EXISTING ASPHALT ROADS FROM QUAIFA (WILAYAT IBRA) TO AL GARDA (WILAYAT AL MUDAIBI) (NORTH AL SHARQIYYA GOVERNORATE)	20/12/2021	3/1/2022	31/1/2022	EXPERIENCED COMPANIES AND REGISTERED WITH THE SECRETARIAT GENERAL OF TENDER BOARD (FIRST CLASS)	(62/500) SIXTY TWO OMANI RIAL AND FIVE HUNDRED BAISA NON-REFUNDABLE

Interested Companies registered with the Secretariat General of Tender Board may obtain 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 online on given website. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee issued by local bank in the Sultanate of Oman for the value of (1%) of the Tender value validity for (90) days,

CORRESPONDANCE:

- Tender Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the TENDER Inquiry must be online at e-Tendering System. (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- E-Tendering System Inquiry: All correspondence pertaining to the e-Tendering System technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email address and phone number:
Tel: +968 24402200, e-mail : etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE



HALLIBURTON

P.O. Box 2721 • Ruwi • Postal Code 112 • Sultanate of Oman
PHONE +968-24623400 • Fax +968-24504100 • C.R.No. 1/29565/9

Announcement

Halliburton worldwide will launch Used Equipment for wholesale and interested buyers can visit our base in Adam to inspect the equipment,

You may visit Halliburton base on 21st and 22nd of December for inspection (you can find Halliburton Adam base in google/maps) from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

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



Tender Number		T-30-2021	Tender Announcement	
"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tender:				
Tender Name		Framework Agreement for Provision of Cleaning Services to MWASALAT Offices & Staff Accommodation in Khasab, Lima, Dibba		
Project Summary		Within the framework of this tender, MWASALAT would like to have a qualified contractor to provide Cleaning Services required to Offices & Staff Accommodation in Khasab, Lima, Dibba.		
Tender Fee		NIL	Grade & Speciality	Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field
Start date for tender document distribution		MON 20th December 2021	Last date for tender document distribution	Last date for submission
			MON, 27th December 2021	SUN 9th January 2022
The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00A.M - 2:00 P.M. Tenderers are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email. All Tenderers shall submit with their offers a Tender Bond in the amount of not less than one percent (1%) of the Tender Value, valid for (120) days from the date of Tender Submission obtained from a locally registered Bank, drawn in favor of The Chairman of Procurement Committee, National Ferries Company L.L.C "MWASALAT". Any bid without tender bond will be rejected. The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table. Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head- quarter National Ferries Company L.L.C (MWASALAT) at Ghala, Muscat (Jabal Shams Building 5th floor). Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.				
"Mwasalat" Head Quarter, Ghala Tel: +968 24121500/24121555 P.O.Box: 911, Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman			For more information please send to: tenders@mwasalat.om	



A view of the Green Zone which houses the seat of the Iraqi government as well as the US embassy, in the capital Baghdad, on Sunday, after two rockets targeted the area early in the morning. – AFP

Two rockets fired at Baghdad’s Green Zone

BAGHDAD: Two rockets targeted Baghdad’s ultra-secure Green Zone that houses the US embassy early on Sunday, Iraq’s security forces said in a statement.

“The Green Zone in Baghdad was the target of two Katyusha rockets. The first was shot down in the air by C-RAM defence batteries, the second fell in a square, damaging two vehicles,” the statement said.

A security source said that the shot down rocket fell near the US embassy, while the second came down roughly 500 metres away.

Previously, the source said that two rockets had been shot down near the US embassy.

No one claimed responsibility for the attack.

In recent months, dozens of rocket assaults or drone bomb attacks have targeted US troops and interests in Iraq.

The attacks are rarely claimed. The latest rocket salvo comes after the country this week announced the end of the “combat mission” on its territory of the anti-militant coalition led by Washington.

But roughly 2,500 American soldiers and 1,000 coalition soldiers deployed in Iraq will remain in the nation to pursue a role of training, advice and assistance.

Some factions in Iraq are calling for the departure of all US forces stationed in the country.

The attack also coincides with the 10th anniversary of the departure of US troops from Iraq on December 18, 2011, after the invasion and overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

Washington then deployed its troops to the country to fight the IS group, which had captured large swathes of the nation in a lightning offensive. — AFP

Pentagon documents reveal ‘deeply flawed’ US air war

WASHINGTON: Newly obtained Pentagon documents show that the US air wars in the Middle East have been marked by “deeply flawed intelligence” and resulted in thousands of civilian deaths, including many children, *The New York Times* reported on Saturday. It said a trove of confidential documents covering more than 1,300 reports of civilian casualties undercuts the government’s portrayal of a war fought with precision bombs.

Pledges of transparency and accountability, it said, had regularly fallen short.

“Not a single record provided includes a finding of wrongdoing or disciplinary action,” the paper reported in what it said was the first of a two-part series.

While several of the cases mentioned by the *Times* have been previously reported, it said its investigation showed that the number of civilian deaths had been “drastically undercounted,” by at least several hundred.

SURVEILLANCE FLAWS

Among three cases cited was a July 19, 2016 bombing by US special forces of what were believed to be three IS group staging areas in northern Syria. Initial reports were of 85 fighters killed. Instead, the dead were 120 farmers and other villagers.

Another example was a November 2015 attack in Ramadi, Iraq after a man was seen dragging “an unknown heavy object” into an IS position. The “object,”



This photo taken on December 26, 2011, shows the Pentagon building in Washington, DC. – AFP

a review found, was a child, who died in the strike. Poor or inadequate surveillance footage often contributed to deadly targeting failures, the report said.

More recently, the United States had to retract its claim that a vehicle destroyed by a drone on a Kabul street in August had contained bombs. Victims of the strike, it turned out, were 10 members of a family, including children.

Many civilian survivors of US attacks, the report says, were left with disabilities requiring expensive treatment, but condolence payments numbered fewer than

***The New York Times* report said a trove of confidential documents covering more than 1,300 reports of civilian casualties undercuts the government’s portrayal of a war fought with precision bombs**

a dozen.

Asked for comment, Captain Bill Urban, spokesman for the US Central Command, told the

Times that “even with the best technology in the world, mistakes do happen, whether based on incomplete information or misinterpretation of the information available. And we try to learn from those mistakes.

“We work diligently to avoid such harm. We investigate each credible instance. And we regret each loss of innocent life.”

The US air campaign in the Middle East grew rapidly in the final years of former president Barack Obama’s administration, as public support waned for the seemingly endless ground wars.

— AFP

Thousands rally in Sudan 3 years after people revolt started

KHARTOUM: Thousands of Sudanese protesters rallied on Sunday to mark three years since the start of mass demonstrations that led to the ouster of strongman Omar al Bashir, as fears mount for the democratic transition.

Authorities shut off bridges linking the capital Khartoum with its twin city Omdurman in anticipation of a large turnout.

Political parties and neighbourhood committees had said they were mobilising people to demonstrate against military chief General Abdel Fattah al Burhan, who launched an October 25 coup followed by a bloody crackdown.

Thousands turned out in both Khartoum and Omdurman on Sunday, shouting slogans against Burhan and his deputy Mohamed Daglo, also known as Hemeti, witnesses said.

The generals had initially detained civilian leader Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, but reinstated him on November 21.

The move alienated many of Hamdok’s pro-democracy supporters, who dismissed it as providing a cloak of legitimacy for Burhan’s coup.

Hamdok, who has argued he wants to avoid further bloodshed, warned in a late on Saturday statement of “the country’s slide toward the abyss,” urging restraint from the protesters.

“We’re facing today a sizeable regression in the path of our revolution that threatens the security of the nation, its unity



Sudanese youths raise national flags as they rally against the military chief who launched an October 25 coup followed by a bloody crackdown, in the northern part of Khartoum, on Sunday. – AFP

and its stability,” he said.

Protest organisers have however vowed, in a key slogan, “No negotiation, no partnership and no legitimacy”.

Previous protests against the military takeover have been forcibly dispersed by the security forces. Nationwide, at least 45 people have been killed and scores more wounded, according to the independent Doctors’ Committee.

MILITARY CONTROL

December 19 has a particular resonance in Sudanese history.

Not only was it the day in 2018 when thousands launched mass protests that ended Bashir’s three decades in power, it was also the day in 1955 when Sudanese lawmakers declared independence

from British colonial rule.

Following Bashir’s ouster, a joint military-civilian transitional government took power but the troubled alliance was shattered by Burhan’s coup.

“The coup has put obstacles in the way of the democratic transition and has given the military complete control over politics and the economy,” Ashraf Abdel Aziz, chief editor of the independent *Al Jarida* newspaper, said.

Sudan’s military dominates lucrative companies specialising in everything from agriculture to infrastructure projects.

The prime minister said last year that 80 per cent of the state’s resources were “outside the finance ministry’s control”. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TELAVIV

Israel arrests Palestinians over settler killing

Israel’s army said on Sunday they had arrested four Palestinian men suspected of shooting dead a Jewish settler and wounding two others in an attack in the occupied West Bank days before.

“The four hardliners who carried out the shooting attack last Thursday were caught,” the Israeli army said in a statement.

“The suspects were transferred to the security forces for further investigation, and the weapon of the suspect who carried out the shooting was captured.”



The four are suspected of firing at least ten bullets at a car, killing 25-year-old religious student Yehuda Dimantman and injuring two fellow students as they drove out of Homesh, an illegal outpost in the northern West Bank.

TEHRAN

Iran reports first case of Omicron variant

Iran has detected the first case of the coronavirus Omicron variant, deputy health minister Kamal Heidari told state television on Sunday.

An Iranian man from Tehran had tested positive after returning from the United Arab Emirates.

“We detected him very quickly and immediately quarantined him and the contact cases,” Heidari said. An emergency meeting has been held to discuss ways to stop any spread of the variant, including a proposal to temporarily close schools.

Iran, the worst-hit country in the Middle East during the coronavirus pandemic, has recorded 130,000 deaths.

Scientists remain uncertain how dangerous the highly mutated Omicron variant is.



RIYADH

Medical evacuation of Iran’s Yemen envoy

Iran’s ambassador flew out of the Ansar Allah-held Yemeni capital to receive Covid treatment on Saturday in a rare exemption from an air blockade enforced by a Saudi-led coalition, Saudi and Iranian officials said.

“The ambassador left on an Iraqi aircraft and is probably now in Baghdad,” a senior Saudi official familiar with Yemeni affairs said.

He said the flight was organised at the request of Yemen’s Ansar Allah fighters and agreed by Saudi authorities.

Iraq has hosted several exploratory meetings between Iranian and Saudi officials seeking a thaw in relations after years of proxy wars around the region.



In brief

KABUL



HUNDREDS QUEUE FOR PASSPORTS

Hundreds of people braved sub-zero temperatures in Afghanistan's capital to queue outside the passport office early on Sunday, a day after the Taliban government announced it would resume issuing travel documents. Many began their wait the previous night and most stood patiently in single file — some desperate to leave the country for medical treatment, others to escape the new regime.

Tense Taliban personnel periodically charged crowds that formed at the front of the queue and at a nearby roadblock.

"We don't want any suicide attack or explosion to happen," said Taliban security operative Ajmal Toofan, 22, expressing concerns about the dangers of crowding.

VIENTIANE



SCENIC RAILWAY BUILT ON A MOUNTAIN OPENS

Laos opened a new \$6 billion rail link with China to much fanfare this month, but analysts warn the party could be short-lived as the government grapples with a potential debt crisis.

The line will connect the capital Vientiane with the southern Chinese city of Kunming, and there are grand plans for a high-speed rail network running to Singapore through Thailand and Malaysia.

Laos President Thongloun Sisoulith at the opening heralded a "new era of modern infrastructure development" for the impoverished country, adding that "the dreams of Lao people have come true".

HONG KONG



POLLING STATIONS SEE MUTED TURNOUT

Turnout was looking muted on Sunday as Hong Kongers cast ballots for city lawmakers under Beijing's new "patriots only" rules which drastically reduced the number of directly elected seats and control who can run for office. It is the first legislature poll under the new political blueprint China imposed on Hong Kong in response to massive and often violent pro-democracy protests two years ago.

All candidates have been vetted for their patriotism and political loyalty to China and only 20 of the 90 legislature seats are being directly elected.

The largest chunk of seats — 40 — are being picked by a committee of 1,500 staunch Beijing loyalists.

RAI DEATH TOLL RISES TO 108

AUTHORITIES RAMP UP EFFORTS TO DELIVER WATER AND FOOD TO DEVASTATED ISLANDS

MANILA: More than 100 people have been killed in the strongest typhoon to hit the Philippines this year, official tallies showed on Sunday, as efforts to deliver water and food to devastated islands ramped up.

More than 300,000 people fled their homes and beachfront resorts as typhoon Rai ravaged the southern and central regions of the archipelago.

The storm knocked out communications and electricity in many areas, ripped off roofs, damaged hospitals, toppled concrete power poles and flooded villages.

Arthur Yap, governor of the popular tourist destination Bohol, said on his official Facebook page that mayors on the devastated island had so far reported 72 deaths in their towns.

Ten people also died on the Dinagat Islands, provincial information officer Jeffrey Crisostomo said.

That took the overall number of reported deaths to 108, according to the latest official figures, making it one of the deadliest typhoons to hit the country in years.

But the toll was likely to rise as disaster agencies assessed the full extent of the storm's aftermath across the vast archipelago.

Rai smashed into the country on Thursday as a super typhoon packing wind speeds of 195 kilometres per hour.

Thousands of military, police, coast guard and fire personnel are being deployed to assist in search and rescue efforts in the worst-affected areas.



Fallen electric pylons block a road in Surigao City days after super typhoon Rai devastated the city. — AFP

Coast guard and naval vessels carrying food, water and medical supplies are being dispatched, while heavy machinery — like backhoes and front-end loaders — are being sent to help clear roads blocked by fallen power poles and trees.

"It's going to be a long, tough road for people to rebuild and get their lives back on track," said Alberto Bocanegra, head of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the Philippines.

The organisation appealed for 20 million Swiss francs (\$21.6 million) to fund urgent relief and recovery efforts.

An aerial survey of damage to parts of Bohol — known for its beaches, rolling "Chocolate Hills", and tiny tarsier primates — showed "our people have suffered greatly", Yap said.

'REMINISCENT' OF HAIYAN

There has also been widespread destruction on Siargao, Dinagat and Mindanao islands, which bore

the brunt of Rai when it slammed into the Philippines.

Aerial photos shared by the military showed severe damage in the Siargao town of General Luna, where many surfers and holidaymakers had flocked ahead of Christmas, with buildings stripped of roofs and debris littering the ground.

Tourists were being evacuated from the island on Sunday by plane and boat.

Dinagat Governor Arlene Bag-ao has said the damage

to the island's landscape was "reminiscent if not worse" than that caused by Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013.

Haiyan, called Yolanda in the Philippines, was the deadliest cyclone on record in the country, leaving more than 7,300 people dead or missing.

"I saw how Typhoon Odette tore the provincial capitol apart, piece by piece," Dinagat PIO Crisostomo told radio station DZBB, using the local name for Rai. — AFP

UN concerned over Rohingya school closures

DHAKA: The decision by Bangladesh to close schools for Rohingya refugees risks leaving a generation of children "practically uneducated", a United Nations human rights envoy warned on Sunday.

Authorities this week ordered the closure of "unauthorised" education centres in border camps hosting around 850,000 members of the stateless Muslim minority, who fled there from violent persecution in neighbouring Myanmar.

The order came during a visit by UN special rapporteur Tom Andrews, who said the privately run schools played a critical role in educating Rohingya children.

"I am deeply concerned to have learned of a new policy, promulgated while I was here, that would close all private schools in the camps," he told reporters in the capital Dhaka.

"We cannot allow an entire generation of Rohingya to go practically uneducated," he added. Bangladesh's foreign ministry has said the order will not impact around 3,000 learning centres for children in camps supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

It claimed the move had been made to halt the opera-



UN Special Rapporteur Tom Andrews talks to journalists about his mission to Bangladesh on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, during a conference in Dhaka. — AFP

tions of schools "promoting radicalism and engaged in illegal activities".

Angered Rohingya activists in the camps have taken to social media to protest the decision in lieu of public protests, which have become difficult since security was boosted after the murder of a top camp leader in September. The New York-based Human Rights Watch said about 30,000 children will lose their access to education if Bangladesh does not reverse the closures.

Andrews used his Dhaka press conference to urge Bangladesh to protect Rohingya livelihoods after the bulldozing last week of around 1,000 shops in the camps, which authorities said were built illegally. — AFP

Islamic world seeks response to Afghanistan emergency

ISLAMABAD: Muslim nations sought to respond to the growing economic and humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan as neighbouring Pakistan opened an extraordinary meeting on Sunday of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

The emergency in Afghanistan, with millions facing hunger as winter sets in, has caused mounting alarm, but the international community has struggled to come up with a coordinated response given Western reluctance to help the Taliban government, which seized power in August.

"Unless action is taken immediately, Afghanistan is heading for chaos," Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan said in his opening remarks, adding that a refugee crisis and more Islamic State violence may follow. "Chaos suits no one," he said.

The two-day meeting in Islamabad also includes representatives from the United Nations and international financial institutions, as well as from world powers including the United States, the European Union and Japan.

The Taliban's acting foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi said the new government had restored peace and security and done much to address demands for more inclusive government



Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi addresses the opening of a special meeting of the 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Islamabad. — AFP

with respect for human rights, including the rights of women.

"All must acknowledge that political isolation of Afghanistan is not beneficial for anyone, therefore it is imperative that all support the prevailing stability and back it both politically and economically," he said, according to a text of his remarks.

Taliban officials have previously asked for help to rebuild Afghanistan's shattered economy and feed more than 20 million people threatened with hunger. Some countries and aid organisations have begun delivering aid, but a near-collapse of the country's banking system has complicated their work.

Beyond immediate aid,

Afghanistan needs help ensuring longer-term economic stability. Much will depend on whether Washington is willing to unfreeze billions of dollars in central bank reserves and lift sanctions that have caused many institutions and governments to shy away from direct dealings with the Taliban.

"They must delink the Taliban government from the 40 million Afghan citizens," Pakistan's Prime Minister Khan said.

Muttaqi said the Taliban would not allow Afghanistan to be used as a base for attacks on other countries and he said no reprisals would be carried out against officials of the former government. — Reuters

Dutch streets deserted as snap Covid-19 lockdown starts

AMSTERDAM: Dutch urban centres were largely deserted on Sunday as the country began a snap lockdown that, aimed at stemming an expected Covid-19 surge caused by the fast-spreading Omicron variant, left people's Christmas plans in disarray.

Prime Minister Mark Rutte announced the shutdown on Saturday evening, ordering the closure of all but essential stores, as well as restaurants, hairdressers, gyms, museums and other public places from Sunday until at least January 14.

In Rotterdam, police used a water cannon to disperse a group of around 1,000 people who had gathered outside the city's main soccer stadium, ahead of a clash between local team Feyenoord and bitter rivals Ajax Amsterdam.

Several people were held as fireworks and bottles were thrown at police and at the Ajax team bus, news agency ANP said.



People walk on a quiet street in the center of Amsterdam as Netherlands go back into lockdown to fight the Covid-19 pandemic. — AFP

Spectators have been barred from Dutch sporting events since the end of November.

The new curbs, which also

include a ban on gatherings outside of more than two people, were unexpected, and many people rushed out on Saturday to

stock up on presents or get a last-minute festive haircut.

Hospitality workers demanded compensation for lost income

over the holiday season.

"Closing all cafes and restaurants in such an important month is incredibly painful and dramatic. We need compensation and an exit strategy," the Dutch association for hospitality services said. Dutch coronavirus infections have dropped from record levels after a night-time lockdown came into force last month. But Omicron cases are increasing rapidly and the variant is expected to become dominant before the end of the year.

Hospitals have already been cancelling regular operations for weeks as they try to avoid running out of beds due to high numbers of Covid-19 patients. The government also said on Saturday that it would accelerate its booster vaccine programme. More than 85 per cent of Dutch adults are double-vaccinated, fewer than 9 per cent have had a booster shot, one of the lowest rates in western Europe. — Reuters

US air war 'deeply flawed', reveals Pentagon documents

WASHINGTON: Newly obtained Pentagon documents show that the US air wars have been marked by "deeply flawed intelligence" and resulted in thousands of civilian deaths, including many children, *The New York Times* reported.

It said a newly obtained trove of confidential documents covering more than 1,300 reports of civilian casualties undercuts the government's portrayal of a war fought with precision bombs. Pledges of transparency and accountability, it said, had regularly fallen short.

"Not a single record provided includes a finding of wrongdoing or disciplinary action," the paper reported in what it said was the first of a two-part series.

While several of the cases mentioned by the *Times* have been previously reported, it said its investigation showed that the number of civilian deaths had been "drastically undercounted."

Among three cases cited was a July 19, 2016 bombing by US special forces of what were believed to be three IS group staging areas in northern Syria.

Initial reports were of 85 fighters killed. Instead, the dead were 120 farmers and other villagers. — AFP

German defence minister in Lithuania on 1st foreign visit

RUKLA: German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht travels to Lithuania on Sunday to visit troops stationed in the Baltic Nato member, her first trip abroad since taking office.

The visit comes as Lithuania and fellow Baltic nations Estonia and Latvia worry about regional security after Russia deployed tens of thousands of troops near its border with Ukraine.

Lambrecht, who was named defence minister this month, will meet with her Lithuanian counterpart Arvydas Anusauskas to discuss the security situation as well as bilateral ties, according to the Lithuanian defence ministry.

Around 550 German troops are stationed at the Lithuanian military base in Rukla as Germany leads the multinational battalion in the country.

Similar military units were sent to other Baltic states and Poland in 2017 to deter Russian aggression after Moscow annexed Crimea and



German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht meets German soldiers as she visits Rukla military base. — Reuters

helped separatists take over parts of eastern Ukraine three years earlier.

But today, the situation in the eyes of Lithuania is not better, and is maybe even worse.

After amassing some 100,000 troops near Ukraine, Russia on Friday unveiled proposals to contain the role of the United States and Nato in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, calling for urgent negotiations with Washington.

The proposals call for the

US-led Nato alliance not to bring in new members or establish bases in ex-Soviet countries.

The West has threatened Russia with harsh sanctions should its soldiers enter into Ukraine.

In the wake of Ukraine discussions by EU leaders in Brussels last week, Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda said the current regional security situation is "probably ... the most dangerous it's been in 30 years". — AFP

Texas building its own 'wall' on Mexico border

WASHINGTON: Texas has begun building its own "wall" of huge steel bars on the border with Mexico, its Republican governor Greg Abbott said, accusing President Joe Biden of not doing enough to stop illegal immigration.

"Texas is taking what is really an unprecedented step by any state in the country," Abbott said, telling a news conference about construction of "a wall on our border to secure and safeguard the sovereignty of the United States and our own state."

Such a wall "is needed for one single reason, and that's because the Biden administration has failed to do its job," he said from Rio Grande City, speaking in front of a crane and steel bars.

The governor, who is said to have his own White House ambitions, denounced the "deadly consequences" of Biden's border policies.

"This border wall that you see behind us is a replication of the border wall that president Trump put up, same material, same concept," he added, referring to Bi-



Salvadoran migrants wait for a transport to arrive after turning themselves into US Border Patrol, near the border wall under construction in El Paso, Texas. — AFP

den's predecessor, Donald Trump.

Trump famously made the construction of a wall along the US-Mexico border a plank of his administration, though much of the 727 kilometers he managed to build over his four-year term was replacing existing barriers.

The work was halted when

Biden took office in January this year.

The Democratic president has been criticised for his management of illegal

migration, with some on the left denouncing what they say are the harsh policies still in place, and the right demanding even harsher ones. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

SANTIAGO

Chileans vote in presidential election

Chileans headed to the polls on Sunday to vote in the Andean nation's most divisive presidential election in decades, with two candidates offering starkly different visions for the future from pensions and privatisation to human rights. Polls opened at 8 am, with voters lining up to choose between Gabriel Boric, a 35-year-old former student protest leader, and ultra-conservative Jose Antonio Kast, a lawyer who has won support for a hard law-and-order line. "Two models for



the nation are going face-to-face," Kast wrote in a letter published on Saturday in local newspaper *El Mercurio*, citing Boric's plans for "total transformation" and his own promising "change with order and stability."

BAKU

10 more soldiers handed over to Armenia

Azerbaijan handed over 10 captured Armenian soldiers to Armenia on Sunday for the second time this month following talks last week between both sides and European Council President Charles Michel, the two countries said.

Armenia and Azerbaijan agreed to a ceasefire at their border on November 16 after Russia urged them to step back from confrontation following the deadliest clash since a war last year.



In a statement, Azerbaijan's State Security Service said it had handed over 10 Armenian soldiers who were detained on November 16.

It also released 10 soldiers earlier in December.

SYDNEY

Sixth child dies after bouncy castle tragedy

A sixth child has died following an Australian bouncy castle tragedy, with police saying on Sunday the 11-year-old boy died in hospital.

It comes three days after the large inflatable castle lifted off the ground at an end-of-term school party in the northern Tasmanian town of Devenport.

"It is with a heavy heart that I can confirm an 11-year-old boy passed away in hospital this afternoon," said Tasmania police commissioner Darren Hine.



"Our thoughts continue to be with his family, and the families and loved ones of all the children involved, during what is an incomprehensibly difficult time."

Could video games bring NFTs to masses?

YASSINE KHIRI & KATY LEE

A year ago, NFTs were obscure virtual assets known only to tech geeks — but as video game companies enter the growing market, industry players hope they’re poised to go mainstream.

Short for “non-fungible tokens”, NFTs are digital items whose certificates of authenticity and ownership are registered on blockchains, the technology behind cryptocurrencies.

From art to fashion, the creative industries have been quick to experiment with an innovation that has sparked excitement and scepticism alike in the tech sector.

Auction houses like Sotheby’s now sell NFTs alongside oil paintings, while film director Quentin Tarantino is embroiled in a legal feud over NFTs from his cult movie “Pulp Fiction”.

And now that they’re being introduced to video games, proponents hope millions of players could become familiar with an idea that remains tricky to get one’s head around.

“NFTs are still a niche market, but we’re a really mainstream industry,” Nicolas Pouard, head of blockchain initiatives at the gaming giant Ubisoft, said.

Ubisoft this month launched Quartz, a platform where players can acquire NFTs called “Digits” — items within games that might take the form of weapons or vehicles.

Other gaming heavyweights such as Electronic Arts — the company behind The Sims and Fifa — as well as Take-Two and Atari have also signalled an interest in NFTs.

Investors have meanwhile poured \$680 million this year into French start-up Sorare, whose platform allows sports fans to trade NFT versions of old-fashioned football cards.

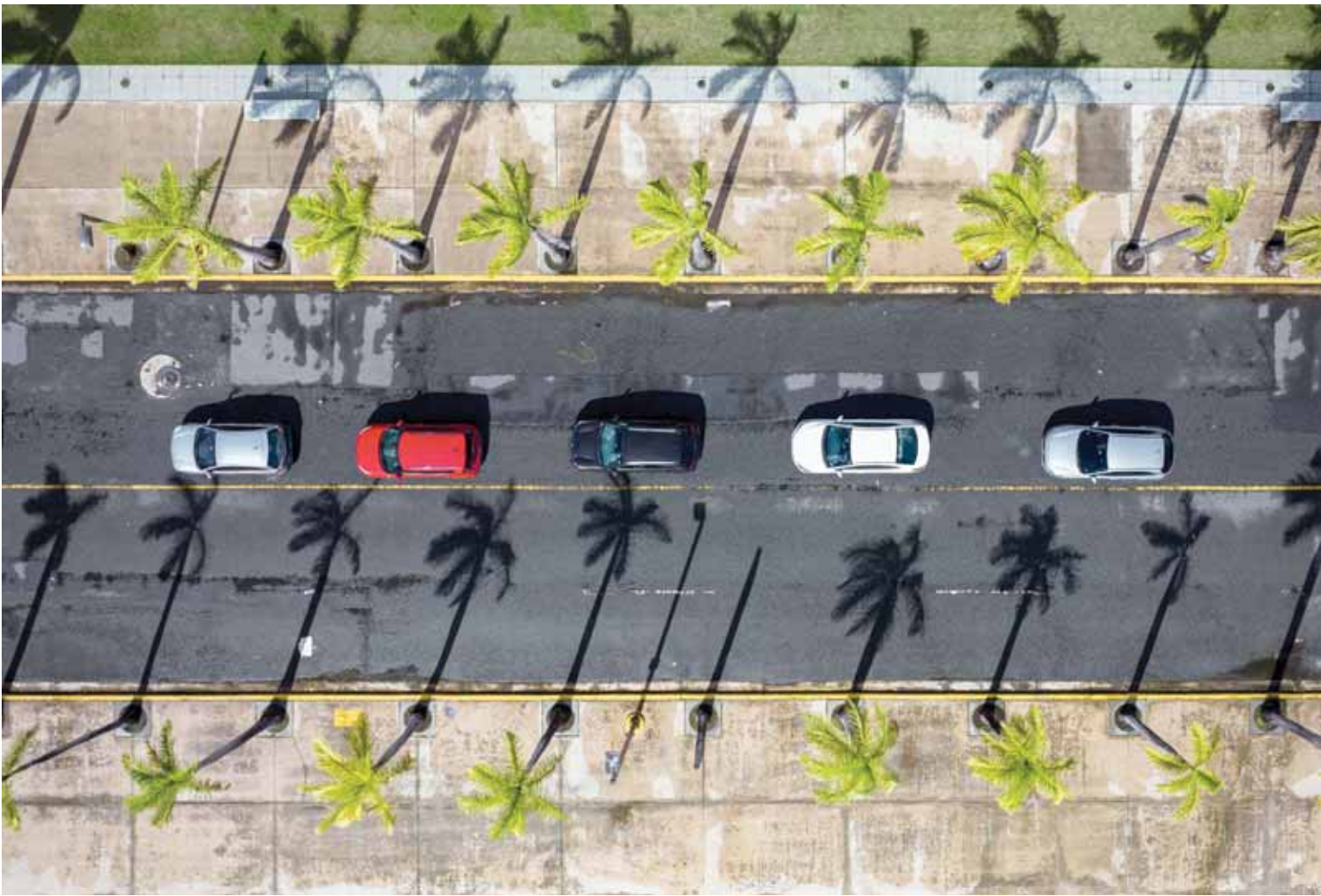
NFTs are collectable by nature, which makes them easy to integrate into games where the fun comes from amassing objects or points.

But it’s the sheer heft of the global video game industry — now estimated to be more valuable than the movie sector — that makes it ripe for introducing NFTs to a wider public.

A report by DFC Intelligence estimates that more than three billion people play video games, representing some 40 per cent of the world population.

Crypto evangelists argue that concepts like blockchains — digital ledgers that record all transactions publicly — are already familiar to millions of people. — AFP

NFTs are still a niche market, but we’re a really mainstream industry
NICOLAS POUARD
head of blockchain initiatives



TESTING TIME

Drivers wait in line to be tested for Covid-19, at a drive-up testing centre operated by the Puerto Rico Health Department at the Hiram Bithorn Stadium parking lot, in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

– AFP

A journey of a wordsmith



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WRITING IS NOT LIKE MATH; IN WHICH TWO PLUS TWO ALWAYS EQUALS FOUR NO MATTER WHAT YOUR MOOD IS LIKE. WITH WRITING, THE WAY YOU FEEL CHANGES EVERYTHING YOU SCRIPT

Being a wordsmith is very challenging and exhausting mission, mentally and physically indeed. That is why writing, as either a talent or a profession, is not everyone’s cup of tea. No matter how a writer is passionate about it, writing can be a puzzling talent or a difficult profession. A writer might struggle with many different obstacles and experiments that wordsmiths encounter on a daily basis. In some cases, a wordsmith can get encouraged by others who have successfully overcome similar challenges, by either reading their success stories or getting inspired by their writings.

In fact, a good wordsmith possesses not only his own spirit, but also the spirit of others as well. As there is no rule on how one could write his piece, everything in life is writable about if one has the outgoing guts and imagination to do it. As Benjamin Franklin said, “Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing”. Sometimes, writing comes easily and perfectly, while sometimes it is like drilling a rock. It has been said that words can be like X-rays; if they are properly used, they will go through anything.

The role of a writer is, basically, not to say what all can say; rather to say

what others are unable to say. Therefore, writing is regarded the best way of talking without being interrupted. Actually, most writers are on a writing diet; they just write every day of their life. They read passionately and many of those who are on this diet have pleasant careers and become successful writers. This is originally attributed to their boundless passion of writing. A writer reflects on his soul’s secrets, experience of life and thoughts of mind.

It is believed that ideas, for passionate and skilled writers, are like rabbits; they get a couple and learn how to handle them, then they get a dozen. Occasionally, ideas just come straightforward, but in other times a writer has to sweat and almost bleed to bring out ideas. Writing is not like math; in which two plus two always equals four no matter what your mood is like. With writing, the way you feel changes everything you script. Writing is actually influenced by the writer’s mood, spirit and feelings alike.

What is more, writing is an art and a craft that needs to be developed through thoughtful practice and study over a period of time. Luckily, some of the world’s greatest writers, probably the ones who had mastered the craft and

whose names have been passed down to us through years, gifted us not only with their stories. However, many of them took time in-between the development of their novels, short stories and poems to classify their writing philosophies, their writing strategies and their writing habits too.

Being a journalist, as an example of a writer, is a profession full of dreams and desires since the beginning of the journey to become one. During study, a student has to face the contrast between the university and the real life because journalism has an advantage that can be a disadvantage too. In fact, being in front of the reality and in the centre of illusions is the place in which students can see the roads they can follow in the real world. Regardless, a fact that everybody should realise that a journalist works for the community and for the public cause.

If truth to be told, there are no two days for a journalist are ever the same. Finding the best material for a story could mean attending a press conference, holding an interview over the phone, searching through professional contacts, or hammering out paragraphs. The story comes first and journalists do whatever it takes to make every story they write an accurate and thought-provoking piece.

British prime minister left reeling after trusted ally quits

JAMES PHEBY

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson was left reeling on Sunday after his Brexit minister resigned, ending a difficult week during which his Conservative party suffered a humiliating defeat in a local by-election and his own MPs rebelled over new coronavirus curbs.

David Frost, a trusted ally of the prime minister and former Brexit negotiator, sent his resignation letter late on Saturday following reports that he was to leave his cabinet post in January.

“It is disappointing that this plan has become public this evening and in the circumstances I think it is right for me to write to step down with immediate effect,”

he said in the letter, published by Johnson’s Downing Street office.

Frost told Johnson he had “concerns about the current direction of travel” regarding coronavirus regulations and tax rises.

Johnson responded that he was “very sorry” to receive the resignation, “given everything you have achieved and contributed to this government”.

The *Mail on Sunday* had that Frost handed in his resignation a week ago, but had been persuaded to stay on until the New Year.

Johnson is already reeling from a rebellion by 100 of his MPs in a parliamentary vote over coronavirus measures and the stunning loss of a 23,000-majority

seat in a by-election.

That was partly blamed on a slew of reports that his staff and aides had held parties last Christmas despite virus restrictions in place at the time.

The by-election loss for Johnson’s Conservatives intensified speculation of a leadership challenge.

Frost recently came second in a poll of most popular ministers held by ConservativeHome, an influential blog read by the grassroot Tories who could end up deciding Johnson’s replacement.

Health Secretary Sajid Javid told Sky News on Sunday that Frost was “an outstanding public servant”, adding that “I do understand his reasons, he’s

a principled man, you know, principled people do resign from the government.”

The deputy leader of the main opposition Labour party Angela Rayner said the resignation demonstrated “a government in total chaos.”

“@BorisJohnson isn’t up to the job. We deserve better than this buffoonery,” she tweeted.

Conservative MP Andrew Bridgen warned Johnson was “running out of time and out of friends to deliver on the promises and discipline of a true Conservative government.”

“Lord Frost has made it clear, 100 Conservative backbenchers have made it clear, but most importantly so did the people of

North Shropshire,” he wrote on Twitter.

And Arlene Foster, who stepped down as Northern Ireland’s first minister because of post-Brexit trading arrangements in the UK territory, said it had huge implications.

“The resignation of Lord Frost from the Cabinet is a big moment for the Government but enormous for those of us who believed he would deliver for NI,” she wrote on Twitter.

Frost told Johnson in his resignation letter: “I hope we will move as fast as possible to where we need to get to: a lightly regulated, low-tax, entrepreneurial economy.

— AFP



DR MARWAN AL JUMAA
OHA chairman

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, DEC 19

Oman Hockey Association (OHA) unveiled Lim Chiow Chuan as the head coach of the Sultanate of Oman national hockey teams (Senior & Junior) at a press meet in Muscat on Sunday. The announcement was made by Marwan al Jumaa, OHA chairman, in the presence of coach Lim and other OHA officials and the attendant media.

Coach Lim, who is from Malaysia, has an impressive CV with a chequered playing and coaching pedigree.

The newly appointed coach has represented the Malaysian senior team from 1986-1996 with 178 international caps. Lim played for Malaysia at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and 1996 Atlanta Olympics as well, apart from the Asian Games of 1990 and 1994. He had also made an appearance at the 1993 Champions Trophy.

Lim's coaching experience has been vast and he has been donning the coaching role since 2006 when he started off as the assistant coach of Singapore national team and later became their head coach as well.

He has also had long coaching stints in his home country of Malaysia as well. Lim was the head coach of Malaysia's U-16 team in 2011-12 and rose to become the head coach of their U-21 team in 2013.

In between those coaching stints, Lim was the development director of Malaysia Hockey from 2010-2015 as well. Lim was the assistant coach of the Malaysian men's team from 2014-2017 and his latest assignment was the post of Technical Director of Indonesia Hockey from 2018 until taking up the Sultanate of Oman job.

OHA CHAIRMAN OPTIMISTIC

OHA chairman Dr Marwan al Jumaa stated that coach Lim has been appointed with taking Oman hockey forward in a positive and ambitious way.

"We have very high ambitions and expectations from the hockey family. But there are some limitations, we would like to take things realistically. We have some targets. And appointment of the coach is a step in that direction. What he has done with the Indonesian team is something that he could probably replicate here with Sultanate



MALAYSIA'S
LIM APPOINTED
AS SULTANATE
OF OMAN HOCKEY
HEAD COACH



If you see the rankings, the Sultanate of Oman is currently 25th in the world and 7th in Asia. We are currently behind China in Asia and that is a difference of 30 points. Realistically, we are not far away from China and I feel we can chase them to get into the top six of Asian hockey when we meet them in the AHF Cup and Asian Games qualifiers

LIM CHIEW CHUAN
Head coach

The Sultanate of
Oman Men's National
Teams 2022 Schedule

Men's AHF Cup in Indonesia in February
Asian Games Qualifier in March
11th Men's Asia Cup in May
Islamic Solidarity Games, Aug 9-18 in Turkey
19th Asian Games, Sept 5-26, Hangzhou, China
Junior AHF Cup in November

of Oman. Also, coach Lim has a very vast experience in not just coaching but training and lecturing as well. And this is something that we will benefit from in the coming days," the chairman added.

Coach Lim was looking forward to being at the helm of affairs for the Sultanate of Oman and laid out his thoughts and ideas.

"I have not met the players yet and will do soon. If you look at the calendar next year, it's a packed schedule and the last two years have been a reset period. And if you look at the list of players selected for the national camp, there are some new names and fresh faces. So it shows there is talent and potential waiting to be tapped. We want to do well in the AHF Cup, it's the second tier of Asian hockey and hopefully we can do a good job," he added.

"I have followed Sultanate of Oman hockey for a while now and also played against them when I was coaching other teams. So, I'm aware of the potential and talent in the Sultanate of Oman ranks and I'm sure under the leadership of Dr Marwan we can only get better," he added.

Coach Lim felt that there are certain areas where Sultanate of Oman will have to work on but he explained it will be a long-term process.

"We will have to bring the players out of their comfort zones and make them stretch their limits. We cannot start expecting results overnight or in the next six months or a year for that matter. It will take time and the fans of Sultanate of Oman hockey will need to have patience," the coach added. Coach Lim also felt that the Sultanate of Oman players will have to refocus on their training regimen rigorously going forward and hone their tactical skills as well. "I think for a team to be competitive on the international stage, it needs players with good tactical skills and its application in match situations."

The Malaysian also dwelt a bit on the Sultanate of Oman's ranking at the World and Asian level and on plans to move up the ladder.

"If you see the rankings, the Sultanate of Oman is currently 25th in the world and 7th in Asia. We are currently behind China in Asia and that is a difference about 30 points. Realistically, we are not far away from China and I feel we can chase them to get into the top six of Asian hockey when we meet them in the AHF Cup and Asian Games qualifiers," he added.

Nadal casts doubt over Australian Open participation

ABU DHABI: Spain's Rafael Nadal said he cannot guarantee he will make the trip to Melbourne for next month's Australian Open after returning to action at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship in Abu Dhabi.

The 20-times Grand Slam champion's comeback at the exhibition event — his first tournament appearance since the Citi Open in Washington in August — ended in two close defeats by Andy Murray and Denis Shapovalov.

Nadal, 35, spent four months on the sidelines with a foot injury. He was knocked out at Roland Garros in the semifinals and was forced to pull out of Wimbledon, the Tokyo Olympics and the US Open.

"The idea is to go there and try my best there in Australia... Being 100% honest, I can't guarantee it," Nadal said. "I need to speak with my team."

"Its more than six months since the last real official

match. Things are difficult and I accept that... I was able to compete in both matches and even had my chances, so if we put that in perspective it's a very positive thing.

"I went through this process unfortunately a lot of times in my tennis career but I need to practice and I need to be healthy enough to go through this process. If that happens, I'm confident that I will be back."

World number six Nadal said he would not have returned to tennis if he did not feel he was competitive enough to challenge for the biggest titles in the sport.

"I am not playing at all for money or just for fun, I am playing to keep achieving goals or at least to enjoy the process to try to achieve my goals," he added.

"If then you don't achieve, it's fine, but the motivation and the passion is still there."

The Australian Open begins on January 17.

— Reuters



Spain's Rafael Nadal returns the ball to Canada's Denis Shapovalov (unseen). — AFP



Australia players celebrate taking the wicket of England's Dawid Malan. — Reuters

AUSTRALIA SNARE ROOT TO CLOSE IN ON ADELAIDE TEST VICTORY

ADELAIDE: Mitchell Starc removed England captain Joe Root with the last ball of day four to put Australia firmly on course for victory in the second Ashes test at the Adelaide Oval on Sunday.

Australia declared their second innings on 230-9 before the tea break, setting England an improbable victory target of 468.

The touring side were 82-4 at stumps, losing Root in the final over and staring at a second successive heavy defeat in the five-match series.

Ben Stokes, whose batting heroics secured England's most successful Ashes run chase at Leeds two years ago, was on three with his team still 386 short of their target. Australia showed their intent by removing opener Haseeb Hameed for a duck before tea and sent back Dawid Malan, who made 20, after the break.

England settled briefly as Rory Burns, who had managed 17 runs in his three previous innings on this tour, held firm before departing for 34, caught by Steve Smith in the slips off a Jhye Richardson lifter.

Starc floored Root with a pain-

Ben Stokes, whose batting heroics secured England's most successful Ashes run chase at Leeds two years ago, was on three with his team still 386 short of their target

ful blow to his abdomen before dismissing the England captain to cap another satisfying day for Australia.

"Root is a huge wicket, he is in fantastic form," Australia vice-captain Travis Head said. "I have a lot of sympathy for him. We got told to give him some space (on the pitch)."

"Starc on that line is never pretty and unfortunately with the day he (Root) has had it wasn't a great time to get hit."

Head expects spinner Nathan Lyon to play a big part on Monday. "It's a big day tomorrow," he said.

Earlier, Marnus Labuschagne followed his first innings century with a fifty and Travis Head made 51 as Australia declared on 230-9

half an hour before the tea break.

England claimed three wickets in the first session but Labuschagne and Head settled any nerves in the Australia camp before stand-in captain Smith declared.

West Indies hold the record for the highest successful fourth innings chase of 418 achieved against Australia in 2003.

England's most successful Ashes chase came at Leeds two years ago when they reached their 359-run target thanks to Stokes's super century.

It took 12 balls for an English wicket to fall with Richardson removing Haseeb Hameed caught behind for a duck.

Starc was treated for a back injury incurred while batting but showed no ill-effects.

Stokes temporarily took over England captaincy as Root had a hospital scan after being hit in the abdomen during Sunday's warm-up and he limped off the field following his dismissal to complete a depressing day for his team.

England fast bowling coach Jon Lewis praised Root's character

and resilience.

"Joe is a leader and a strong leader in this group," Lewis said. "Since he got hit he stood up, he could have had a night-watchman." — Reuters

SCOREBOARD

Australia first innings: 473-9 dec	
England first innings: 236	
Australia second innings (0/n: 45/1):	
M Harris c Buttler b Broad	23
D Warner (run out)	13
M Neser b Anderson	3
M Labuschagne c Stokes b Malan	51
S Smith c Buttler b Robinson	6
T Head c Stokes b Robinson	51
C Green (not out)	33
A Carey b Root	6
M Starc c Pope b Root	19
J Richardson c Buttler b Malan	8
Extras (B-3, LB-8, NB-5, W-1)	17
Total (For 9 wks dec, 61 overs)	230
Fall of wickets: 1-41, 2-48, 3-48, 4-55, 5-144, 6-173, 7-180, 8-216, 9-230	
Bowling: Anderson 10-6-8-1, Broad 10-3-27-1, Robinson 15-2-54-2, Woakes 12-3-46-0, Root 6-1-27-2, Stokes 2-0-24-0, Malan 6-0-33-2	
England second innings	
R Burns c Smith b Richardson	34
H Hameed c Carey b Richardson	0
D Malan lbw Neser	20
J Root c Carey b Starc	24
B Stokes (not out)	3
Extras (LB-1)	1
Total (For 4 wks, 43.2 overs)	82
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-48, 3-70, 4-82	
Bowling: Starc 11-2-4-21-1, Richardson 8-4-17-2, Lyon 14-3-28-0, Neser 5-2-7-1, Green 5-2-8-0	

Murray says clear-thinking key on road back to top

ABU DHABI: Andy Murray believes he is playing with more "clarity" and has a better idea of how he needs to compete against the top players as he approaches the new season with renewed purpose and confidence.

The former world No.1, down to 134 in the rankings, had a positive weekend in Abu Dhabi, where he claimed two victories over Dan Evans and Rafael Nadal before losing to Andrey Rublev in the final of an exhibition tournament.

The 34-year-old Murray, who is attempting a comeback no player with a metal hip has ever dared to embark on, struggled to find his best form against the top players last season, but finished 2021 with some promising results, including two top-10 triumphs over Hubert Hurkacz and Jannik Sinner.

"I feel like now I'm a lot clearer in my mind about how I'm going to play and the way I'm going to go about my matches in the next year," Murray told reporters in Abu Dhabi on Saturday.

"Decision-making comes from having a clear mind and clarity about the way you want to play and right now I'm quite sure on that and I believe that will help me in the important moments."

Murray missed last February's Australian Open after contracting Covid-19 and with the current surge in cases in the UK, the Scot is wary of suffering a similar fate ahead of next month's action in Melbourne.

"Obviously it's a concern," he said. "I want to try and stay safe. When I get home, I'm going to do all of my physical training at home in my house and avoid going to

the national tennis centre; there's been a number of cases there the last week to 10 days."

Murray is expecting to receive a wildcard into the main draw of the Australian Open — a tournament where he has reached, and lost, five finals.

The Brit owns a strong 48-13 win-loss record at Melbourne Park but has also experienced so many near-misses Down Under.

"I kind of feel like I maybe deserve to have an Australian Open, but I never got it done in the big matches there," he conceded.

"Got close and was in good position a couple of times, but couldn't convert it, so that's something I obviously have to deal with. But my memories from Australia, in terms of how I feel about the place, I love it there."

— AFP



(R to L) First-place winner Andrey Rublev of Russia holds up his trophy alongside second-place winner Andy Murray of Britain during the awards ceremony after the final match of the Mubadala World Tennis Championship. — AFP

Juventus battle through fog to win at Bologna

MILAN: Juventus gave their hopes of reaching the Champions League a boost on Saturday after a hard-fought 2-0 win at Bologna following Roma's thumping 4-1 victory at fancied Atalanta.

Goals in each half from Alvaro Morata and Juan Cuadrado ensured that Juve joined Roma at five points from the league's top four positions.

Massimiliano Allegri's side came away with the three points following a dogged performance at a ground which has proved tough terrain for some of Serie A's leading sides and was enveloped in thick fog for almost the entire match.

Juventus sit a sobering 12 points behind champions and league leaders Inter Milan, who crushed Salernitana 5-0 on Friday, but while a title challenge is almost certainly out of the question this year a place in Europe's top club competition is something they can fight for.

"When we play with this attitude, with determination and skill these are the results we get," said Leonardo Bonucci to DAZN.

"We can't afford to lose any more ground on the teams in front of us so this was a big win."

How far Juve sit from their target come the end of the weekend depends on how injury-hit Napoli fare at fellow title-chasers AC Milan on Sunday night.

Luciano Spalletti's team are fourth, a point away from Atalanta, but can go second with a win in northern Italy.

Morata pinched the lead for Juve on the break in the sixth minute, the Spain forward finishing after launching the attack and blasting home following a give-and-go with Federico Bernadeschi.

Juve were on the back foot for much of the match and home fans were ready to celebrate an equaliser in the 22nd minute when Mattias Svanberg lined up a bicycle kick from Mark Arnautovic's deflected cross, but the Swede's acrobatic effort flashed just wide.

After defending for the best part



Juventus' Juan Cuadrado celebrates after scoring during the Serie A match against Bologna in Bologna. — AFP

of 25 minutes from the start of the second half, Colombian Cuadrado sealed the win with a long range strike which took a wicked deflection Aaron Hickey.

ROMA'S SMASH AND GRAB

England international Abraham opened the scoring with less than a minute on the clock in Bergamo and, late on, rounded off coach Mourinho's biggest win since he returned to Serie A with a deft first-time strike to take his league tally to six for the season.

Massimiliano Allegri's side came away with the three points following a dogged performance at a ground which has proved tough terrain for some of Serie A's leading sides and was enveloped in thick fog for almost the entire match

"What a win, what else can I say? A lot of people doubted us today but this is by far one of the best wins we've had this season," said Abraham to DAZN.

Nicolo Zaniolo, with his first Serie A goal since July last year,

and Abraham's countryman Chris Smalling also netted in Roma's first win against one of Italy's top teams this campaign, denting Atalanta's burgeoning title hopes.

Gian Piero Gasperini's third-placed side are six points behind

Inter after being defeated by a Roma team whose goals came from five shots on target after having less than 30 per cent possession and no corners.

The match turned during four minutes midway through the second half in which Atalanta had a leveller ruled out by VAR for Jose Luis Palomino straying offside after challenging for Duvan Zapata's flick with Bryan Cristante and Smalling then poked home Roma's third.

The decision to rule out the

hosts' leveller infuriated Gasperini who raged to DAZN that the referee told him a Palomino goal had been ruled out even though the Argentine had not, in fact, touched the ball.

"If Palomino didn't touch the ball, then why is it offside? If Cristante got the ball, then what difference does it make?" he asked.

In Saturday's late game Cagliari try to get out of the relegation zone when they host Udinese in Sardinia. — AFP

Raptors rout Warriors, Pistons lose 14th straight game

LOS ANGELES: Fred VanVleet finished with 27 points and 12 assists and Scottie Barnes tallied 21 points as the Toronto Raptors rolled over the under-manned Golden State Warriors 119-100 on Saturday.

The Warriors were missing several of their top players, including Stephen Curry and Draymond Green, who had been on the current road trip but did not make the trip to Canada.

Warriors coach Steve Kerr elected to send them home after a win over Boston on Friday rather than risk them getting the coronavirus and have to potentially quarantine in Canada. Andre Iguodala (right knee), Otto Porter Jr (left foot) and Andrew Wiggins (left knee) were also sent back to California.

The Warriors dressed just nine players for the fifth game of their eight-day road swing.

The Raptors were playing for the first time since Thursday's game against the Chicago Bulls was postponed for Covid-19 reasons.

The Raptors were also missing key performers as an hour before tip-off, forward Pascal Siakam

and guard Dalano Banton entered health protocols.

"There's a heck of a lot of testing going on right now," said Toronto coach Nick Nurse.

Making his first NBA start, rookie Jonathan Kuminga led Golden State with a season-best 26 points.

The Raptors jumped out to a 25-10 lead in the first eight minutes. VanVleet had eight points, Chris Boucher had seven and Barnes six during the early scoring burst.

"I thought we played a lot better in the second half, competed better," Kerr said. "In the first half, we were on our heels and didn't have a lot of juice and confidence."

Elsewhere, Christian Wood scored a team high 21 points and grabbed eight rebounds as the Houston Rockets handed the Detroit Pistons their 14th consecutive loss with a 116-107 victory.

Playing against his former team, Wood led the Rockets who had all five starters scoring in double figures.

"I was concerned, because this was our sixth game in nine days and we were starting at noon," Rockets coach Stephen Silas said.

"Our first unit really got us off to a good start. Josh (Christopher) set the tone and then Christian worked himself into the game."

Eric Gordon tallied 18 points and five assists, Garrison Mathews 16 points, and Jae'Sean Tate had 11 points in the win. Kenyon Martin Jr (10 points, 11 rebounds) added a double-double off the bench as Houston shot 49.5 per cent from the floor.

The hapless Pistons committed 20 turnovers and made just 10 of 36 three point attempts.

Cade Cunningham finished with 21 points and 11 assists, while Saddiq Bey led Detroit with 23 points in the loss.

In Boston, Josh Richardson scored a season-high 27 points, Jayson Tatum had 25 and the Boston Celtics beat the New York Knicks 114-107.

Both teams were missing a half dozen players because of Covid-19 measures.

Kemba Walker, who played for Boston the last two seasons, started for the Knicks and scored a season-high 29 points. He was benched after starting New York's first 18 games and didn't play in the last 10. — AFP



Golden State Warriors' Kevon Looney (5) dunks against Toronto Raptors forward OG Anunoby (3) during the first half at Scotiabank Arena. — USA Today Sports



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Energy Development Oman unveils new brand identity

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 19

Energy Development Oman (EDO) SAOC has launched its new brand identity by unveiling its corporate vision and logo.

The company was set up in Muscat in December 2020 to take over the government’s 60 per cent stake in PDO’s Block 6 oil and associated gas, and 100 per cent in PDO’s Block 6 non-associated gas and condensate. PDO continues to operate Block 6, and EDO, through PDO, is responsible for the bulk of the Sultanate of Oman’s hydrocarbon output.

EDO’s vision — “To be a world-class partner for growth, driving a sustainable energy future” — will guide the business towards achieving its objectives of: Creating a vehicle for growth, enhancing efficiencies and governance in the country’s oil, gas and new energies sector; Alleviating the government’s Block 6 funding requirements and; Unlocking



value through diversification and value chain integration.

EDO Interim Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Haifa al Khaifi (pictured) said: “EDO’s ambitious vision is inspired by the Oman 2040 Vision of transitioning to renewables, leveraging world-class development opportunities and maximising value for the Sultanate of Oman.”



“The new logo, which was designed by PDO Concept and Design Adviser Mohammed al Mahraza, also reflects our approach to energy and sustainability, as well as EDO’s values of driving forward the energy transition agenda.”

Following its establishment through Royal Decree 128/2020, the transfer of the Block 6 oil concession (Royal Decree

21/2021) and the granting of a new Block 6 gas concession (Royal Decree 43/2021), EDO has made substantial progress on its journey to become the country’s energy champion and to support the Sultanate’s economic diversification.

In August 2021, EDO successfully secured USD 2.5 billion of financing at competitive

rates to meet the funding requirements for Block 6.

New interim appointments to the EDO team have also been announced, including Saif al Harthi as Chief Financial Officer, Aiman al Shukaili as Chief Strategy and Commercial Officer, Kahlan al Nabhani as Chief Corporate Planning and Services Officer and Dr Qassim al Riyami as Chief

Reserves Officer.

Haifa al Khaifi, who has over 25 years of experience in the energy sector and is the first female CEO of a Gulf Co-operation Council national energy company, commented: “These robustly qualified and experienced interim appointees will further energise EDO’s progressive journey during this transitional phase.”

Pan-industry strategy launched to drive digitalisation in Sultanate of Oman

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION:
Cross-sector collaboration involving government, industry, academia, SMEs and ICT service providers

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the nation’s largest oil and gas producer, says it is leading a cross-sector effort to accelerate digitalisation across industry in the Sultanate of Oman.

The pan-industry strategy is a joint initiative of government entities and industrial organisations, according to Dr Rajaa al Kiyumi, IT Infrastructure Projects Delivery Lead at PDO.

Speaking at a ‘majlis’ organised recently by PDO on the theme, ‘Driving Digital Transformation in Oman: Opportunities and Challenges’, Dr Al Kiyumi said the initiative is driven by PDO and its Energy Renewal Unit in collaboration with the company’s Digitalisation Unit.

It is also supported by the Ministry of Energy and Minerals and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MTCIT). The ‘majlis’ was held under the auspices of Dr Ali al Shidhani, Communications and Information Technology Under-



“We are also hoping to streamline efforts, break the siloes and share knowledge across all the different industries and thereby accelerate digital transformation across the entire industry

DR RAJAA AL KIYUMI
IT Infrastructure Projects Delivery Lead, PDO

Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology.

“Accelerating digital strategies is one of the most viable responses to the industry’s many challenges,” said Dr Al Kiyumi. “Having digital transformation programmes is key to improving efficiency, driving productivity,

and managing sustainability and low carbon agendas. For the industry as a whole to achieve digital leadership, requires vision, discipline and substantial changes to the existing operating models,” she stated.

According to the expert, the goal of the initiative — which was launched a few months ago

— is to develop a pan-industry digitalisation strategy that defines specific key focus areas and provides a clear implementation roadmap over a defined timeframe.

“By doing this, we aim to create a lot of great things, like promoting industry integration, for example,” she said. “We are also hoping to streamline efforts, break the siloes and share knowledge across all the different industries and thereby accelerate digital transformation across the entire industry.”

Part of the strategy is to identify and tap into existing capabilities in industry, academia and SMEs, explore R&D opportunities in the industry, and unlock in-country value (ICV) potential opportunity with a view to accelerating capability development, she explained.

Insights gleaned during the strategy development process will be shared with all of the participating stakeholders, including industry, local academia, start-ups, SMEs and ICT service providers, relevant government entities, and the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI).

The ultimate goal is to chart a roadmap, spanning a 5-10 year timeframe, specifying key focus areas and deliverables.



Oman Air codeshare pacts cover 18 airlines

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 19

Oman Air, the national airline of the Sultanate of Oman, will continue to strengthen strategic codeshare partnership agreements to maximise its post-pandemic growth trajectory.

The airline’s ongoing recovery calls for greater codeshare connectivity to offer passengers better connections and a wider choice of destinations from its hub in Muscat.

Oman Air has built a healthy network throughout the Middle East and the Indian Subcontinent, as well as several cities in Europe, South Asia and Africa in recent years and is focused

on growing additional connectivity to North and South America and Australia through strategic codeshares with its 18 partner airlines.

These include Ethiopian Airlines, Etihad Airways, Garuda Indonesia, Gulf Air, Royal Dutch Airlines KLM, Kenya Airways, Kuwait Airways, Lufthansa, Malaysia Airlines, SalamAir, Bangkok Airways, Qatar Airways, Royal Jordanian Airlines, Saudia, Thai Airways, Turkish Airlines, Sri Lankan Airlines, and Egyptair. Currently, Oman Air operates 46 codeshare sectors and markets an additional 219 codeshare sectors on six continents through its partners for a total of 265 sectors.

TURN TO PAGE 15

TURN TO PAGE 15

Meethaq: Changing the banking landscape

MUSCAT: Meethaq Islamic Banking from Bank Muscat is the most popular and largest Islamic banking services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, offering a full suite of Shari'a-compliant retail, corporate banking and wholesale banking products and services.

Since its inception 9 years ago, Meethaq Islamic Banking has been enjoying phenomenal growth and continues to set new benchmarks. It has been very encouraging to see both retail and corporate customers wholeheartedly adopting innovative Islamic banking and finance solutions, which were previously unavailable in the Sultanate of Oman. In line with its excellent customer-centric vision and full commitment to offer a world-class Islamic banking experience to customers in every corner of the country, Meethaq has established the largest Islamic branch network in the Sultanate of Oman consisting of 12 branches in the Governorate of Muscat and 12 branches across other governorates.

In addition to its already excellent network of branches, Meethaq has a dedicated network of 41 ATMs/CDMs and also provides free access to more than 740 plus ATMs and CDMs of Bank Muscat across the country for customers to conduct their banking transactions with ease. This has resulted in Meethaq enjoying the tremendous confidence of its extensive base of customers.

Meethaq demonstrated its leadership in the sultanate's Islamic banking sector yet again by growing its assets despite the strong economic headwinds brought about by the ongoing pandemic. It is noteworthy that with close to 30 per cent market share of the total Islamic assets in the Sultanate of Oman, Meethaq Islamic banking is significantly bigger than both full-fledged Islamic banks and other Islamic windows operating in the Sultanate of Oman.

SUPPORTING THE SULTANATE OF OMAN'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Meethaq has been at the forefront in actively supporting the Sultanate of Oman's economic development with its ever-growing suite of Islamic finance products and services catering to the varied and sophisticated needs of its different customer segments.

In May 2017, Meethaq attained a notable milestone when it received approval from the Capital Market Authority and the Central Bank of Oman to launch the first Sukuk programme in the Sultanate of



Oman allowing participation by retail investors.

The maiden Sukuk issuance was a great success with subscriptions far exceeding the initial target amount. Meethaq exercised its greenshoe option to absorb the excess demand for its Sukuk and raised a total of RO 44.6 million, which was well above the initial target of RO 25 million.

Similarly, Meethaq Sukuk Second Series launched in 2019 was a resounding success with the Islamic banking leader successfully raising an additional RO 45.6 million. Building on these successes, Meethaq has played a pivotal role in several sovereign Sukuk issuances by the Government of the Sultanate of Oman.

In addition to supporting the Sukuk issuances in various capacities which include being mandated as the Sole Lead Manager, Issue Manager and Book Runner, Meethaq has always been the largest Islamic Financial Institutional investor in all of the Government of the Sultanate of Oman Sukuk issued so far. This reflects Meethaq's commitment to support the Sultanate's sustainable economic and development growth over the long term.

Meethaq recognises the immense investment prospects and potential offered by the Sultanate of Oman and continues to play an important role in the development of key sectors in the Sultanate.

In support of Oman's Food Security related strategic initiatives, several local food producers such as Gulf International Poultry, Osoul Poultry Company and Al Nama Poultry have been financed by Meethaq. Meethaq has also been

instrumental in the development of the country's transport and logistics infrastructure by providing financing facilities to Oman Air and Oman Shipping Company.

Hence, Meethaq promotes the Sultanate of Oman's national goals of achieving strong economic growth, sustainable development and ensuring prosperity for all by financing national initiatives which are vital for the well-being of the country's economy.

INNOVATION

Innovation has always been a crucial element of Meethaq's product offerings and has resulted in the launch of numerous innovative corporate and retail products.

Meethaq's product suite comprises of several variants of Savings and Current Accounts customised to meet the needs of different customer segments, financing solutions such as Home Financing, Car Financing, Personal Goods Financing, Travel Finance, Personal Financing, Education Finance, Marriage Finance, Ijarah Financing, Diminishing Musharaka Financing, Wakala Bil Istihmar Financing and Goods Murabaha Financing amongst other structured products & services.

With the aim of offering a full range of Islamic financial offerings to cater to the different customer segments, Meethaq also offers credit cards, debit cards, Motor Takaful solutions, Trade Finance solutions and Hafawa Premium Banking services.

These are essentially additional products and services recently launched by Meethaq in response to the growing sophistication of its customers.

It is also noteworthy that even

during multiple periods of enhanced social distancing and lockdowns in the post-Covid-19 phase, Meethaq continued to innovate and launch new products or upgraded its existing products and services, which have greatly benefitted its customers. These include digital on-boarding of customers for opening savings accounts, domestic helper, travel and SME Takaful offerings in partnership with Takaful Oman, launch of Corporate Purchase Card, co-branded Lulu Credit Card and the opening of fixed deposits through Mobile banking.

DIGITAL PAYMENTS

Meethaq is strongly committed towards investing in state-of-the-art technology to further increase efficiency and improve customer service. With emphasis on competitive channels and new products to cater to various customer segments, Meethaq is focused on maintaining leadership in hi-tech products and services, including electronic payment and web-based services, in tune with the banking requirements of a young, tech-savvy generation.

Several significant technology upgrades were implemented over the last 15 months, including the Meethaq Wallet, which supports storing both Meethaq and non-Meethaq credit/prepaid/debit card details or even another bank's wallet details.

This allows customers with a Meethaq Bank wallet to make digital fund transfers to a third party conveniently. It also allows a registered wallet customer to send or request money from anyone just by entering their mobile number or email address, irrespective of whether the customer is a Meethaq

Bank wallet user or not.

Naturally, the new product has significantly boosted cashless payments in the Sultanate of Oman.

Other recent technological upgrades involved enabling customers of other banks in the Sultanate of Oman to use Bank Muscat and Meethaq CDMs / FFM's to transfer funds to Meethaq or Bank Muscat accounts.

Allowing the usage of debit cards issued by other Omani banks at Meethaq and Bank Muscat CDMs has reduced customer visits to Meethaq branches across the Sultanate and helped improve social distancing during the pandemic phase.

PROMOTING SAVINGS

Meethaq has been playing an active role in promoting savings amongst its customers by launching the Hibati savings account. As part of this, Meethaq organised Hibati prize draws throughout the year, with 5 high-value prizes amounting to RO 300,000 to be given away in the upcoming End of Year draw.

In total, cash prizes worth more than RO 1.5 million are being given away in 2021 to as many as 5,331 winners.

Based on the Sharia concept of unrestricted Mudarabah, the cash prizes offered under Hibati's 2021 prize draw scheme are 'Hiba' (gift) from Meethaq to its customers and are paid out of Mudarib's (shareholders') own sources. The cash prizes are in addition to the profit share of Investment Account Holders (IAHs) in the General Mudarabah Pool as per the declared profit rates.

WORLD-CLASS ISLAMIC BANKING EXPERIENCE

Meethaq's strong commitment to support the strategic national development initiatives in line with Oman's Vision 2040 economic blueprint, continued investment in new technologies and infrastructure to nurture and grow existing and new customer segments, has been well recognised by the global Islamic Finance community.

Every Meethaq product goes through the process of Shari'a compliance certification by the Shari'a Supervisory Board and is created in line with the guidelines of the Central Bank of Oman.

Meethaq's adoption of AAOIFI standards (Accounting & Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions) further distinguishes Meethaq Islamic banking practices in terms of standardisation of its products and services complementing its world-class Islamic banking experience.

Alizz Islamic Bank holds seminar on Waqf and Will



MUSCAT: As part of Manar Alizz Initiative, Alizz Islamic Bank, in collaboration with Al Rustaq Charity Team, will organise a seminar under the theme 'Waqf and Will: their Civilisational Role' on Wednesday at Wilayat Al Rustaq in the governor's office.

This seminar comes in response to the many invitations received by Alizz Islamic Bank from across the different governorates of the Sultanate of Oman following the successful launch of a similar seminar held at Grand Millennium Muscat during which Alizz Islamic Bank hosted a distinguished group of scholars, researchers, and specialists in this field.

In their work papers, the experts underlined the fact that the 'will' is a religious duty commanded by Allah yet much is needed to be done to educate the public about continuous charity and act of giving. It is highly praised for its noble and vital purposes as it can be used to fund charitable activities in the Sultanate as a gesture of social solidarity.

On the other hand, endowment ('waqf') is an important religious instrument since the early days of the Islamic civilisation and, practically, the Omani society has applied this concept throughout its history as a reflection of compassion and empathy between the members of society under the tenets of Islamic Shari'a.

To continue this shining legacy, while offering Islamic banking services; there is a need to underscore the role of waqf and provide the opportunity to invest the 'waqf' properties. These will grow into sustainable sources of income to fund charitable activities and manifest the strong bond between society members.

The 'will and waqf' are mercies and religious duties that must be maintained and encouraged. The will, specifically, is a source of income for the non-inheritors, an endless charity with constant reward from Allah and a form of strong and dynamic mechanism of benevolence that can be used to bridge the gap between the rich and bring out the sense of love and sympathies toward one another in society.

Data and statistics show that nowadays there is less and less tendency among people to prepare their wills as only 20 'wills' were recorded in one of the wilayats in 2019.

Given the number of the population aged 65 years and above, 20 'wills' represent only a meagre portion of 0.6 per cent. This calls to ring the bell for more robust cooperation and action to promote awareness among the public as to the importance and impact of 'wills' on their lives.

Own the Lincoln Navigator with exclusive benefits



MUSCAT: The Luxury Lincoln Navigator, the large and luxurious SUV is now even more attractive to own with exclusive benefits. Customer owning the Navigator can avail service 5 years / 100,000

kms, 1 year registration and 3M window tint. (Conditions apply. For details visit a Lincoln showroom.) The campaign is valid until December 30, 2021.

While on the move, the

Navigator is also easy to adjust to changing conditions. With the turn of a dial, the driver can adapt the Navigator to changing road or weather, and enjoy a smooth, confident ride.

Additional available technology includes: Trailer Backup Assist, which automatically steers the vehicle to turn a trailer the desired amount — meaning less time required to perform the task; Navigator is expected to deliver more towing capability than any other premium full-size SUV; 360-degree camera and enhanced park assist, which reduce stress from parallel and perpendicular parking.

The system integrates views from four cameras to create an

overhead image so the driver can see all around the vehicle; Adaptive cruise control, which automatically slows Navigator in stop-and-go traffic — resuming speed when traffic allows.

The interior layout is clean and uncluttered, with a simple, soothing ambience. At night, interior ambient lights sequentially illuminate each of the SUV's three rows. During the day, a panoramic roof fills the cabin with natural light. Inside, spaciousness comes in all three rows, including storage in each to keep the cabin clean and organised.

An available rear-seat entertainment system allows passengers to stream content wirelessly with an Android device

to one of the 10-inch adjustable screens mounted on the rear of the front seats.

The Navigator is designed to be intuitive and easy to use. A 12-inch configurable instrument cluster allows drivers to choose the information they want displayed. An available Head-Up Display can show selected information on the windshield instead of the instrument cluster.

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China's property distress sours steel sector

BEIJING: Debt problems at a major Chinese property developer have now spilled over into a vital artery of the nation's industrial engine — the steel sector — and started to ripple through to other critical parts of the world's second-largest economy.

The spreading balance-sheet crisis at real estate firms is a warning for policymakers as a swing in the fortunes of the steel industry would have significant repercussions for China's economy, with cement, glass, and household appliances all vulnerable to demand drops.

Already, steel prices are down from their record highs seen earlier this year due to easing demand from construction activities, which account for over half of the metal's consumption, while steelmakers' share prices have also been hurt.

Steel's acute sensitivity to the ebbs and flows in construction and manufacturing makes it a closely-tracked bellwether for China's economy, which has started to slow down from the second quarter. Steel firms are also massive employers that support a vast supply chain.

Hitting steel operations, real estate developers have dialled back investment in projects to conserve cash in a sector squeezed by tighter borrowing regulations that have engulfed indebted companies, most notably China Evergrande Group.

"We normally stockpile steel products in winter at relatively lower prices and sell them after the new year holidays when consumption resumes. But we are holding



Labourers work at a steel plant in Jinan, Shandong province, China. — Reuters

off this year," said Qi Xiaoliang, a Beijing-based steel trader. "There's still uncertainty in the real estate market for 2022 and the situation is not expected to be fully reversed for another six to 12 months," he added.

In the final quarter of 2021, the property market took a further hit as the unease in the sector shook already weak buyer sentiment, with unsold housing stock in China's 100 biggest cities reaching a five-year high in November.

Demand for homes is expected to ease further in 2022, hitting downstream manufacturers of household products.

Cement production was down around 16 per cent for September-November year-on-year, and was

lower versus the same period between 2017 and 2019. Demand for earth excavators has also dropped off in recent months.

The broadening spillover impact of the property downturn was also seen elsewhere. In the appliances industry, for example, monthly refrigerator output has been falling since May through to November on an annual basis.

Steel producers were among the best performers of the entire Chinese economy over the first three quarters of 2021, with China's 28 major listed mills pocketing over 106 billion yuan (\$16.61 billion) in net profits, up 174 per cent year-on-year and 129 per cent higher than in pre-pandemic 2019.

But the boom times in the steel sector are over.

The paralysis that has struck China's mammoth construction industry is triggering a rare contraction in building activity across the country. New construction starts by floor area have contracted from a year earlier since July — their longest stretch of declines since 2015.

The slowdown in the real estate sector has dented China's monthly crude steel output by more than 20 per cent since September. The closely-tracked steel equity instruments and commodities futures have captured the reversal of fortunes.

After gaining roughly 90 per cent through mid-September,

the CSI steel equities index has plunged 27 per cent since, while futures prices for construction materials rebar and wire rod have tumbled 24 per cent and 31 per cent respectively from their historical highs to erase almost all their gains this year.

As steel producers hit the brakes, the key inputs used in steelmaking have also taken a shellacking, with Dalian Commodity Exchange iron ore futures down more than 45 per cent from their record in May.

Property-related sectors are the single biggest contributor to China's economy, accounting for 28 per cent of GDP in 2021, down from a recent peak of 35 per cent in 2016. — Reuters

Oman Air codeshare pacts cover 18 airlines

FROM PAGE 13

"Providing access to more destinations underpins our business operations and growth strategy as we gradually emerge from the global pandemic and look for new ways to offer our valued guests greater travel convenience and connectivity," said Eng Abdulaziz al Raisi, CEO of Oman Air.

"Together with our codeshare partners, we continue to grow our network reach out of Muscat while offering reciprocal connectivity for passengers flying to the Sultanate of Oman. Strategic codeshare agreements make sense at a time when airlines around the world are facing tremendous challenges, and Oman Air understands that now, more than ever, seamless connectivity is a deciding factor for passengers when it comes to booking."

To date, Qatar Airways remains Oman Air's biggest codeshare partner. In December 2020, Oman Air and Qatar Airways announced greater cooperation that would allow both airlines to expand commercial operations, boost connectivity and enhance travel options. Both airlines announced a reciprocal loyalty partnership whereby members of Oman Air Sindbad Program and Qatar Airways Privilege Club can earn and redeem miles for travel on both airlines between Muscat and Doha in either direction.

Shaleem receives OPAL Best Practice Award 2021

MUSCAT: Shaleem Petroleum Co has won the OPAL Best Practice Award 2021 in the Category of Health & Safety in the Class for Local Community Contractors.

The OPAL Best practice Award is given annually to companies that have made a special contribution to the Nation by executing exceptional projects.

Shaleem has provided the SARS-CoV-2 Rapid Antigen Tests to all employees in order to quickly identify employees who have Covid-19.

These tests are used widely in Europe, especially with school kids. These tests are self-administered, safe, easy



to use and provide a result within minutes. All employees in Shaleem take a self-test before travelling to work in the oilfield. In Head Office staff are

regularly screened in order to limit the spread of Covid-19.

By doing this Shaleem has been able to identify and isolate Covid-19 infected employees

and managed to stop the virus from spreading further. This has helped the healthcare system of the Sultanate of Oman. Shaleem has created a safer working space for all employees.

Mark Hobbs, CEO of Shaleem said: "The Antigen-Rapid Tests have helped not only us and our employees in Shaleem, but also the nation. We are proud to have received the OPAL Best practice Award for our efforts."

I would like to thank all Shaleem employees for their dedication and support in the application of the Antigen Rapid Tests. This prestigious award is for all of our employees!"

Pan-industry strategy launched to drive digitalisation

FROM PAGE 13

In her address, Dr Al Kiyumi held up the Oil & Gas industry as having made significance strides in digitalisation.

Examples of digitalisation already achieved by the sector include: the use of blockchain to execute international transactions, deployment of drones for pipelines surveillance, stuck pipe & tight spot event prediction (STEP), AI-based production optimisation, and robotic process automation.

The sector is also weighing opportunities for, among

other things, 3D printing of oil equipment and assets, digital twin of well models and stations, real time asset tracking, and analytics driven warehouse management, she added.

Significantly, the PDO-led initiative comes against the Omani government's recent unveiling of a National Digital Economy Programme that seeks to spark the growth of national industries based on the digital economy, speed up the digital transformation in the public sector and upgrade the level of electronic services in the country.

Apple seeks dismissal of India apps market antitrust case

NEW DELHI: Apple Inc has asked India's antitrust watchdog to throw out a case alleging abuse of market power in the apps market, saying it is too small a player in the South Asian country where Google is dominant.

The filing was made after the Competition Commission of India (CCI) started reviewing allegations that Apple hurts competition by forcing app developers to use its proprietary system which can charge commissions of up to 30 per cent on in-app purchases.

Apple denied the allegations in its filing to the CCI and stressed that its market share in India is an "insignificant" 0-5 per cent, while Google commands 90-100 per cent as its Android operating system powers most other smartphones.

"Apple is not dominant in the Indian market... Without dominance, there can be no abuse," Apple said in the submission dated November 16 which was signed by its Chief Compliance Officer, Kyle Andeer.

"It has already been established



A salesperson speaks on the phone at an Apple store in Mumbai. — Reuters

that Google is the dominant player in India," it added.

The complainant in the case, a little-known non-profit group called "Together We Fight Society", said that Apple with iOS dominates the market for non-licensable mobile operating systems.

Apple countered that in its filing, saying the entire smartphone market — which includes licensable systems like Android — is the market that should be taken into consideration.

Apple also described the Indian

complaint as a "proxy filing" in its Competition Commission of India submission, saying that the complainant was "likely acting in concert with parties with whom Apple has ongoing commercial and contractual disputes globally and/or that have complained to other regulators."

The US tech company did not give any evidence in its submission to support its claim. The non-profit said that Apple's remark was "made to prejudice the mind" of the CCI "without any iota of proof." — Reuters

Big Wall Street bonus pools may be hard to drain

The windfall coming to Wall Street bankers is the worst-kept secret of 2021. The bonus pools at JPMorgan, Goldman Sachs and the rest have swelled read more , which means bankers can take home more without shareholders settling for less.

Just like any market that has been artificially stimulated, it's the return to normal that poses the challenge.

JPMorgan and Goldman are both planning to raise bonuses by upwards of 40 per cent for investment bankers who work on deals, initial public offerings and such. The increase is partly arithmetic. In an industry where a big chunk of pay is performance-linked, bonuses rise when revenue does, and markets have been buoyant.

Goldman's compensation expense in the first nine months of the year rose 34 per cent as its top line expanded 31 per cent.

But banks are also reversing some of the restraint they showed in 2020. Last year, Goldman's pay as a share of revenue fell to 30 per cent, from 34 per cent the year before.

Compensation increased, but at a slower pace than the top line. JPMorgan's investment banking and trading division paid out 24 per cent, compared with 28 per cent for each of the three preceding years. So long as those ratios remain stable or fall, as they have done for years now, increasing pay doesn't conflict with the rising profit that investors demand.

That could change this year with so-called comp ratios set to rise again. For hints, bankers only need consider the lucky few at the top. Goldman boss David Solomon took a \$10 million pay cut in January only to get a \$30 million special incentive in October.

JPMorgan just handed Daniel Pinto, a potential successor to Chief Executive Jamie Dimon, a \$25 million stock award on top of the \$24.5 million he was paid in 2020.

Yet it may be tougher than usual to bring bonuses down again if markets lose their froth. Assuming a constant pay ratio, if revenue in 2022 fell back to 2019 levels then overall compensation would slump by almost 40 per cent from this year at Solomon's firm and by 25 per cent at Dimon's.

That's a potential problem because big banks no longer just compete against each other for talent: Cryptocurrency and financial technology firms are hiring aggressively. A shrinking Wall Street bonus pool in 2022 could be just what those brash new rivals need. — Reuters

Just like any market that has been artificially stimulated, it's the return to normal that poses the challenge



SET FOR LAUNCH

A woman walks under snowfall in front of a Soyuz rocket installed as a monument in Baikonur city, near the Russian leased Kazakh Baikonur cosmodrome. After a decade-long hiatus, Russia is relaunching an ambitious bid for dominion over the world's budding space tourism industry, jostling with zealous billionaires, the United States, and rising China. — AFP

GDP days are numbered



DIANE COYLE

Professor of Public Policy at the University of Cambridge, is the author, most recently, of *Cogs and Monsters: What Economics Is, and What It Should Be* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

THE CORE IDEA IS TO CREATE A COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL BALANCE SHEET TO DEMONSTRATE THAT ECONOMIC PROGRESS TODAY IS ILLUSORY

How should we measure economic success? Criticisms of conventional indicators, particularly gross domestic product, have abounded for years, if not decades.

Environmentalists have long pointed out that GDP omits the depletion of natural assets, as well as negative externalities such as global warming. And its failure to capture unpaid but undoubtedly valuable work in the home is another glaring omission. But better alternatives may soon be at hand.

In 2009, a commission led by Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi spurred efforts to find alternative ways to gauge economic progress by recommending a “dashboard” of indicators.

Since then, economists and statisticians, working alongside natural scientists, have put considerable effort into developing rigorous wealth-based prosperity metrics, particularly concerning natural assets.

The core idea is to create a comprehensive national balance sheet to demonstrate that economic progress today is illusory when it comes at the expense of future living standards.

In an important milestone in March of this year, the United Nations approved a statistical standard relating to the services that nature provides to the economy.

That followed the UK Treasury's publication of a review by the University of Cambridge's Partha Dasgupta setting out how to integrate nature in general, and biodiversity in particular, into economic analysis. With the consequences of climate change starting to become all too apparent, any meaningful concept of economic success in the future will surely include sustainability.

The next steps in this statistical endeavour will be to incorporate measures of social capital, reflecting the ability of communities or countries to act collectively, and to extend measurement of the household sector.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted how crucial this unpaid work is to a country's economic health.

For example, the US Bureau of Labour Statistics intends to develop a more comprehensive concept of living standards that includes the value of such activity.

Aggregate measures such as these can be useful for guiding important policy decisions in a manner consistent with familiar economic concepts.

This approach also helps the conversation with finance ministry officials and business executives, whose support for a longer-term perspective regarding prosperity will be essential to bring about change.

But many advocate thinking about

economic success and failure in terms of well-being, a broader and fuzzier concept. The idea that policy decisions should focus on what ultimately matters in people's lives is intuitively appealing.

And a number of governments, from New Zealand to Scotland, have recently adopted explicit well-being policy frameworks. This approach, however, raises even more difficult measurement questions. Well-being depends on many aspects of individuals' life circumstances. To be sure, there is a large body of research in psychology and economics concerning how to measure well-being and analyse the factors that influence it.

Often, the measurement involves surveying people's satisfaction with their lives or their level of anxiety. For example, the United Kingdom's Office for National Statistics has been tracking anxiety and depression throughout the pandemic.

But while policymakers need some top-down, aggregate statistics to facilitate their decision-making, such indicators have limitations.

For example, whereas the links between well-being and factors identified by econometric analysis — such as being employed or in good mental health — are intuitive, the causal connections are not well understood. ©Project Syndicate, 2021

NFTs: much hyped, but how do they work?

JULES BONNARD

NFTs have sometimes sold online for astronomical sums, with major companies now joining the craze as the tokens find their way into everything from the art market to video games. But what exactly are these digital assets, and how are they traded?

What is an NFT?

NFT stands for Non-Fungible Token. Something that is “fungible” can be exchanged with an equivalent item — for example, a \$5 bill with another \$5 bill.

Cryptocurrencies, which use a digital public record of transactions called a blockchain, are fungible. NFTs are digital items that can be bought and sold using this

blockchain technology. But they are not fungible, making them a different type of asset.

Some have sold for millions, including an NFT by digital artist Beeple which went under the hammer at Christie's in March for an eye-watering \$69.3 million.

Some of the most coveted NFTs are released via collections of thousands of unique individual cartoons, such as the Bored Ape Yacht Club.

They are seen as intrinsically cool by their owners, who enjoy boasting of their purchases by displaying them as their social media avatars. The tokens aren't necessarily images, though: on several websites, such as Decentraland and The Sandbox, you can buy virtual land in NFT form.

Critics say investors are spending money on meaningless items, but supporters insist that NFTs are much more than digital trinkets.

Some predict that using the blockchain to record the ownership history of an item will eventually become much more widespread, revolutionising how we think about property.

How are NFTs traded?

Like cryptocurrencies, NFTs are bought and sold on specialised platforms. OpenSea is the best-known NFT marketplace. A sale does not necessarily involve the transfer of the object depicted by the token.

NFTs of famous paintings have been sold, for example, but the buyer does not receive the painting.

What changes hands is a certificate of ownership of the NFT, registered on the blockchain. The certificate must be kept safe in a digital wallet, which can take various forms. The wallet might be accessed via Metamask, a free Internet browser

extension, or a secure physical device.

It might also take the simple form of a code printed on a piece of paper. To purchase an NFT, the wallet must contain enough of the relevant cryptocurrency — for example, ether (ETH) if the person is buying a token on the Ethereum blockchain.

With a little technical know-how, it is also possible to make, or “mint”, your own NFT.

Ultimately, NFTs are digital contracts, with certain rules embedded such as the number of copies available for sale.

What are the risks?

Trading NFTs involves technical processes that are sometimes misunderstood — and that can lead to investors not knowing quite what they are dealing with. Every interaction with the blockchain involves fees to pay for “mining”

— the hugely energy-intensive computer calculations needed to verify each transaction.

Thousands of users might rush to buy a much-coveted NFT as it's minted, and they have to pay the fees even if they walk away empty-handed.

Some buyers use bots to try to ensure that they get their hands on a token, which makes the market even less accessible for newbie investors.

“A very small group of highly sophisticated investors rake in most of the profits from NFT collecting,” blockchain data company Chainalysis said in a recent report.

And it added that NFTs are often sold at a lower price to enthusiasts who have helped to create hype for the project.

“The data suggests that NFTs are far from a surefire investment,” Chainalysis concluded. — AFP

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

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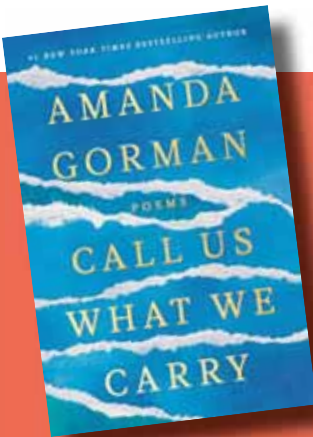
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A simple guide when hiking in the Sultanate of Oman

In the Sultanate of Oman, winter is also synonymous with outdoor adventures and hiking. As the weather is perfect, there will definitely be a new bunch of hikers and outdoor lovers who would like to give hiking a try. This writer compiled some of the dos and don'ts for beginners so you too can have a successful hiking adventure... **P20**

READ



CALL US WHAT WE CARRY

BY AMANDA GORMAN
A debut collection of poems on identity and history by the presidential inaugural poet who wrote "The Hill We Climb."

HERITAGE

Unesco adds Bahrain musical performance to heritage list

THE UNITED NATIONS cultural agency on Wednesday added Bahrain's Fjiri musical performance, which commemorates the history of pearl diving, to its list of "intangible" heritage. The Gulf country, with a population of about 1.5 million, presented its nomination to the UN Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organisation (Unesco), which announced the listing on Twitter. Bahrain's nomination was among 48 from around the world considered for inscription on the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list at an annual Unesco-led meeting. "Dating back to the late 19th

century, it was traditionally performed by pearl divers and pearling crews to express the hardships faced at sea," Unesco said on its website. "The performers sit in a circle, singing and playing different types of drums, finger chimes and a jahl, a clay pot used as an instrument," it added. "The centre of the circle is occupied by the dancers and the lead singer, who is in charge of conducting the performance." Bahrain was also among 16 Muslim-majority countries that presented the nomination of Arabic calligraphy, a tradition in the Arab and Islamic worlds, which was also added to the heritage list during this week's meeting. Fjiri, which originated on



Bahrain's island of Muharraq, is performed in festivals throughout the country. "It is now well-known across the country and is viewed as a means of expressing the connection between the Bahraini

people and the sea," said Unesco. "The words, rhythms and instruments are used to convey the values of perseverance, strength and resourcefulness." — AFP



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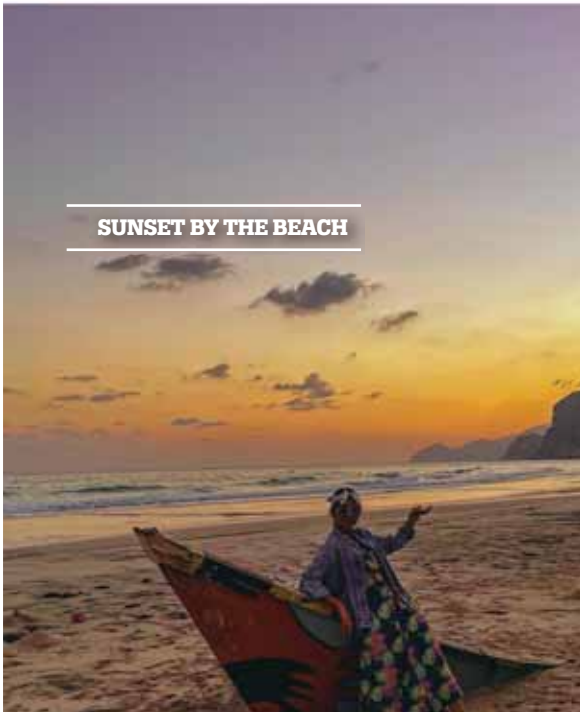
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AROUND THE WORLD

LIFESTYLE

Ghana opens first skate park honouring fashion icon Abloh



GHANA HAS OPENED its first skate park in the heart of the capital, Accra, in honour of the late US fashion icon Virgil Abloh, who was overseeing the project before he passed away in late November.

Unveiling the park, organisers paid tribute to the American designer of Ghanaian origin with musical performances by local artists and skate sessions by both professionals and amateurs.

"Abloh was here," is conspicuously written on a fence wall at the park, among the list of personalities who contributed to fund the Freedom Skatepark.

Artistic director for Louis Vuitton men's collections, Abloh, whose family was from Ghana, died last month of cancer aged 41, after becoming the first major black designer recognised in the industry.

Abloh expanded from Chicago's skate and DJ culture to the heights of the fashion world, first with his own red-hot label Off-White, and then into the luxury industry in Paris.

But he never forgot his own Ghanaian roots — earlier this year he used Kente, a traditional fabric worn in Ghana to the catwalks of Vuitton.

His Off-White clothes brand is among the sponsors of the new park, which was set up with the help of Surf Ghana, a local collective seeking to empower youth through teaching them extreme sports.

The founder of Surf Ghana, Sandy Alibo, says skating is a lesser-known sport in Ghana.

But she believes it will go a long way towards boosting tourism and creating networking opportunities for young Ghanaians.

"We're not talking only about sports, but we're talking building self-confidence in the youth, about tourism and developing youth entrepreneurship," she told AFP.

"They connect and share ideas. Skateboarders make the city alive because they entertain people and that is what Ghana needs."

Alibo said she is looking forward to one day seeing Ghana participate in international skateboarding competitions.

"Skateboarding has been accepted at the Olympic Games and that can help develop the sports in Africa."

A skateboarding coach, Joshua Odamtey, says the park will also help children develop their love for the sport.

"We share what we know with the minors because in some years to come we'll not be here anymore," he said.

"Skateboarding is a way of exercising and also to have fun."

Abloh was hailed last month by African designers who said he had helped open the door for them and given them a voice in the global fashion industry. — AFP

ENTERTAINMENT



DiCaprio and Lawrence big up science in doomsday comedy

FOR HOLLYWOOD A-LISTERS Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence, their new end-of-the-world comedy was a chance to send a little respect back to scientists.

In "Don't Look Up", released on December 24 on Netflix, they play two astronomers who discover a comet will wipe out life on Earth within six months, but then try in vain to get politicians and the media to take the threat seriously.

The parallels with the climate crisis were deliberate, and filming during the pandemic gave the film another level of relevance.

"We are so immensely distracted from the truth nowadays and then Covid hit and a whole new scientific argument happened there," DiCaprio said in a recent press conference.

The film marks Lawrence's return to the big screen after a couple of years away from the spotlight.

The "Hunger Games" star recently told Vanity Fair she felt people had "gotten sick of me" following a string of box office disappointments, and wanted to build a real life, not least after a near-death experience when her private plane crashed.

She was lured back by her love for "Don't Look Up" director Adam McKay and the message of the film. "It's so sad and frustrating to watch people who have dedicated their lives to learning the truth be turned away because people don't like what the truth has to say," said Lawrence.

In the movie, the astronomers face a particularly tough time trying to convince the power-obsessed US president, played with narcissistic glee by Meryl Streep. Streep was coy about the real-life inspiration for her role.

"There were so many places to take things from, because there

are so many preposterous people who put themselves in public life, shamelessly," she said.

The press conference was hosted by Dr Amy Mainzer, the real-life astronomer who provided the basis for Lawrence's character.

She said it was "very cathartic" watching DiCaprio's impassioned rant in the film against the stupidity of ignoring scientific warnings.

"We had a screening with other scientists in LA and they were cheering. It was really something to behold," Mainzer said.

'I WOULD BE TWEETING'

Jonah Hill, who plays the obnoxious son and chief-of-staff to Streep's president, struck a light note at the press conference.

Asked what he would do if the world was coming to an end, Hill dead-panned: "I think I would be tweeting. Letting people know the cool thoughts that I had to say, and opinions about different stuff like movies and how stars live their lives and who they're dating."

"And I think people in their last moments would want to read that."

Lawrence, laughing, agreed: "I would die commenting on TikTok."

McKay has pivoted from out-and-out comedies like "Anchorman" and "Step Brothers" to more political fare with films about the financial crisis ("The Big Short") and former vice-president Dick Cheney ("Vice").

"We wanted to deal with this subject — the climate crisis — that is arguably the greatest threat to life in the history of mankind, and that can be almost like an animal attacking you, it can be overwhelming," McKay said.

"But if you're able to laugh, that means you have some distance, that's important. You can feel urgency and sadness and loss while also having a sense of humour."

That approach helped hook in DiCaprio, who has been a passionate campaigner on climate issues for years.

"I'd been looking for a movie about this subject for decades. This is an issue where everyone is looking for what kind of difference they can make. Adam really cracked the code," DiCaprio said.

"It's the most important issue that any of us could be talking about on a regular basis." — AFP



Rachael MacIver
Instagram: @rachael_maciver

The adventure of a blonde and a very old car #22

"I THINK WE GOT company", I called out to Mrs J, who quickly threw a loose dress over her swimsuit to cover up.

We had set up our little camp on an empty beach, close enough to hear the surf, but in a safe enough distance so as not to wake up to any surprises caused by the tide. It has a little bit of Heaven. Soft sand, a large dune leaning lazily up against a huge cliff as though it wanted to swallow it, a soft stretch of greenery where camels would visit at dawn to graze. Nobody else around — except for the small white and orange taxi now making its way carefully towards our tents in the soft sand.

Mrs J and I watched a little apprehensively as the car came to a stop next to us. "Don't worry" Mrs J whispered, "I have my Swiss Army knife". I looked at her hand clutching the little handbag version of the famous Swiss knife. I wasn't sure how good a nail file would be in the case of an armed robbery, but perhaps the little toothpick would work.

We hadn't needed worrying.

Saif waved as he climbed out of his taxi and asked permission to join us. His dishdasha was pristine and an intoxicating smell wafted towards me on the sea breeze. Sandalwood. It was a welcoming change from damp firewood. How did Omani men always manage to stay so clean and smell so good even on a sandy beach in the middle of nowhere?

Mrs J looked at me as we discreetly inched away from Saif on the beach mat. Like myself, she was at this point painfully aware of the distinct aura of salt, seaweed and wood smoke surrounding us. In each other's company, we had gotten used to it. But yes, we needed a shower.

I unscrewed the top of our little thermos and offered him a cup of tea. As tradition dictated he had to decline our offer several times and we had to insist and more or less force a mug into his hand. This dance took a

while, of course, and we almost missed the sunset — the whole reason for the three of us to sit like ducks in a row on the beach mat, overlooking the sea. Eventually, I won, as we all knew I would according to century-old traditions of hospitality.

Saif slurped his tea in small sips. "Ahhh, this is tea from Sulaiman!" he exclaimed surprised. He was right of course. We had stopped in his village, Hadbeen, on the way there and filled up the thermos. Had been, a tiny village by the sea, with only 350 inhabitants according to Saif. Of course, he would know Sulaiman's tea.

"I'm a travelling man, you know," Saif said apropos nothing. Mrs J and I both looked at his orange striped taxi in the sand and imagine sandalwood smelling Saif touring the world with the meter running. "I've been to Muscat", he continued "and Dubai". There was a pause where we kinda expected him to go on to list all the many other places this travelling man had been to. After a while, it was clear that the list ended after Dubai.

"I take tourists in my taxi and show them around, and in return, they tell me about their countries. In my mind, I have now travelled to all these places. I have walked in the snow, I have tasted their food, I have listened to their language. It takes me everywhere."

"You could always just google these places", Mrs J suggested. Saif looked puzzled.

"I guess", he shrugged without much enthusiasm. And with just a few words she had shattered his illusions, derailed his Dream Express and brought him right back to Hadbeen and his beaten-up taxi. He left us soon after.

"Do you know who said: 'Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world'?" I asked Mrs J.

"Albert Einstein" I continued without waiting for her reply. "I googled it".

AROUND OMAN IN 3RD GEAR



A simple guide when hiking in the Sultanate

Text by Rumpa Mitra
Photos by Abhilash Pillai

Winter in Oman is the best time for all types of outdoor activities and quite obviously all the hiking trails will be busy with the sound of footsteps of numerous hiking teams — professional groups, individuals and beginners alike.

When I started pursuing my passion, I was clueless on how to start, but fortunately, I got acquainted with some of the pro hikers including Instagram content creators @extremethrills & @7amd0on. My interaction with them allows me to learn from their experience and till today, 3-years into adapting to the hiking lifestyle, I am still learning and getting guidance from these professionals. For anyone wanting to explore new hiking paths, information is always a crucial part of a successful hike.

Having extensively hiked the country and sharing these experiences on social media, I often get inquiries from beginners as to the dos and don'ts of hiking. It is heartwarming to see that there is a continued interest in this activity and as such, I've compiled a few things every beginner should always consider when going for a hike.

DO NOT BLINDLY FOLLOW.

It is good to have an idol who is a pro in the field, but please do not try to follow their actions when you are still at a beginners' level. Remember, they might have been doing what they do far longer than you realise so when they look at a terrain, they already have an insight that you might not necessarily have. When joining a group hike, always follow their instructions and learn from their experiences. Do not, however, become a daredevil in an instant and follow everything they do. Always hike with caution. As a newbie, make sure to observe the hiking trail markings.

These are your lifeline. Most hiking trails in the Sultanate of Oman have yellow, white and red markings for you to follow. Always choose these tested paths.

HAVE AN EXPERT FRIEND.

The more people you know, the better chances you will have in succeeding whatever hike you embark on. It is always good to know someone who is an expert so that you can reach out to them anytime for any information or queries related to this type of activity. Having two or three expert hiker friends who are familiar with terrain is even better as their insight will definitely help you navigate your destination with more caution and foresight. Always compare and contrast information that is handed to you. When faced with a dilemma while on the road, it is always life-saving to ask first rather than blindly decide on what road to take or where to go.

READ BLOGS AND UNDERSTAND YOUR DESTINATION TO THE LAST DETAIL.

Just because someone rated a hiking path as the easy or medium difficulty doesn't mean that it will always be the case. Remember that terrains change all the time and it is, therefore, important to get the latest updates. Before attempting any outdoor activity, one should always personally check and read different blogs. Read by yourself to know more and understand clearly. The more you read, the more you know, the more prepared you become.

ASSESS YOUR PHYSICAL FITNESS OR PEOPLE ACCOMPANYING YOU.

You are the best person to judge your own fitness level. The worst thing you can do is lie to yourself and force yourself on a hike that you are not prepared for. Choose a hiking destination that you have trained and prepared for. While it is important to not underestimate your capabilities, your body cannot lie. Always factor in weight, age, physical capability whenever you say yes to an adventure. It is not only physical strength that matters. You would also need endurance, mental strength and presence of mind. If you're tagging friends and family along, make sure to assess that they can do your chosen path.

AVOID DOING SOLO HIKING TRIPS AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.

City walks are fine. But one thing you have to understand about Oman's mountains is that they can be tricky especially at night. Many of the hiking trails are littered with sharp, rugged rocks that can easily cut or hurt you. Never try to be a solo explorer at the beginner level. Always make sure that you hike with a buddy or better yet, acclimate yourself by joining group hikes.

FACTOR IN THE WEATHER AND YOUR CLOTHING.

Just because a plan was made doesn't mean that it should already be set in stone especially if the weather is involved. The thing about the Sultanate of Oman is that when it rains, some areas can get flooded fast. Weather plays an important role in any of your outdoor

activities. So before you embark on a trip, make sure to check on the weather forecast and consider it in your plans. Expect the mountains to be cold especially during the winter and dress appropriately. The clothing has to be just optimal depending on the climate and nature of the activity. The right pair of shoes is very essential for any outdoor activity, it can change the entire trip experience.

ALWAYS CONSIDER THE TIMING.

The worst thing that can happen to you is mismanaging your time and finding yourself scrambling in the dark looking for the hiking marks. Read the hike details carefully and then plan the entire hike. Remember, you need to come back from the mountain before sunset unless it's a well-prepared camping trip or night hike where the group is equipped with the proper lighting and night gear. Here it is important to note that the time for completing any hike or outdoor activity varies from person to person depending upon their stamina and fitness levels. After the sunset, it is difficult to cross the trail and reach the end.

PREPARE A CHECKLIST OF YOUR TRIP ESSENTIALS.

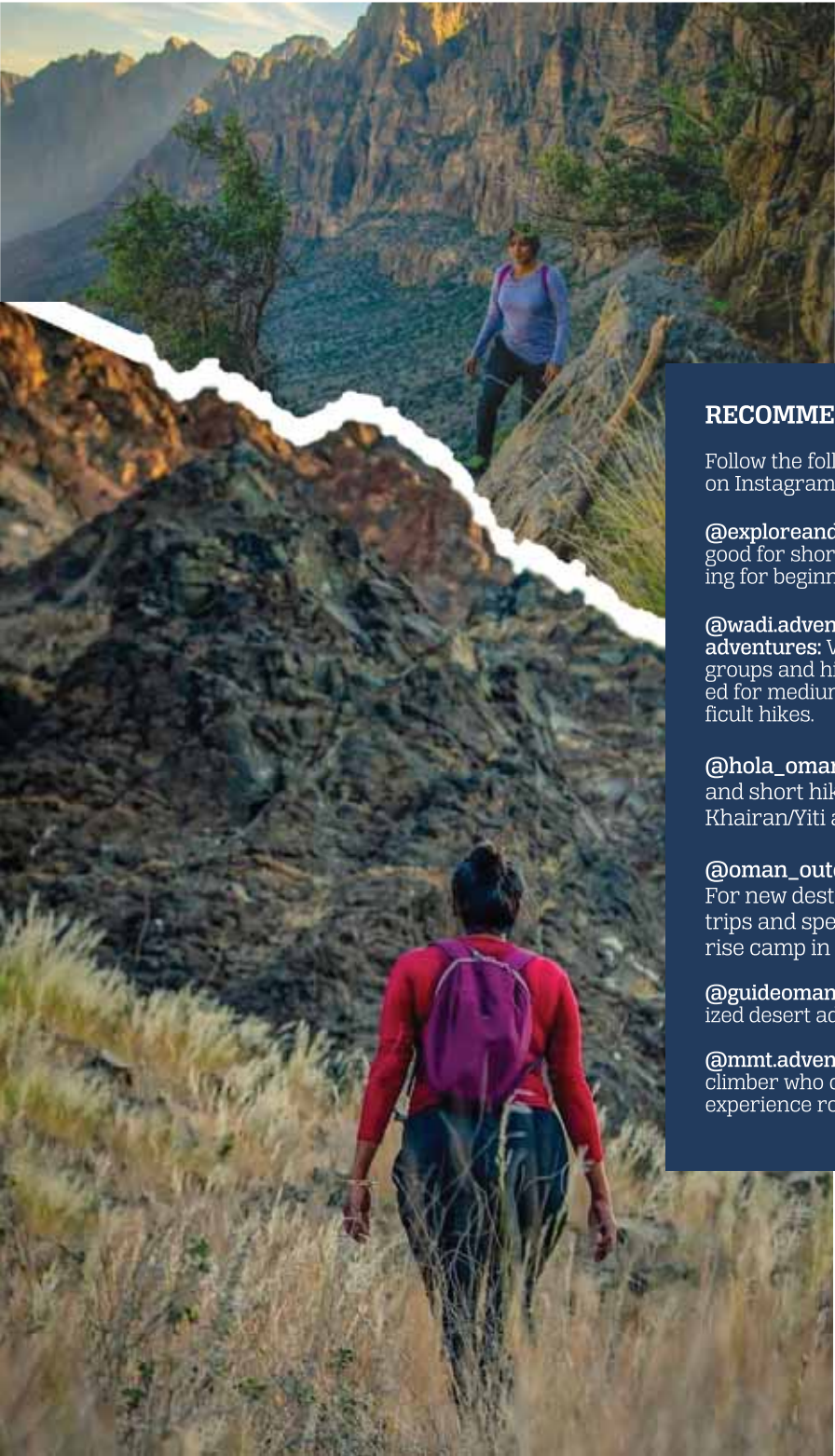
Dehydration is going to be your enemy when you hike so always bring along some essentials with you when you hike. For 6-8 hour hikes, bringing along a backpack that can accommodate 2.5 litres of water will be a lifesaver for you. Always carry a light snack or small fruit as well for nourishment. Carrying dates, some nut bars, baby carrots are good options. Try not to add unnecessary weight to your backpack. A head torch is a must or you may opt for a small lightweight torch. The phone should be charged properly and battery backup is essential if you are going out for a long activity. For wadi adventures, always wear your swimsuit and life jackets for safety reasons even if you are a good swimmer. You need to have a waterproof phone cover along with a dry backpack. A small medical kit with band-aids, pain relief spray, and your personal necessary medicines is a must. Sunglasses, scarf/hat and sun cream come under essential items.

BE MINDFUL OF WHERE YOU ARE GOING.

When going out in the wild, you will come across different wild animals including venomous snakes or bugs. Always look where you're going. When visiting small villages, observe some decorum. Do not speak loudly or pluck fruits from farms. When taking photographs, always ask for permission first.

Always research your destination if a 4-wheel drive is needed. Always follow the "Leave no trash" motto. Carry your trash with you dispose properly in the appropriate disposal bins.

There is no shortcut to knowledge and experience when it comes to hiking. Whether you are doing a mountain trail, a wadi trail or just a fun city hike, make sure that you learn from every of your hiking journey.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Follow the following groups on Instagram:

@exploreandchallenge: Very good for short hikes and abseiling for beginners.

@wadi.adventure and @cyr.adventures: Very professional groups and highly recommended for medium-level to very difficult hikes.

@hola_oman: For kayaking and short hikes around the al Khairan/Yiti area.

@oman_outdoor_adventure: For new destinations, camping trips and special sunset/sunrise camp in Bandar Khairan.

@guideoman: For well-organized desert adventures.

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