

P10

AL ZUBAIR, STOLZ AND KONRAD FINISH THIRD IN ASIAN LE MANS



P13

OQ SELLS 20% ABRAJ STAKE TO SAUDI-OMANI INVESTMENT CO



P20

THE LAST INHABITANTS OF THE CANYONS OF DMEITHA



MUSCAT

HM SENDS MESSAGE TO IRANIAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran, dealing with bilateral relations binding the two countries and their peoples. The message was handed over by Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Mu'aini, the Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran, when Dr Hossein Amir-abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, received him in Tehran.

DETAILS ON P2

HM GREET'S CYPRUS PRESIDENT-ELECT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Dr Nikos Christodoulides, President-elect of the Republic of Cyprus. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings to the president-elect wishing him success in leading the friendly Cypriot people, hoping that the friendship relations between the two countries will witness more progress and development. — ONA



OMAN TEAM PULLS OUT WOMAN ALIVE IN TÜRKIYE



Oman's National Search and Rescue Team (NSRT) on Monday pulled out a woman alive from the rubble of a collapsed building in one of the areas hit by last week's devastating earthquake in the Türkiye. The woman was rushed to hospital for medical care. DETAILS ON P2

Inflation stands at 1.89% in January

MUSCAT: The inflation rate of the Consumers Price Index (CPI) in the Sultanate of Oman stood at 1.89 per cent during January, according to the latest data issued by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The data indicated a rise in the prices of main groups

in January 2023 compared to the corresponding period in 2022, such as food and non-alcoholic beverages by 4.78 per cent, restaurants and hotels by 3.91 per cent, furniture, household equipment and routine household maintenance by 3.42 per cent, health by 2.73

per cent, miscellaneous goods and services by 2.04 per cent, recreation and culture by 1.96 per cent, clothing and footwear by 1.00 per cent, transport by 0.77 per cent, education by 0.05 per cent, housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels by 0.03 per cent. — ONA

32 countries to attend book fair

MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL BOOK FAIR FROM FEBRUARY 22 - MARCH 4

MAI AL ABRI

MUSCAT, Feb 13

The 27th edition of Muscat International Book Fair will kick off on February 22 under the auspices of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior. The 11-day literary extravaganza will be held at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre.

Giving the details of the book fair at a press conference held by the Ministry of Information on Monday under the auspices of Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture, Deputy Chairman of the organising committee of Muscat International Book Fair, said: "The Governorate of South Al Batinah will be honorary guest of the 27th version of the book fair, which includes a number of cultural, tech-

nical and artistic activities." The book fair will provide a number of cultural halls, like Ahmed Bin Majid Gallery, Al Farahidi Gallery, Ibn Dureid Gallery and Al Awtabi Gallery. Mohammed bin Said al Balushi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information for Radio and Television, Chairman of the Book Fair's Media Committee, and Ahmed bin Saud al Rawahi, Director of Muscat International Book Fair, were also present on the occasion. Mohammed al Balushi said: "Various media programmes will be conducted during the book fair, which will also host media professionals and scholars who influenced Arab literary life." He said that, though freedom of expression is guaranteed by law, but publications which compromise national or religious values are not welcomed in the book fair. TURN TO P3



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Oman celebrates World Radio Day

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman is celebrating World Radio Day, which falls on February 13 every year.

In an interview with Radio the Sultanate of Oman (Oman Radio), Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, affirmed that Oman Radio has developed wide-ranging experience since its inception in 1970.

The minister valued Oman Radio's broadcasting tenure, describing it as "great and rich experience, both in terms of technical performance and artistic media content".

He noted that Oman Radio's role recently merged well with other forms of media like television, the press and the Internet.

Dr Abdullah said, "Omani media combined both freedom and responsibility and this sets its message aside." He added that media in Oman boasts a level of freedom that empowers people "to express what they believe is good for the nation and future generations". In this context, he said that Omani social and cultural history was built on solid foundations of diverse opinions.

Dr Abdullah spoke about Al Shabab Radio or Youth Radio and the content that serves the largest segment of the population in Oman, thanks to the radio service's innovative programmes that respond to the aspirations of youth and encompass their interests, like technology, sports and science, among other fields.

The minister also touched on the Ministry of Information's plans, which, he said, envisage



The future of Omani society be based on sound knowledge and proper media fundamentals, and that this future be built on strong foundations of awareness

DR ABDULLAH BIN NASSER AL HARRASI
Minister of Information

that "the future of Omani society be based on sound knowledge and proper media fundamentals, and that this future be built on strong foundations of awareness." The minister pointed out that the role of Omani media has been crucial to spreading awareness about Oman Vision 2040.

Omani media, he said, played major roles, both in the period of preparations for Oman Vision 2040 and through the stages of its implementation. The media elaborated on the Vision's different programmes. This resulted in raising awareness and confidence in the Vision's outputs and programmes, he observed.

Dr Abdullah stressed that

radio was once a means of communicating with the world, long before the advent of the Internet and its use as a gateway for following up global events. He added that Omani radio stations kept pace with the developments of the modern age and the opportunities it offered to users.

In this context, the minister underlined the project of digital TV and radio broadcasting and he referred to the utilisation of the Internet through various channels, including Ayn platform, podcasts and Omani audio book, which, he asserted, have all contributed to the propagation of knowledge about Omani civilisation and the publication of Omani books.

The Minister of Information said that the media is making good progress and that the projects undertaken by the Sultanate of Oman in this aspect are marked by deep-rootedness. In this respect, he referred to Oman Arabic daily and its cultural supplement, which, he said, is one of the media platforms being developed by the Ministry of Information. The supplement has been well received, both in Oman and abroad, he added.

The minister also hailed the progress made by Nizwa magazine, which, he said, imparts knowledge in many ways. He noted that some Omani scholarly articles published in Nizwa magazine have been translated into English and later published in other newspapers like Oman Daily Observer. This, he said, gave mileage to Omani writers at the international level.

Speaking about Muscat International Book Fair, which will open on February 22, Dr Abdullah said that this year's edition of the book fair will be distinguished for the diversity of its cultural events.

The Governorate of South Al Batinah will be the guest of honour for the book fair, said the minister, who expressed the confidence that this 27th edition of the book fair will constitute a unique cultural extravaganza and an arena for upgrading the knowledge of youth and society at large.

Winding up his comments at the conclusion of the interview, the minister underscored the significance of advocating logical thinking as a means of overcoming challenges.

HM sends written message to Iranian President



TEHRAN: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a written message to President Raisi, as well as His Ebrahim Raisi of the Islamic Republic of Iran, dealing with bilateral relations binding the two countries and their peoples.

The message was handed over by Ibrahim bin Ahmed al Mu'aini, the Sultanate of Oman's Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Iran, when Dr Hossein Amir-abdollahian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran received him at the premises of Iranian Foreign Ministry in Tehran.

During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed His Majesty the Sultan's sincere

greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Raisi, as well as His Majesty's wishes of continuous progress and prosperity to the friendly people of Iran. On his turn, the Iranian minister asked the ambassador to convey the Iranian President's greetings, appreciation, and best wishes of further welfare and prosperity to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people.

The meeting covered the bilateral relations between the two countries and ways of consolidating them. The two sides also exchanged consultations on issues of common concern.

— ONA

Woman pulled out alive by NSRT in Turkiye



MUSCAT: Oman's National Search and Rescue Team (NSRT) on Monday pulled out a woman alive from the rubble of a collapsed building in one of the areas hit by last week's devastating earthquake in Turkiye. The woman was rushed to hospital to receive medical care.

Since the outset of its operations in Turkiye, the NSRT pulled out a number of dead bodies from collapsed buildings.

The NSRT alongside other international teams continues carrying out search and rescue operations and providing medical care to the quake survivors.

Students donate essentials for quake victims

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Joining hands with the rest of the world, children of a school in Muscat have launched a relief collection drive to help earthquake victims of Turkiye and Syria.

Titled 'Together we can make a Difference', the children of Ahmad Bin Majid Private School (ABM) collected clothing and household articles over the weekend.

"I was shocked to hear of this calamity that occurred so close to us, and it breaks my heart to see the suffering of the people, especially the children. I'm proud to be part of this institution and to be able to help others in need," said Al Faisal bin Khalid al Saidi of Grade 10. Ali bin Mohammed al Habsi, also from Grade 10, said he was happy to be able to help the homeless.



Students sorted and packed items to be sent to earthquake affected areas. This real -life experience has given ABM students the chance to support the community and fulfil their role as global citizens. The items donated

will be sent to the Oman Charity Organisation to be dispatched to Turkiye and Syria.

"I was shocked, upset and sad; so many victims were just kids. I just broke down. I haven't given much but I hope it will help those

in need," laments Lamar Anwar al Harthy from Grade 10

Siblings Asrar bint Ahmad al Amriyah of Grade 7 and Hanin bint Ahmad al Amriyah of Grade 11, said they were happy to be able to make a difference to any family in need as they really wanted to help in any way they could.

For Retaj bint Ali bin Hilal al Esriyah of Grade 7, it gave a feeling beyond words after having donated what she could from her little savings and was happy to do something good to help anyone in any way.

"The mission of Ahmad Bin Majid Private School is not just the transference of knowledge, but building leadership skills, while inculcating core values such as understanding and empathy among the young minds," a representative of the school said.

Military drill Khanjar Oman 2023 wraps up in Al Wusta

MUSCAT: Omani-British military Exercise Khanjar Oman 2023 wrapped up on Monday at the military training zone in Al Wusta Governorate, under the auspices of Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), in the presence of Major-General Thomas Julian Bateman, General Officer Commanding 1st Division of the British army.

The military drill was carried out by the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) represented by the Coast Security Force along with units from the British army. It included multiple military tactics and joint field training.

The chief guest was briefed about

the stages and objectives of the military drill and the practical demonstration. The final demonstration was attended by a number of senior officers from RAO and the British army.

Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) received Maj Gen Thomas Julian Bateman, General Officer Commanding of the 1st Division at the British Army during the drill.

During the meeting, they discussed a number of military matters of mutual interest. It was attended by senior officers at the RAO and the British Army.

— ONA





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32 countries to attend Muscat Book Fair

FROM PAGE 1
The book fair will continue till March 4.

Speaking on the occasion, Al Rawahi said the book fair returns are not limited to proceeds from books, but revenues are generated via airlines, restaurants, hotels, transportation, and other shopping activities. “All of this contributes to domestic commercial interactions.”

The exhibition will feature 47 globally renowned intellectuals, media, GCC and Arab exhibition managers, and the President of the Arab Publishers Union.

Libyan writer Ibrahim al Koni, Iraqi poet Sinan Antoon, Eritrean novelist Haji Jaber are among the prominent personalities participating in the book fair.

Around 32 countries are participating in the exhibition, including 826 publishing houses and 533,063 titles. Among them are 260,614 in Arabic, 204,411 foreign books and 22,950 Omani books, with 5,900 fresh issues for 2023.

There is a designated area for children and families, as well as a theatre for events, scientific and cultural activities, a reading corner, and workshops. In comparison to the last edition of the book fair, which contained approximately 129 child activities, the current edition includes a total of 166 activities.

A special corner will be dedicated to Omani authors and publications, including those written in Zanzibar, Arab



countries or European countries.

The Muscat International Book Fair has a 3D feature, many cafés to provide a fun time to families and friends in their search journey for their favourite books and authors.

For the first time, artificial intelligence will be used to register the number of visitors, their gender, and age and to facilitate payment by using electronic payment in collaboration with Bank Dhofar.

“We exert all feasible means to come up with a successful cultural interface for this country since the

book fair isn't simply a platform for selling and buying books but also a cultural phenomenon gathering all intellectual and families under one roof,” said Al Rawahi.

Sayyid Said al Busaidy expects that the Bahraini Cultural Week will positively impact visitors and help introduce Bahraini culture as the case is for future editions for other nations.

Authorities having expertise in the book industry will participate in the book fair, while authors will sign their respective publications.

The book fair will provide an electronic application and

a mobile catalogue. It will also promote volunteering activities to offer an opportunity to hone the skills of interested segments.

A corner will be allocated to signing cultural and literary publications. The management of the book fair provided electronic payment solutions at all its participants' platforms in coordination with a local bank.

Thursday (February 23), Monday and Wednesday are designated for male school students, while Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday are for female students.

Survey to take stock of colleges and varsities

AFRAH AL BALUSHI

@AfrahAlBalushi

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation launched the fourth graduate survey for 2023 for strategic planning for higher education in the Sultanate of Oman under the auspices of Dr Bakhait bin Ahmed al Mahri Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Higher Education, Starting from February 13, the survey will continue for a month.

The survey aims to assess the output of higher education institutions and the programme majors' compatibility with the labour market requirements.

This survey targets 72,000 graduates from educational institutions inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Bakhait al Mahri said, “This survey is a continuation of the previous surveys of graduates conducted by the ministry, and the feedback will help the strategic planning for higher education in the Sultanate of Oman.”

He added, “Everyone is aware that skill development has become one of the most important strategic goals of education in developed countries in recent times, as it is a wide field for students to interact efficiently with the world's changes and the accelerating labour market, as the requirements of the global market for jobs are constantly changing so we must prepare our cadres to compete globally through their access to this market as experts and specialists. Oman's labour market is not isolated from these changes, as it is also witnessing rapid change due to the different types of foreign investments attracted in the Sultanate of Oman, the successive technological developments and the fourth industrial revolution.”

Maitha al Lawati, Assistant Director of the Department of



Statistics and Information, added that the graduate survey is one of the most important research tools used to study the reality of higher education outputs and the needs of the labour market.

Many countries allocate research centres concerned with applying and analysing the data of such surveys and providing the competent authorities with the latest and most accurate results.

Dr Yaqoub bin Juma al Raisi, Director General of Planning, said: “We seek to have the largest possible number of targeted graduates participate in this survey to be able to collect data that will contribute to developing the necessary plans, whether for the government or public or private educational institutions. We hope that a larger number of graduates will participate.”

The Graduate Survey 2023 is the fourth national graduate survey conducted by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, represented by the Department of Statistics and Information, which targets graduates of 2018/2019, 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 from all higher education institutions inside and outside the Sultanate of Oman.

The benefits of the graduate survey project include graduates identifying the best means to obtain job opportunities and knowing the skills required by the labour market.

Zanzibar’s House of Wonders to be restored

MUSCAT: A tender for the restoration of the House of Wonders was awarded as part of a programme undertaken by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism to renovate historical monuments related to Omani architectural heritage in Zanzibar.

The signing ceremony was attended By Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, the Consul General of Oman in Zanzibar, and the Ambassador of Tanzania to Oman and Secretary of the National Commission for Education, Culture and Science.

The agreement for the



reconstruction and restoration was signed by Ibrahim bin Said al Kharousi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, and Semay Saeed, Minister of Tourism and Heritage in Zanzibar.

Oman decided to reconstruction and restoration the

House of Wonder after its partial collapse in 2020, in coordination with the government of Zanzibar and Unesco.

The House of Wonders in the Stone Town in Zanzibar is one of the most important historical monuments, and the most prominent icon for its distinctive

architectural and aesthetic elements. It is a testament to the legacy of Oman in East Africa since the late nineteenth century.

House of Wonders was built by Sultan Barghash bin Said in 1883 and served as the official reception palace and a hall for celebrations. It is the first building in Zanzibar to have electricity service and also the first building in East Africa to have an electric elevator.

The project will use the same traditional materials that were used in the building, based on the directives and guiding principles of the World Heritage and its advisory bodies. — ONA

Al Bashayer Camel Festival begins in Adam

AHMED AL KAABI

MUSCAT, FEB 13

The sixth edition of the annual Al Bashayer Festival for Arab Camel Races started at Al Bashayer Camel Racetrack in the Wilayat of Adam in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate on Monday. The races will continue until February 18.

As many as 75 races will be held over six days. The first day included 25 rounds for a distance of 4 km allocated to the ‘Hagayeg’ category.

HAGAYEG MORNING RACES

The first round was snatched by ‘Batashah’ owned by Aziz al Omrani. In the second round, ‘Al Wadah’ owned by Saeed al Hajri took first place.

‘Mishelah’ owned by Awad al Balushi claimed the third round.

‘Inthar’ won the fourth round, owned by Walid al Rashidi.

The fifth round was claimed



by ‘Zahi’ owned by Hazaa al Bartamani.

In the sixth round ‘Maqam’ owned by Ahmed al Derei, clinched the honours.

‘Saba’ owned by Khamis al Mukhaini won the seventh round.

In the eighth round, ‘Wasaf’ owned by Jaber al Wahibi came on top.

‘Al Dabi’, owned by Musabah al Balushi, claimed the ninth round.

In the 10th round, ‘Hamlool’, owned by Hamed al Jahfi, came on top.

‘Kahal’ won the 11th round, owned by Salem al Junaibi.

In the 12th round, ‘Draa’ claimed the top spot, owned by Ali al Maliki. In the 13th round,



‘Haflah’ came on top, owned by Saeed al Harthy. ‘Al Theb’ claimed the 14th round, owned by Abdullah al Hashemi.

‘Kalabah’ was top-ranked in the 15th round, owned by Hammoud al Wahibi.

In the 16th round, ‘Al Astchary’ came on top, owned by Yasser al Wahibi. The 17th round was

claimed by ‘Slabah’, owned by Hamad al Jedili. ‘Majd’, owned by Hamad al Nusairi, won the 18th round.

‘Shwahin’ came on top in the 19th round, owned by Hamad al Jahafi.

HAGAYEG EVENING RACES

In the six evening races that

were allocated to the camel ‘Hagayeg’ for a distance of 4 km, the first round prizes were Al Bashayer Cup and a car. ‘Shaan’ owned by Mohammad al Ketbi (UAE) was ranked first.

In the second round, the prizes were an Al Bashir rifle and a car. ‘Zuman’ won the race for its owner Saeed al Mansoori (UAE).

In the third round with a prize of a car, ‘Al Tayarh’, owned by Hamdan al Jahafi, claimed the top spot.

In the fourth round, ‘Matherah’, owned by Ateeq al Qubaisi snatched first place and a car.

‘Sae’ owned by Yasir al Harasousi snatched first in the fifth round and a car.

In the sixth round, ‘Al Andalus’ owned by Salloum al Junaibi, came on top to win a car.

The competition continues for the second day with 20 rounds for the category of Al Laqaya, for a distance of 5 km on Wednesday.



معرض مسقط
الدولي للكتاب - ٢٠٢٣
Muscat International
BOOK FAIR - 2023

محافظة جنوب الباطنة (ضيف الشرف)

النسخة
Edition

٢٢ فبراير - ٤ مارس 22nd February - 4th March

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FESTIVAL OF LETTERS

27TH
MUSCAT INTERNATIONAL
BOOK FAIR TO BE HELD FROM FEBRUARY 22 TO MARCH 4
AT OMAN CONVENTION AND EXHIBITION CENTRE

826
PUBLISHING
HOUSES FROM
32
COUNTRIES



Inauguration by
SAYYID HAMOUD BIN
FAISAL AL BUSAIDY,
Minister of Interior

Guest of honour:
THE GOVERNORATE OF
SOUTH AL BATINAH

Prominent writers at MIBF: Libyan writer Ibrahim Al Koni, Iraqi poet Sinan Antoon, Eritrean novelist Haji Jaber.

The book fair will include a Bahraini cultural week

Remembering historic Omani personalities: Ahmed Bin Majid Gallery, Al Farahidi Gallery, Ibn Dureid Gallery and Al Awtabi Gallery



Various cultural and arts events will be held alongside the book fair. We will also use artificial intelligence in this edition to analyse data and information about visitors and accompanying programmes

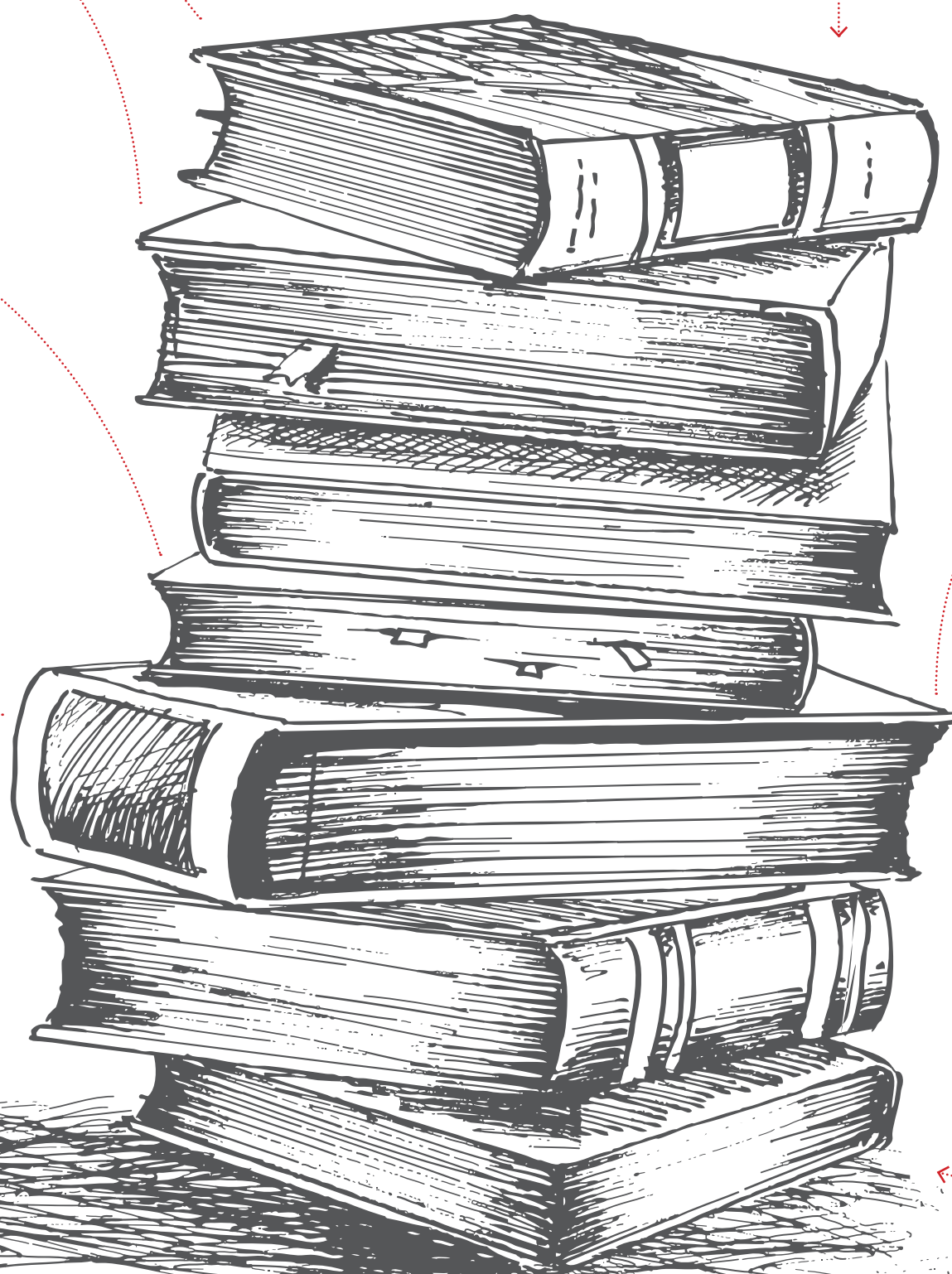
**SAYYID SAID
BIN SULTAN
AL BUSAIDY**

*Under-Secretary of the
Ministry of Culture, Sports
and Youth for Culture*

533,063
TITLES AND
PUBLICATIONS
ON DISPLAY

165
CULTURAL
EVENTS AND
166
CHILDREN'S
ACTIVITIES IN

1,194
PAVILIONS,
AL RAWAHI
ADDED



OMANI
PUBLICATIONS
AT THE BOOK FAIR
STANDS AT
22,950

FRESH
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IN ADDITION TO
204,411
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A corner will be allocated to signing cultural and literary publications. The management of the book fair provided electronic payment solutions at all its participants' platforms in coordination with a local bank

A special corner will be dedicated to Omani authors and publications especially those in Zanzibar, Arab and European countries

THE BOOK FAIR WILL PROVIDE A MOBILE APP AND A MOBILE CATALOGUE



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TUESDAY | FEBRUARY 14 | 2023

5

TANZANIAN DEFENCE CHIEF VISITS SAF MUSEUM



Muscat: General Jacob Mkunda, Chief of Defence Forces in the United Republic of Tanzania, and his accompanying delegation visited the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF) Museum at Bait Al Falaj on Monday. The guest and his accompanying delegation toured various sections of the museum and viewed the historic manuscripts and models. They were briefed on the march of SAF's development.

SQU concludes archaeological excavations in Al Rustaq

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), represented by the Department of Archaeology at the College of Arts and Social Sciences, finalised the second archaeological excavation season 2023 conducted in coordination with a team from the University of Pisa in Italy.

A small temple was unearthed during the second season at a settlement denoting the presence of religious beliefs among the inhabitants. There were circular stone terraces outside the temple in addition to a circular building adjoining it to the west.

The archaeological excavations conducted at Al Taikha site in the Wilayat of Al Rustaq uncovered a large human settlement dating back 4,500 years which is also the first of its kind to be unearthed in South Al Batinah Governorate.

The joint mission also



excavated two cemeteries that were later sabotaged probably during the Iron Age some 2,000

years after being constructed. The cemeteries were then reused for other purposes. — ONA

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR PROVISION OF COMMERCIAL & FINANCIAL CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF WIND INDEPENDENT POWER PROJECTS (IPPs)



The Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP), a member of Nama Group, is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the OPWP license.

Tender Description	In line with Sultanate of Oman's vision to diversify fuel sources through the use of clean energy for power generation, OPWP wishes to initiate the procurement process for three (3) Wind Projects (Duqm Wind IPP, Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Wind IPP and Harweel Wind IPP) with a target Schedule Commercial Operation Date ("SCOD") by Q2 2026 for Duqm Wind IPP and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Wind IPP and SCOD by Q4 2026 for Harweel Wind IPP. OPWP is seeking proposals from interested bidders to provide commercial and financial consultancy services for the development of the Projects and to advise on the competitive tendering of the Projects.
Tender Number	OPWP/2023/2
Tender Purchase Period	9 February 2023 till 25 February 2023
Tender Fee	400 OMR / Free of charge for SMEs holding a valid Riyada card.
Submission date	22 March 2023 at 12:00 PM Gulf Standard Time GST
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through OPWP website (https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx). The payment is done electronically through OPWP website. In case of any queries, please send an email to: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om .
Bank Guarantee	A Tender Bond (in the form set out in the tender) or a bank certified cheque of not less than 1% of the tender value, to be valid for a period of (120) days from the submission deadline date referred to above. The tender bond or certified cheque shall be enclosed as part of the bid. Riyada card holder exempted.



Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP)
5th Floor, Building 5, Muscat Grand Mall, Tilal Complex (Office)
Tel.: +968 24508400 | Fax: +968 24399946 | www.omanpwp.com

Armed Forces Hospital launches OLLIF for Spine Surgeries



MUSCAT: Represented by the Orthopaedics and Spine Department, the Armed Forces Hospital in Al Khoudh, Muscat launched the Advanced Interventional Surgical Technique of OLLIF in spine surgeries that it conducts.

The technique was introduced in cooperation with Inspired Spine Hospital in the United States.

The technique was inaugurated by a medical team from the departments of orthopaedics, anesthesia, operations and radiology. The inaugural ceremony was held under the auspices of Col Dr Ahmed bin Saif al Jahwari, senior consultant and head of the Spine Surgery Department at the Armed Forces Hospital, Al Khoudh.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FOR PROVISION OF LEGAL CONSULTANCY SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF WIND INDEPENDENT POWER PROJECTS (IPPs)



The Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP), a member of Nama Group, is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatization of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 78/2004 as amended and the OPWP license.

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Tender Number	OPWP/2023/3
Tender Purchase Period	9 February 2023 till 25 February 2023
Tender Fee	400 OMR / Free of charge for SMEs holding a valid Riyada card.
Submission date	23 March 2023 at 12:00 PM Gulf Standard Time GST
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents are available for purchase in an electronic format through OPWP website (https://www.omanpwp.om/new/Default.aspx). The payment is done electronically through OPWP website. In case of any queries, please send an email to: procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om .
Bank Guarantee	A Tender Bond (in the form set out in the tender) or a bank certified cheque of not less than 1% of the tender value, to be valid for a period of (120) days from the submission deadline date referred to above. The tender bond or certified cheque shall be enclosed as part of the bid. Riyada card holder exempted.



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Oman takes part in World Government Summit in Dubai

Dubai: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Finance, is taking part in deliberations of the 9th edition of World Government Summit 2023 being held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). Oman's delegation is led by Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance. The World Government Summit 2023 is held under the theme of "Shaping Future Governments". The Summit brings thought leaders, global experts and decision makers from around the globe to share and contribute to the development of tools and policies. — ONA

SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Directorate General of Khoula Hospital invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders:-

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of tenders Document	Bid Submission Closing Date on/ Before 10:00 am Tuesday	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/ DGKH- 2/490/2023	Replacement of Generator in Operation Theatre At Khoula Hospital	19/February/2023	28/February/2023	Specialized Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in Excellent Grade	R.O 25.000

- Tenders should be submitted on line on <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> enclose **Electronic Bank Guarantee** issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.
- For any Clarification, you may contact via Telephone: 24402200 , Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om



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hereby gives Notice of following Tender:

Tender No	Description	Eligibility	Participation Charges	Sale of Documents	Last Date of Bid Submission
MCD-TENDER-2023-01	Consultancy Services for Business Development Strategy	Local/ International Financial Market Consultancy Firms	R.O 25/=	19-02-2023 to 09-03-2023	09-03-2023

Tender Documents shall be obtained from Administration & Finance Department, Muscat Clearing & Depository, First Floor, MBD, RUWI, Sultanate of Oman (Tel.: +968-24822207) during office hours after paying the non-refundable amount mentioned above for the Tender Documents.

Consultancy Firms that are bidding must provide a bank guarantee or a certified cheque from a bank operating in the Sultanate for at least (2%) of the tender value on behalf of MUSCAT CLEARING & DEPOSITORY.

MCD 's Standard Terms and Conditions of Contract Agreement shall be applicable.

Tenderers are requested to submit their **Tender in Hardcopy** as well as **Electronic copies with Password Protection** addressed to the 'Chairmen Procurement Committee', MCD. Electronic copy Technical Document shall be emailed to Salim Al Balushi <salim@mcd.om>, Chairmen Procurement Committee on or before last day 14:00 hours of Tender submission date.

MCD is not bound to accept the lowest tender.



‘A crane, for God’s sake’: A mother’s plea for help



Men stand next to trucks, part of a convoy carrying aid provided by Qatar, in the aftermath of an earthquake, at Syria's Bab al Hawa border crossing with Türkiye in the rebel-held northwestern province of Idlib. – AFP

KEVSER said she could hear her two sons trapped beneath the rubble of their collapsed apartment building in the Turkish city of Antakya but for two days she was unable to find an emergency response leader to order their rescue.

“Everyone’s saying they’re not in charge. We can’t find who’s in charge,” she said on Tuesday last week, standing on a downtown street where at least a dozen other buildings had collapsed. “I’ve been begging and begging for just one crane to lift the concrete.”

“Time’s running out. A crane, for God’s sake.”

When Reuters returned to the street a day later, neighbours said no more survivors had been pulled from the wreckage of the building.

Many in Türkiye say more people could have survived the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that struck the south of the country and neighbouring Syria a week ago if the

emergency response had been faster and better organised.

Reuters spoke to dozens of residents and overwhelmed first-responders who expressed bewilderment at a lack of water, food, medicine, body bags and cranes in the disaster zone in the days following the quake - leaving hundreds of thousands of people to fend for themselves in the depths of winter.

WORST NATURAL DISASTERS

The death toll from both countries on Sunday exceeded 33,000, making it among the world’s worst natural disasters this century and Türkiye’s deadliest earthquake since 1939.

“The general problem here is of organisation, especially in the field of health,” Onur Naci Karahanci, a doctor working in Türkiye’s southeastern city of Adiyaman, said on a call hosted by the Turkish Medical Association (TTB), the professional grouping for doctors. He said there weren’t enough body bags for the dead, especially in the first

two days after the quake.

In the cities of Antakya and Kahramanmaras, close to the epicentre of the quake, many reporters saw very few rescue teams in the first 48 hours.

Some survivors said they had tried unsuccessfully to contact Türkiye’s Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) and ended up begging local teams to rescue their relatives from the wreckage - only to be told that such requests must go through AFAD’s coordination centres, witnesses said.

Asked about the rescue efforts, AFAD’s press department directed the news agency to the interior ministry, saying its teams were busy in the field. The interior ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

AFAD has been tasked since 2009 with coordinating disaster response and aid efforts in Türkiye by its 7,300 personnel and more than 600,000 volunteers, as well as by other Turkish and foreign groups.



The rubble of collapsed buildings in the historic southern city of Antakya. – AFP

AFAD said on Saturday in its regular public briefing that more than 218,000 AFAD responders, police, gendarmerie, soldiers, volunteers and other personnel were now deployed in the quake zone.

However, AFAD’s top officials have not publicly addressed some residents’ criticism of its slow response.

Two experts consulted partly blamed the delays on the centralisation of emergency response under AFAD by President Tayyip Erdogan’s government.

This included restricting the military’s freedom to deploy its troops without direct instruction from civilian authorities, and sidelining of other first-responders, such as the Red Crescent and the AKUT search and rescue group, they said.

Hetav Rojan, a Copenhagen-based security advisor for Danish authorities and expert on the region, said Turkey’s politics and governance has “gravitated towards centralisation” under the ruling AK Party. — Reuters

Earthquake could cost Türkiye up to \$84 billion

ANKARA: Türkiye’s worst earthquake in almost a century has left a trail of destruction that could cost Ankara up to \$84.1 billion, a business group said, while a government official put the figure at more than \$50 billion.

The combined death toll in Türkiye and Syria from last Monday’s 7.8 magnitude quake approached 36,000 and looked set to rise, as the focus of the response switched from rescuing survivors trapped under the rubble to providing shelter, food and psychosocial care. A report published at the weekend by the Turkish Enterprise and Business Confederation put the cost of the damage at \$84.1 billion - \$70.8 billion from the repair of thousands of homes, \$10.4 billion from loss of national income and \$2.9 billion from loss of working days. It said the main costs would be rebuilding housing, transmission lines and infrastructure, and meeting the short, medium and long-term shelter needs of the hundreds of thousands left homeless.

President Tayyip Erdogan has said the state will complete housing reconstruction within a year and the government was preparing a programme to “make the country stand up again”.

Quake victims need papers to come to Germany

BERLIN: With its large Turkish and Syrian communities, Germany offers the prospect of shelter and care to earthquake victims with relatives in the country - but only if they can fulfil existing visa requirements, the foreign ministry said on Monday. Berlin’s goal is to make it quicker and easier for such people to come to Germany within the existing framework, a ministry spokesperson said. “Missing passports are of course a problem. Those who have lost everything are unlikely to have a passport, but we cannot simply undermine the passport sovereignty of the Turkish authorities and issue travel documents for foreigners just like that,” the spokesperson told reporters at a regular government news conference in Berlin. — dpa

Hopes dwindle a week after quake



A man holds a Micky Mouse doll which belongs to his nephew in Kahramanmaras. – AFP

KAHRAMANMARAS/ANTAKYA: Rescuers in Türkiye pulled out several people alive from collapsed buildings on Monday and were digging to reach a grandmother, mother and daughter from a single family, a week after the country’s worst earthquake in modern history.

With hopes of finding many more survivors in the rubble fast fading, the combined death toll in Türkiye and neighbouring Syria from last Monday’s 7.8 magnitude quake rose above 37,000 and looked set to keep increasing.

The rescue phase is “coming to a close”, with the focus now switching to providing shelter, food and schooling, United Nations aid chief Martin Griffiths said during a visit to Aleppo in northern Syria on Monday.

But as he was speaking, teams in southeastern Türkiye plucked more people from the rubble. Officials said a young girl named Miray was rescued in Adiyaman 178 hours after the earthquake and a 35-year-old woman was also rescued in the same city.

A woman named Naide Umay was carried alive from a mess of crumbled masonry and twisted steel rods in Antakya, a video shared online by the mayor of Istanbul showed. Workers clapped as she was put in an ambulance.

Broadcaster Haberturk reported another woman and two children were rescued in



Turkish soldiers patrol next to collapsed buildings in Kahramanmaras. – AFP

Death toll 31,643 in Türkiye , more than 5,714 in Syria

At least seven people reported rescued on Monday

Team seeks to free grandmother, mother and baby



Drone footage shows AFAD tents set up in the stadium of Kahramanmaras following the earthquake in Kahramanmaras. — Reuters

Antakya, while CNN Turk reported a woman taken from the rubble in southern Gaziantep province. Rescue workers in the Turkish city of Kahramanmaras said they had contact with a grandmother, mother and baby trapped in one



A psychologist takes care of children who have been affected by earthquake which struck the border region of Türkiye and Syria in Kahramanmaras. – AFP

room in a three-storey building, with a fourth person possibly in another room.

Rescuers, who included a Spanish team and the Turkish police and army, said they were trying to break a wall to reach the survivors but a column was delaying them. One rescue worker said the women were 3 metres below ground.

“They are still alive and they’re in very good condition. We are doing our best to get them and I have a very strong feeling we are going to get them,” said Burcu Baldauf, head of the Turkish voluntary healthcare team.

“It’s already a miracle. After seven days, they are there with no water, no food and in good condition,” she said.

The deadliest quake in Türkiye since 1939 has killed 31,643 people there and forced the evacuation of 160,000 from the quake zone, Türkiye’s Disaster and Emergency Management Authority said.

More than 4,300 people were reported dead and 7,600 injured in northwest Syria as of Sunday, said a UN agency. Combined with the toll reported from government-held parts of the country, it takes the number of people reported killed in Syria to more than 5,714. The quake is now the sixth most deadly natural disaster this century, behind the 2005 tremor that killed at least 73,000 in Pakistan. — Reuters



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In brief

■ RIYADH



SAUDI ARABIA TO SEND ITS FIRST WOMAN INTO SPACE

Saudi Arabia will send its first ever woman astronaut on a space mission later this year, state media has reported. Rayyana Barnawi will join fellow Saudi male astronaut Ali Al Qarni on a mission to the International Space Station (ISS) “during the second quarter of 2023”, the official Saudi Press Agency said.

The astronauts “will join the crew of the AX-2 space mission” and the space flight will “launch from the USA”, the agency said.

Saudi will be following in the footsteps of the neighbouring UAE which in 2019 became the first Arab country to send one of its citizens into space.

— AFP

■ DHAKA



RETIRED JUDGE IS NEW BANGLADESH PRESIDENT-ELECT

Bangladesh's election authorities declared retired judge Mohammed Shahabuddin the next president of the South Asian country after no other candidate was put forward. Kazi Habibur Awal, the chief election commissioner, made the announcement.

Voting in parliament had been set to take place on February 19 but as Shahabuddin was the only candidate to submit valid papers on time, he was elected unopposed for a five-year term, the commissioner said. Shahabuddin, the nominee of the ruling Awami League party, will succeed Abdul Hamid, the head of the state since 2013. — dpa

■ JAKARTA



INDONESIAN POLICE OFFICIAL SENTENCED TO DEATH

One of Indonesia's most senior police officers was sentenced to death over the murder of his bodyguard. Ferdy Sambo, a two-star general and former head of internal affairs for the national police, was named as a suspect after his bodyguard was found dead at Sambo's home in July, in a killing police were initially alleged to have covered up.

Sambo was accused of ordering a subordinate to shoot 27-year-old Brigadier Nofriansyah Yosua Hutabarat, and then firing a bullet into the wounded victim himself. He was arrested in August and discharged from the force in September. — AFP

Russian forces bombard Ukraine's Bakhmut

KYIV: The city of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine endured heavy Russian artillery fire on Monday in an apparent prelude to a major new offensive as the first anniversary of the war neared.

Ukrainian defenders, who have already held out there for months, were braced for new ground attacks, Ukrainian military officials said.

Positions in Bakhmut have been fortified and only people with a military role were being allowed in, a deputy battalion commander said. Any civilians who still wanted to leave the city would have to brave the incoming fire, he said.

Bakhmut is a prime objective for Russian President Vladimir Putin and its capture would give Russia a new foothold in the Donetsk region and a rare victory after several months of setbacks. Donetsk and Luhansk regions make up the Donbas, Ukraine's industrial heartland. Russia partially occupies it and wants to win full control.

In Brussels, Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said he considered the long-anticipated Russian offensive to have already started.

“What we see is President Putin and Russia still wanting to control Ukraine. We see how they are sending more troops, more weapons, more capabilities,” he told reporters. The Russian assault on Bakhmut has been spearheaded by mercenaries of the Wagner group, who have made small but steady gains. The



Iryna Hryhorieva sits with her son Bohdan, inside an evacuation train, after leaving their village of Min'kivka, located near the Bakhmut frontline, at the train station in Pokrovsk, Donetsk region. — Reuters

renewed Russian bombardments made the situation there even more acute.

“The city, the city's suburbs, the entire perimeter, and essentially the entire Bakhmut direction and Kostyantynivka are under crazy, chaotic shelling,” said Volodymyr Nazarenko, deputy commander of Ukraine's Svoboda battalion.

Nazarenko said that although no fighting was taking place in the city centre right now, the defenders were prepared to meet

Russia claims incremental gains along frontlines as Bakhmut remains focus of fighting, ‘chaotic shelling’

any assault.

“The city is a fortress, every position and every street there,

almost every building, is a fortress,” he said.

Earlier on Monday, the Russian defence ministry said its troops had pushed forward a few kilometres along the frontlines, without specifying exactly where in a war zone that encompasses several regions in the south and east.

The Ukrainian military reported Russian shelling all along the frontline and said 16 settlements had been bombarded



A Ukrainian serviceman of the State Border Guard Service demonstrates a drone with a mimic grenade in Bakhmut amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine. — AFP

near Bakhmut. It said that over the past day, its forces had repelled a number of attacks near Bakhmut as well as assaults in Kharkiv, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions.

Luhansk Governor Serhiy Haidai said Russian forces had attacked Bilogorivka from all sides before dawn on Monday.

“But our forces fought back there,” he told Ukrainian television. “It was the same situation in the direction of Kreminna - a lot of them (Russians) appeared there. But they pulled back after the fight with our forces.”

Regarding the Russian offensive, he said: “Preparations for this offensive are already under way, the amount of shelling, air strikes and attacks by small groups has already increased.

— Reuters

Israel strikes Gaza, one killed in West Bank arrest raid

GAZA CITY: Israel struck a Hamas base in Gaza on Monday in response to a rocket fired from the enclave, while one Palestinian died during what the army called a West Bank raid targeting suspects.

The latest unrest comes amid a significance escalation in Israeli-Palestinian violence, with dozens killed in recent weeks.

The Palestinian health ministry said Amir Ihab Bustami, 21, was killed in a pre-dawn Israeli army raid in Nablus in the north of the occupied West Bank, the scene of repeated clashes over the past year.

The army said it had apprehended two men, Abdul Kamel Jouri and Osama Taweel, who had allegedly shot dead the Israeli soldier Ido Baruch in October. Three others were also arrested, the army said.

The Israeli army said it had collected intelligence for months trying to “locate a hideout apartment where the assailants were hiding”. “Overnight, the forces arrived at the hideout apartment and an exchange of fire was instigated between the forces and the wanted suspects,” it added.

Separately, in Gaza, the army said it had struck before dawn “an underground complex containing raw materials used for the manufacturing of rockets belonging to the Hamas organisation”. It said the strikes were “a response” to Saturday's rocket. Ayman Shamalakh, a gas station owner in the coastal territory, said the strikes hit



A man inspects a wedding hall hit in Israeli air strikes but the Israeli military described as an underground Hamas rocket foundry in Gaza City. — Reuters

Since the start of the year, the conflict has now claimed lives of 47 Palestinian adults and children, including activists and civilians

a nearby events hall, causing glass to shatter in the area, and added that “as for the hall, it was completely destroyed”.

Following the Israeli strikes, air raid sirens sounded in communities near the Gaza border, the military said.

Since the start of the year, the conflict has now claimed the lives of 47 Palestinian adults and

children, including activists and civilians.

Nine Israeli civilians, including three children, and one Ukrainian civilian have been killed over the same period, according to a tally based on official sources from both sides.

In a move likely to further inflame tensions, Israel's security cabinet late on Sunday announced it would legalise nine West Bank Jewish settlements in response to fatal Palestinian attacks in annexed east Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hardline government also announced a beefed-up security presence in east Jerusalem, the scene of two recent deadly attacks targeting civilians. — AFP

Conservatives to start tricky coalition talks

BERLIN: Berlin's conservative mayoral candidate Kai Wegner will launch efforts to form a government later on Monday, after his Christian Democrats won the rerun of the state's elections - yet it was unclear if he can oust the Social Democrat (SPD) incumbent.

Voters had returned to the polls on Sunday for a repeat of the 2021 city-state elections after the Berlin Constitutional Court overturned the initial outcome due to serious flaws.

The rerun could shake up Berlin's political make-up and have national ramifications too, after the Christian Democrats (CDU) achieved their best state election result in two decades, winning 28.2 per cent of the vote on Sunday.

The SPD meanwhile - the party of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz - fell to 18.4 per cent, its worst result in Berlin since 1950.

SPD mayor Franziska Giffey currently heads a coalition with the Greens and the far-left Die Linke. Berlin counts as one of Germany's 16 states.

Wegner said he would hold initial exploratory talks on Monday evening, with a view to launching formal coalition negotiations this week or next.

“Now is not the time for tacticians, now is the time for doers,” he said.

The outcome of the vote put his party in the lead to form a government, he stressed.

The CDU could form a majority with the Greens or the Social Democrats, however both parties have so far indicated that



Berlin's CDU chairman and party's top candidate for the Berlin state elections Kai Wegner addresses a news conference in Berlin. — Reuters

they would prefer to continue their current coalition.

Analysts predict that lengthy coalition talks could lie ahead.

The Greens emerged narrowly behind the SPD, with 18.4 per cent, but 105 fewer votes.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) increased its share of the vote to 9.1 per cent, while the Free Democrats - who are also in the federal government - failed to pass the 5 per cent hurdle for the state parliament.

The Greens, in television interviews on Sunday night, repeatedly stated that they prefer keeping the current coalition.

So if they beat the SPD for second place and come in second behind the CDU, and keep the current coalition, the new mayor would Bettina Jarasch, the Green's mayoral candidate.

The Greens could also potentially form a coalition with the CDU.

None of this will be decided on Sunday. — dpa

Using social media in a classroom has many positives



Sandhya Rao Mehta

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

It is possibly counter intuitive to think that social media can be used to teach in secondary and post-secondary classrooms.

After all, don't we spend all our time chiding children for spending time on their phones, mainly because they are on Tik Tok or 'IG' (Instagram)?

Effectively, that is exactly the point. Gone are the days when the negative effects of social media could be touted as a reason to dismiss it, and reprimand kids when they are using it. Social media is just so ubiquitous that it is impossible to ignore.

The statistics tell their own tale. In Oman, 70 per cent of youngsters over 13 are currently on social media of some kind, with WhatsApp and Instagram

being the most popular, according to Digital2022: Oman. Internet penetration is at 95 per cent, with many individuals operating on multiple devices.

This has huge consequences for education. Other than outright banning of smartphones and tablets in classrooms, not much can be done to deny the use of the internet by students.

Even imposing that rule is not very successful, as even parents want their children to have a phone with them in case of emergencies – that is just how indispensable smart phones have become.

Perhaps it is too late to panic. After all, this is exactly what was said about television, calculators and even books when they first came out hundreds of years ago: no

DENYING ANY FORM OF SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATION TO THE CHILDREN OF TODAY, WILL ONLY ALIENATE THEM AND MAKE TEACHERS BE OUT OF TOUCH WITH REALITY. THE ANSWER TO STUDENT'S USING SOCIAL MEDIA IS NOT TO FIGHT IT BUT TO EMBRACE IT

one will remember stories if they are written in a book! Like everything else, social media is a tool. Children today have been

growing up with this tool since infancy. Denying them this form of communication will only alienate them and make teachers be out of touch with reality.

The answer to students using social media is not to fight it but to embrace it.

There are many ways in which this could be done. It only requires creativity and commitment to see students as stakeholders in education, not passive consumers.

There is a world of experts out there who can communicate on topics and subjects effectively. Using them as a supplement in a class can only add to students' intercultural knowledge and competence.

But more than a passive window to the world, social media can make students participate in real time.

Creating blogs on specific topics, in which students can take turns to add, will add to student agency and make them responsible for real world learning.

Instagram and Twitter are used to teach key phrases to see how they are used by different people. Twitter actually is a good training ground to learn how to use language concisely. A Facebook group could be used to take a topic and discuss it with others in different parts of the world – almost like having a pen pal.

Learning to teach is a continuing process and if there is one rule, it is to stay in touch with ideas and concepts that emerge.

Resisting new ideas only sends the message that one is unwilling to learn – surely that is the wrong message for a teacher to send.

Turkiye's once mighty developers under fire after quake

BURCIN GERCEK AND ANNE CHAON

Their mugshots are everywhere: a Turkish developer arrested while trying to flee the country and two colleagues connected to a luxurious apartment tower that crumbled in Monday's disastrous quake. The traumatised country's social media users are calling for their heads.

Turkish officials are turning them into the focus of public outrage at the shoddy business dealings that appear to have contributed to the disaster's almost unfathomable scale.

And architects view the Ronisans tower's collapse as a symbol of Turkiye's inability to maintain building standards that could have dramatically reduced the catastrophic toll.

The number of confirmed fatalities surpassed 29,000 in Turkiye and 3,500 in Syria on Sunday.

The quake has become the region's deadliest natural disaster in more than 80 years. But officials at the UN warn that the final fatalities number may be closer to 50,000.

Turkish officials have responded to the outrage by announcing a rapid series of investigations and arrests linked to the construction and development business.

Three people were put behind bars by Sunday and seven more have been detained — including two developers who were trying to relocate to the former Soviet republic of Georgia.

Turkiye's justice ministry has issued warrants for 114 more people and launched 134 investigations.

The problem for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government — in power for the past 20 years — is that the Ronisans case is far from unique.

Turkiye has erected towers across fault lines and swathes of earthquake-prone regions that have been bracing for a major jolt for years.

One of the biggest single disasters struck a hotel housing two dozen Cypriot students and 15 accompanying adults who were in Turkey for a volleyball tournament.

All of the children died and only four adults survived. NTV television said the hotel was briefly closed due to construction "irregularities". But then it reopened its doors. "I want these people to face justice.

They are murderers," an unnamed witness of the hotel's collapse told NTV. The quake tore off the building's walls "like sheets of paper", the survivor said. Erdogan has responded to the anger by arguing that no one could have been prepared to deal with Turkiye's "worst disaster in history". — AFP

The US and Canada shot down objects, but what were they?



Julian E Barnes

The writer is a national security reporter for The NYT



Adam Goldman

The writer is a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning American journalist

The US government and Canada have been busy intercepting unidentified flying objects in the skies, shooting down one on Friday over Alaska, another on Saturday over the Yukon Territory and a third over Michigan on Sunday.

The two countries are still trying to identify and recover the objects, but those efforts are likely to be hampered because of the remote locations off the Arctic coast of Alaska and the rugged Canadian wilderness.

The incidents came a week after the United States blasted a Chinese spy balloon out of the sky that was equipped with an antenna meant to pinpoint the locations of communications devices and was capable of intercepting calls made on those devices.

The balloon, which traversed America for several days, transfixed the public and focused attention both in Washington and across the country on the intensifying rivalry between China and the United States.

Here is what we know about the episodes.

What happened over Alaska, the Yukon and Michigan?

On Friday, the US military shot down an unidentified flying object over the Arctic Ocean near Alaska.

Troops with US Northern Command were working near Deadhorse, Alaska, with Alaska National Guard units, the FBI and local law enforcement to recover the object and determine its nature, Defence Department officials have said.

Then on Saturday, an American F-22 with the North American Aerospace Defense Command, which is operated jointly by the United States and Canada, downed the object over the Yukon Territory. Norad had sent American fighter jets, which were soon joined by Canadian fighters, to track the object.

The F-22 used a Sidewinder air-to-air missile to down the object over Canadian territory, the same type that was used to obliterate the two previous flying objects.

The United States took down another object on Sunday over Lake Huron using an F-16 fighter jet that

Mystery sky objects Shot down over North America in the past 9 days



shot the object with a Sidewinder air-to-air missile. Why were these objects shot down faster?

The Chinese spy balloon traversed the country before it was taken down earlier this month, allowing US officials to observe it and collect intelligence. It was flying at 60,000 feet and didn't pose a danger to aircraft.

The object above Michigan was flying at 20,000 feet and was a potential danger to civil aviation.

US and Canadian officials say the objects shot down on Friday and Saturday were also flying lower than the spy balloon, posing a greater danger to civilian aircraft.

Pentagon officials also said that falling debris from the spy balloon could have hit people on the ground. But the other objects were downed over water or sparsely populated areas, minimising the risk of falling debris.

The spy balloon has also created a state of hypervigilance.

— The New York Times

To comment and email: opinion@omanobserver.om

Let’s not blame, let’s reflect

Life is so easy when we have means to blame whatever goes wrong on others. A deeper reflection makes one understand there’s not much one can do when it comes to passing the buck. In life, most of the given time we only have ourselves to blame for what we go through as most of them are results of our own doings - the decisions we took and choices we made.

So why are some so good at decision making process and others not?

One of course is knowing what is good for us, the other being the ability to use IQ and visualise along with having goals in life. Because when we have goals there is a purpose to our existence or at least that is the way it makes us feel. There is not much room for depression or negative thinking to be lost in.

This is not to say that we do not have other challenges such as the feeling of being stuck. What do we do when there seems to be no space to manoeuvre to the next stage in life. This is when you wish there was more sunlight in our life. Even in this situation we need not take the blame wagon and find faults with everything else and everybody else but is, instead we can seek the sunlight.

After all this is what the 13th Century Persian poet Rumi said: “What you seek is seeking you.”

If you must find light, light will find you. Light will not only destroy the darkness in our mind but also find space for enhancement of knowledge and awareness. Because knowledge alone will not take you to places but application also matters as well as understanding it in various contexts. But most important is the intention.

Then again to reach that level of intention we need clarity in mind but how is it possible when we are flooded with emotions, some of them blocked others raring to go. Let the emotions flow but the difficult part is to stay in touch with the reality, which some call as an illusion. This is because lot of our fears and concerns they say are in our imagination. But we can also argue saying that these concerns



Lakshmi Kothaneth @lakshmioman

The writer is a senior journalist and a radio anchor

A DEEPER REFLECTION MAKES ONE UNDERSTAND THERE’S NOT MUCH ONE CAN DO WHEN IT COMES TO PASSING THE BUCK

are the one that prepares us for the emergency situations or line up with Plan Bs and Cs. The ones who do the perfect plannings think of all potential circumstances and are not necessarily thinking negatively but readying oneself so they are not caught off guard. Do the optimists never think about a potential crisis? If one is to focus on risk management it is easily understood what are the potential threats and crisis control we ought to be preparing for.

At the same time overthinking can lead us to kill projects even before we start. It is important nevertheless to hit the right balance. So when we do meet up with zone of discomfort we can accept the situation and try to find our footing instead of finding faults in others and buy time. What it actually give us is a set back to work from all over again. This is just like playing the board game ‘Snakes and Ladders.’

No wonder the game continues to exist till today. Now would it not be lovely if they could teach all the practical lessons too in school. In fact today there are classes offered in finance for youngsters because managing finance is one of the areas that seemed to have the biggest challenges. Just like how each generation evolves and takes up a trend as we have seen from the 30s to 60s to the millennials, the thought process including ambitions have been changing. It must be because we learn from previous generations but certain areas we don’t seem to have learnt from previous generations are conflicts and environment.

Food consumption changed and the more sophisticated we became, further complicated became the health matters from life style to food intake we seemed to need classes to avoid complications. One group says coffee is good for the heart and another group says it is not healthy. Even staple diets are challenged because the resources today are refined.

So is it overthinking to learn more about health? We are in the age of information overload, they say, and access to information is high but are they all with credibility - that is yet another question.

FLYING HIGH



Indian Air Force (IAF) Sukhoi Su-30MKI fighter jets fly past during the Aero India 2023 air show at Yelahanka air base in Bengaluru, India, on Monday. – Reuters

IPOs and the national economy...

Public offerings are one of the means of attracting local and foreign investments. This is how savings of citizens are deployed in investment vehicles which are beneficial for them. Therefore, countries and governments introduce public offerings of assets they own. They do this to expand the investment base, stimulate the economy and bring modern technologies. This is how they add governance to it and bring transparency by listing them on the stock market.

Here, certain international standards of accounting are to be complied. There are requirements of higher level of disclosures, proper auditing and all these practices increase their performance and value. In IPOs, there is no way out except implementation of all these norms.

In the Sultanate of Oman also, IPOs are not new. They are catalysts of growth of the national economy. The government has sold some of its assets as public offerings. Private companies are also encouraged to be converted into public shareholdings. But the trend has changed recently due to certain reasons.

This is why the Oman Investment Authority came up with an idea to deal with some of the assets of government-owned companies. The Authority could help achieve certain goals of Oman’s Vision 2040, and promote economic diversification and attract foreign investments.



Ali Al Matani alimatanil2@gmail.com

IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN, IPOs ARE NOT NEW. THEY ARE CATALYSTS OF GROWTH OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

Perhaps the offering of 49 per cent of the shares of Abraaj Energy Services company for public subscription is a qualitative step which may help in supplementing some of the government’s efforts aimed at attracting investments.

Abraj Energy Services is one of the companies of the OQ group which is an integrated international company in the sector. This is also the first government company which has come out with IPO for subscription this year.

This will lead to a massive increase in the economic diversification and the pace of growth. It is expected to enhance citizens’ orientation to invest whatever they have saved and add value to their savings. This marks a qualitative shift in their practices and approach from savings to investments.

There is no doubt that expanding the ownership base in government companies is part of the privatisation plan. This policy was formulated in the nineties. Many mechanisms were also made for the purpose.

The government is selling many of the companies owned by it. Before that, it did the same thing with Oman Cement, Oman Flour Mills and other companies by offering their shares for public subscription. This helped in



attracting national and foreign investments. This approach will continue in the coming phase of development of the country in a more effective way. This will further enrich the national economy and strengthen the Muscat Stock Exchange with companies significant in different sectors.

If we take an objective view, we find that the energy sector stands at the forefront of the economic development of the country. The companies in this vital sector are extremely important in the Muscat Stock Exchange.

They rejuvenate the sector

by their presence in the share market and keep the wheel of the economic growth of the country moving. They attract more investments from within the country and abroad. It is noteworthy to mention that the Saudi Fund, Royal Court Affairs, and Schlumberger Investment company have entered into the market to purchase 40 per cent of the shares of Abraaj Energy Services. It increases the confidence of all its investors.

This is a model which is worth to be followed by other sectors, particularly when it comes to attracting investments

from abroad and expedite the development process in the country. This is an example of how new approach is successfully tested in the markets and which brings high returns.

This has also encouraged many other investors and those who have recently started showing interest in investment activity to enter into the area and explore more such opportunities and multiply their wealth.

This is why it is necessary that we focus on such models of investments to move towards achieving the ultimate goals of Oman Vision 2040.



VILLA SWEEP ASIDE BY CITY'S ATTACK



Manchester City's Phil Foden in action with Aston Villa's Alex Moreno. – Reuters

ANDY JALIL
MANCHESTER, FEB 12

After the widely publicised reports last week about them breaking financial rules, Manchester City responded strongly on the field of play with a 3-1 defeat of Aston Villa.

City manager Pep Guardiola said: "Today is a good example and seeing the feeling of the people was nice. The supporters were really good. You could see on social media how the players responded. They know what happened.

“But what happened last week is forgotten. This week we get back to our jobs. I’m much happier now. It is that way because you can see in training how they are focused and working to improve.”

After losing 1-0 to Tottenham in their previous match, their win against Villa puts them just three points behind league

leaders Arsenal who they play on Wednesday. Guardiola said: "Arsenal have a game in hand. We will see after all the games when the League is finished. But we are going to London to try and get a win."

If they do win they will top the league.

City opened the scoring as early as the 4th minute from a corner taken by Riyad Mahrez. Rodri got away from his marker to find space and his firm low header at the near post found the net.

Thereafter they did miss further chances to score. Jack Grealish had a volley from a corner blocked by Calum Chambers and later a corner from Mahrez was deflected on to Erling Haaland but the Norwegian scooped it over the bar from six yards. The leading scorer with 31 goals has had a lean period and hasn't scored since his last goal on January 22.

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS ON SUNDAY:

Leeds 0 Manchester United 2 (Rashford 80, Garnacho 85)
Manchester City 3 (Rodri 4, Gundogan 39, Mahrez 45+1-pen) Aston Villa 1
(Watkins 61)

PLAYED ON SATURDAY

Arsenal 1 (Trossard 66) Brentford 1 (Toney 74)
Bournemouth 1 (Senesi 30) Newcastle 1 (Almiron 45)
Crystal Palace 1 (Tomkins 69) Brighton 1 (March 63)
Fulham 2 (Willian 17, Solomon 88) Nottingham Forest 0
Leicester 4 (Mendy 23, Maddison 25, Iheanacho 45, Barnes 81) Tottenham 1
(Bentancur 14)
Southampton 1 (Alcaraz 25) Wolves 2 (Bednarek 73-og, Gomes 87)
West Ham 1 (Emerson 28) Chelsea 1 (Felix 16)

City doubled their lead in the 39th minute when a hasty header from Chambers, under pressure from Haaland, went over his on-rushing goalkeeper. Both chased the ball but Haaland having got to it first went too wide to score

himself so squared his pass for Gundogan to easily guide the ball in.

Six minutes later, City completed their goalscoring in stoppage time of the first half. Grealish fell in the box after a tangle with Jacob

Ramsey and the referee pointed to the spot for what seemed a soft penalty. There seemed to be a discussion as to who was to take the penalty but eventually it was Mahrez and he placed it to the right of Martinez.

A consolation goal for Villa came in the 61st minute. Bernardo Silva lost possession with Douglas Luiz taking control of the ball. He then found Ollie Watkins with a fine pass and Watkins' low right-footed shot across Ederson went in giving Villa a glimmer of hope. But all that happened was a miss by substitute Philippe Coutinho whose shot was pushed over by Ederson and then in stoppage time Jhon Duran's volley hit the bar.

Villa manager, Unai Emery said: "They deserved to win the game. But our first target when I came here was to make us safe and stay in the Premier League so we have made progress."

[illegible]

Al Zubair, Stolz and Konrad finish third in Asian Le Mans

DUBAI: Oman's Al Faisal al Zubair, Germany's Luca Stolz and Austrian Martin Konrad wrapped up their first appearances together in the Asian Le Mans Series by finishing third and seventh in the two four-hour races at the Dubai Autodrome at the weekend.

Driving the Al Manar Racing by Haupt Racing Team Mercedeses AMG GT3 under the Omani national flag, Al Zubair took the hot seat for the final session of the second race on Sunday to guide the GT3 to seventh place, after the trio had rounded off the podium places in race one on Saturday evening.

Al Zubair said: "We had a good

qualifying with P2 for both races. On Saturday, we converted P2 into P3 in the race. So that was a podium finish on our first race in Asian Le Mans. That was amazing.

“For the second race fortunes did not go on our side. It was great until the final hour. Unfortunately, we messed up something with the drive time. I drove a little less than the minimum, 45 minutes, and we had to come back to the pits. Because of that, we also had a drive-through penalty as well. I had to do the double stint. Finishing seventh is decent out of 24 but, knowing that we should have been on the podium, I am



not really happy with the result to be honest. Hopefully next week we come back stronger in Abu Dhabi."

The weekend's action started strongly for the HRT Team in the first of two practice sessions on the 5.39km, 16-turn Dubai Autodrome circuit on Friday.

The Mercedes ran for 35 laps and clocked the second fastest lap in the GT class of 1min 58.324sec. Victory in the session went to the Getspeed Mercedes of Raffaele Marciello, Fabian Schiller and Florian Scholze.

The Getspeed Mercedes again topped the times in the second practice stint with a fastest run of

1min 58.105sec. Al Zubair's HRT car came home in sixth with a best tour of 1min 59.068sec.

Al Zubair added: "Practice went off quite well. Martin (Konrad) was quite strong from the start, our bronze driver. We were all quite happy with Martin's performance, myself and Lucas. We knew we had a good package."

But the HRT crew saved their best performances for the qualifying session on Saturday morning and a fastest lap of 1min 58.016sec by Konrad enabled them to line up in second place on the grid for the evening's first four-hour race.

India’s Mandhana fetches \$410,000 at first WPL auction



India's Smriti Mandhana in action. – Reuters

MUMBAI: Several of the world’s top women cricketers secured deals worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in the inaugural Women’s Premier League auction on Monday, with India’s attacking batter Smriti Mandhana leading the way on \$410,000.

The left-handed 26-year-old was the first lot on the block at the sale in Mumbai, and was the object of a bidding war.

Nita Ambani — who is the wife of Asia’s richest man, Mukesh Ambani, and owns the Mumbai Indians franchise — placed several bids for Mandhana’s services before the Royal Challengers Bangalore prevailed.

The cash-rich Indian Premier League has transformed the fortunes of cricket globally, and the women’s version could rapidly become one of the world’s biggest money-spinners in women’s sport.

“I was always glued to men’s auction,” a beaming Mandhana said afterwards. “It’s such a big event to have an auction of this sort.”

Australian all-rounder Ash Gardner was the second most expensive player in the first batch

of sales, with Gujarat Giants paying \$387,000 for her.

Royal Challengers Bangalore also bagged Ellyse Perry of Australia for \$205,000 and Sophie Devine of New Zealand for her base price of \$60,000.

“We’re very happy to get such quality players,” said Mike Hesson, director of cricket operations for the Bangalore franchise. “It was a dream result for us.”

The limited available data on women players had challenged the teams ahead of the auction, he added.

English all-rounder Nat Sciver-Brunt was sold for around \$387,000 to Mumbai Indians, while spinner Sophie Ecclestone went to UP Warriorz for \$220,000. But England skipper Heather Knight went unsold in the initial rounds of the auction — although she could come up for bidding again later.

India’s Jemimah Rodrigues was sold to Delhi Capitals for \$266,000.

Her franchise also bagged India’s 19-year-old T20 batting sensation Shafali Verma for \$242,000 and Australia’s Meg Lanning for \$133,000. — AFP

INDIA BEAT PAKISTAN, SRI LANKA WIN AGAIN

CAPE TOWN: India and Sri Lanka came out on top in an all-Asian double-header on the third day of the Women’s T20 World Cup at Newlands in Cape Town on Sunday.

India made a winning start when they beat arch-rivals Pakistan by seven wickets, while Sri Lanka became the first team to notch two wins when they defeated Bangladesh by the same margin.

Both matches were closer than the final results indicated, with the winning teams needing big unbeaten partnerships to see them home.

What had been a tense run chase for India turned into a comfortable win with an over to spare as Jemimah Rodrigues and Richa Ghosh put on an unbeaten 58 off 33 balls after India were set 150 to win.

Rodrigues batted with calm skill to make 53 not out off 38 balls while Ghosh, 19, hit powerfully to score 31 not out off 20 balls.

Favourites India needed almost 10 runs an over when Ghosh joined Rodrigues in the 14th over but the pair were seldom troubled.

“We knew we had to bat sensibly and bat until the end. If we did that the loose balls would come,” said Rodrigues, who said the presence of her father and childhood coach Ivan had inspired her to perform well.

Pakistan captain Bismah Maroof had made a stylish 68 not out and shared a free-scoring unbeaten partnership of 81 off 47 balls with 18-year-old Ayesha Naseem, who struck an unbeaten 43 off 25 balls.

It enabled Pakistan to post a competitive 149 for four after deciding to bat on a dry pitch.

“We made some mistakes as a bowling unit,” said Maroof.

Rodrigues said India were a



India's Jemimah Rodrigues (R) celebrates after scoring a half-century during the Group B T20 women’s World Cup match between India and Pakistan at Newlands Stadium in Cape Town. — AFP

young team with “fight and grit” who had been building steadily since last year and had belief in each other. “Playing with the same team again and again, everyone’s very honest and everyone puts in a lot of hard work.”

SRI LANKA SURVIVE SCARE

Sri Lankan left-handed opening batter Harshitha Samarawickrama made 69 not out and shared an unbeaten 105-run partnership with Nilakshi de Silva (41 not out).

They enabled Sri Lanka to survive an early scare in pursuit of a modest Bangladesh total of 126 for eight.

Captain Chamari Athapaththu, long the batting mainstay of the Sri Lankan team and the star of their victory over hosts South Africa in the tournament opener on the same pitch on Friday, was out for 15.

She fell to 18-year-old medium-pace bowler Marufa Akter, who then took two more wickets without conceding a run to reduce Sri Lanka to 25 for three in the sixth over.

“I’m very happy about our performance,” said Athapaththu. “We don’t depend on one batter. We have been working on our batting the last couple of months.”

Athapaththu said new coach Ramesh Ratnayake had encouraged the Sri Lanka players to play their natural game.

But she said Sri Lanka would need to bowl better in the powerplay when they meet reigning champions and tournament favourites Australia in their next match in Gqeberha on Thursday.

Bangladesh captain Nigar Sultana said her team had fallen short by “15 or 20 runs” when they followed a bright start by losing five wickets for 24 runs in the closing stages of their innings.

— AFP

Nasser Yaqoob wins Assarain Golf Classic

MUSCAT: Nasser Yaqoob of Bahrain overcame a stiff competition from a strong field to emerge champion at the Assarain Golf Classic. The 27th edition of the Assarain Golf Classic was held at the Ghala Golf Club on February 3 and 4 with the participation of over 130 golfers.

A delighted Nasser said: “The Assarain Golf Classic is a fantastic tournament and it feels great to win a competition of this stature. I would like to thank my playing partners over the last few days. It was a pleasure to be in this event and again I would like to thank the sponsor Assarain Group of Companies.”

Khalil al Wahaibi, General Manager of Ghala Golf Club, who managed the event, said: “The atmosphere was electric from the first day. I was truly amazed by the participation and overall feel of the 2023 Assarain Golf Classic. We were oversubscribed and had to have a cut off for players as we unfortunately could not fit all of them in, but overall, it was a tremendous occasion.”

OGC Chairman Mundhir al Barwani was the guest of honour at the ceremony held on the final day that was graced by a host of dignitaries. The Assarain Classic



ended with its tradition of raffling off a Hublot watch which was won by Ahmed al Balushi.

Commenting upon the success of the event, Ibrahim al Wahaibi, Director of Assarain Group of Companies, said: “I would like to congratulate all the winners in the respective categories and would like to thank all the participants. With the success of the 2023 event, we are committed to making the Assarain Golf Classic tournament bigger and better in the coming years while maintaining our strong professional standards of hosting one of the oldest golf tournaments in the Sultanate of Oman.”

2023 ASSARAIN GOLF CLASSIC WINNERS LIST

Men (Gross):

1. Nasser Yaqoob 77+79=156 Gross
2. Bader al Amri 80+77=157 Gross C/B
3. Ruwan Jayasinghe 75+82=157 Net

Net:

1. Hamoud al Shaqsi 70+67=137 Net
2. Humayan Kabir 73+70=143 Net C/B
3. Mohammed Kusuma 71+72=143 Net

Women

- Gross Winner: Emma Marritt 85+96=181 Gross
R/ Up Maralyn Hayes 104+108= 212 Gross
Net Winner Jamila Daud 67+80=147 Net
R/ Up Ina Copier 80+92=172 Net

Juniors:

- Gross winner: Adam al Barwani 87 +78= 165 Gross
Net Winner: Mahir Sampat 78+81=159 Net
Nearest the Pin:

Day 1:

- 2nd hole – Ahmed Syaifudin
5th hole – Raul Singh
12th hole – Yusuf al Balushi
15th hole – Humayun Kabir
NTP 2nd shot 18th hole – Mohammed al Numani

Day 2:

- 2nd hole – Hamdan al Shaqsi
5th hole – Altaf Beg
12th hole – Nasser Yaqoob
15th hole – Majid al Toky
NTP 2nd shot 18th hole – Mohammed Kusuma
Best Net Day 1 – Faisal al Adawi 70 Net C/B
Best Net Day 2- Vikas Dixit 71 Net
Best Gross Day 1 – Joakim Velinder 77 Gross
Best Gross Day 2 – Karl Armstrong 77 Gross

Oman tennis coach bags doubles title at ITF tourney

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Sivan Govind, a professional tennis coach residing in the Sultanate of Oman has won in the doubles category at the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Masters tournament, which witnessed the participation of more than 100 tennis players, from February 6 to 10 in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

Govind, a trainer at the Indian Social Club (ISC) for the last seven years as tennis coach, claimed the title in the category of 40+ out of the five categories, which included 35+, 40+, 50+, 60+ and 70+.

Sivan combined with Krishna Kumar to defeat Harish Haridas and Rajmohan Pillai 6-1, 6-2 in the final of 40+ doubles to emerge winners.

Sivan-Kumar duo was the top seed in the category. They got a bye in the first round. The duo justified their top billing to dominate all the matches from quarterfinals to the final.

Sivan, who has been playing tennis for the last 39 years, has played at All India Inter University and won third place



and as a tennis coach, he had worked in Dubai for 17 years before he moved to Oman.

He was chosen to be Kerala Number 1 and a sub junior top 5 in India as well. He also had the opportunity to work 10 years at the Dubai Tennis Championship and has many titles under his belt as he was bestowed of many career highlights as well. He had earlier played seniors ITF 35+ at Dehradun and reached doubles final, besides reaching the semifinal of the Chennai ITF 35+ category.



J O R G E N S O N T A K E S R E D W I T H F I R S T P R O F E S S I O N A L V I C T O R Y

Movistar hero ends three-year wait

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 13

Movistar hero Matteo Jorgenson ended his three-year wait for a professional victory by claiming the third stage of Tour of Oman 2023 with a powerful uphill sprint at Jabal Haat.

The young American also took the red jersey to lead the Tour standings after finishing the 151.8 km stage in three hours 33 minutes and 51 seconds. Belgium’s Mauri Vansevenant (+02, Soudal Quick-Step) was second and France’s Geoffrey Bouchard (+03, AG2R Citroen) claimed third. Vansevenant (+06) and Bouchard (+14) repeated their positions to follow Jorgenson (11:25:48) in overall standings.

The 23-year-old climber capitalised on the steepest sections leading to an unprecedented finish in Al Hamra.

Jorgenson said: “It is a super special moment, it really is. A huge moment, a relief. Those things start to cross your mind; maybe I am not the type of rider that can win, but today I proved that to myself.”

“It was mostly about legs; that climb was steep at moments, and I wanted to test everyone. It took a second or so for the others to get back to me so I knew I had the legs. We made it to the sprint, and I didn’t look back. The team did well, we stayed in front all day. All in all, just a really nice day!”

Overnight leader Jesus Herrada of Cofidis was in the fray until the last 4.6 km when the Spanish puncheur was left behind as Jorgenson gained some acceleration.

With 300 metres to go, Jorgenson timed his sprint for the line perfectly and this turn of pace



secured victory. Vansevenant had to settle for second and Bouchard for third.

Alexey Lutsenko (Astana Qazaqstan) tried his bit in the final phase but the two-time Tour of Oman winner could only end up at 13th.

PUSHED TO LIMITS

Stage 3 pushed the riders to their limits with a series of climbs and descents starting from Al Khobar and twisting through the foothills of Jabal Al Akhdar past the towns of Samail, Izki and the outskirts of Nizwa before ending in Jabal Haat just outside Al Hamra – a total distance of 151.8km.

Jorgenson’s gritty performance earned him the Individual time and points awards as well as ‘Best Young Rider’ jersey. Dutchman Jeroen Meijers (Terengganu Polygon Cycling Team) won ‘Most Active Rider’ for the third day in succession.

Meijers said, “our main tactic is to get me in the breakaway, and it is then up to me to beat the others



TOUR OF OMAN STAGE 4 RESULTS

1.	Matteo Jorgenson (USA)	Movistar Team	03:33:51
2.	Mauri Vansevenant (BEL)	Soudal Quick-Step	+ 02
3.	Geoffrey Bouchard (FRA)	AG2R Citroen Team	+ 03
4.	Cristian Rodriguez (ESP)	Team Arkea-Samsic	+ 03
5.	Cian Uijtdebroeks (BEL)	BORA-hansgrohe	+ 03
6.	Victor Langellotti (MON)	Burgos-BH	+ 03
7.	Rein Taaramae (EST)	Intermarche-Circus-Wanty	+ 03
8.	Harold Tejada (COL)	Astana Qazaqstan Team	+ 07
9.	Diego Ulissi (ITA)	UAE Team Emirates	+ 09
10.	Maxim Van Gils (BEL)	Lotto Dstny	+ 11

GENERAL CLASSIFICATION

1.	Matteo Jorgenson (USA)	Movistar Team	11:25:48
2.	Mauri Vansevenant (BEL)	Soudal Quick-Step	+ 06
3.	Geoffrey Bouchard (FRA)	AG2R Citroen Team	+ 14
4.	Diego Ulissi (ITA)	UAE Team Emirates	+ 15
5.	Maxim Van Gils (BEL)	Lotto Dstny	+ 15
6.	Jesus Herrada (ESP)	Cofidis	+ 16
7.	Rein Taaramae (EST)	Intermarche-Circus-Wanty	+ 18
8.	Victor Langellotti (MON)	Burgos-BH	+ 18
9.	Cian Uijtdebroeks (BEL)	BORA-hansgrohe	+ 18
10.	Cristian Rodriguez (ESP)	Team Arkea-Samsic	+ 18



in the sprints. The Tour is very well organised, the roads are excellent, and we are very happy to be here. This is the first time the team has competed in Oman. It is very hot when you’re riding with no shade, and tomorrow I will try to save my energy over the long distance and aim to finish strongly.”

Oman’s Said al Rahbi, who was among the five aggressive starters from Al Khobar, dropped back to the bunch during the uphill section 45km into the stage.

Stage 4 on Tuesday kicks off close to Monday’s finishing line in Izki, heading towards Al Jarda and through the Al Hajar Mountains to Bidbid and Fanja. The field will enter Muscat close to Sultan Qaboos University and travel through Al Mawaleh and Bausher to Al Wattayah and the hills of Al Jissah. After a series of turns around Qantab and Yitti, the riders will race for the line at Yitti Hills.

Tuesday’s penultimate stage is the longest of the entire Tour of Oman 2023, a total of 204.9km in which the peloton face another explosive finish on the Yitti Hills.

PICS BY PAULINE BALLET/
ASO-Oman Cycling Association



OQ sells 20 per cent Abraj stake to Saudi-Omani Investment Co

MUSCAT: Oman's integrated energy group OQ and its wholly-owned subsidiary Abraj Energy Services SAOC (Under transformation) signed an agreement with the Saudi Omani Investment Company (SOIC) under which the latter will acquire 20 per cent of Abraj's shares currently being offered in an initial public offering.

The agreement is in line with a framework of joint economic and investment cooperation agreed by the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

It reflects the efforts exerted by Oman Investment Authority to attract foreign investments in various production and service sectors, as well as the plans of OQ, the global integrated energy group, to expand the shareholders' ownership in some of its assets.

The signing of this anchor investment agreement reflects the regional growth strategy adopted by OQ Group and its commitment to attract foreign direct invest, in



line with the objectives of Oman Vision 2040.

This investment agreement demonstrates SOIC's confidence in Abraj's future as a financially resilient and high-growth business with enormous potential to grow regionally.

The agreement signed with strategic investors would increase

the confidence of other segments of corporate and individual investors to invest in Oman. It is worth noting that this agreement would accelerate and strengthen the business scope of Abraj as a quality oilfield services provider that enhances in-country value and supports the development of Oman's capital

markets.

According to the stock prospectus of Abraj approved by the Capital Market Authority, the shares of Abraj will be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange (MSX) on March 14, 2023. Abraj intends to offer 49 per cent of its share capital, equal to 377,398,000 shares for public subscription. — ONA

CMA to set up Virtual Assets Regulatory Framework

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 13

The Capital Market Authority (CMA), which regulates and develops the Sultanate of Oman's financial markets for the capital market and insurance sectors, plans to establish a new proposed regulatory framework for Virtual Assets (VA) and Virtual Asset Service Providers (VASP).

This move highlights Oman's growing recognition and the CMA's proactive approach to develop the digital assets and fintech industry in the country.

This important initiative in Oman was announced during a public stakeholders engagement session held at the CMA recently and being led by the CMA.

By regulating and developing the virtual assets industry, the CMA aims to provide an alternative financing and investment platform for issuers and investors, while mitigating



the risks associated with this asset class.

The CMA is in the process of defining a comprehensive and facilitative regulatory framework, which will include a new regulation to cover all virtual assets activities, a licensing framework for all VASP categories and a supervisory framework to identify, assess, and mitigate ongoing risks.

The aim of this new regulation is to establish a market regime for virtual assets that includes rules to prevent market abuse, including through surveillance and enforcement mechanisms.

TURN TO PAGE 15

Oman to add 1.9 GW of renewables by 2026: IEA

DOWNTREND: Natural gas usage for electricity generation projected to decline from 97% in 2021 to 87% in 2025

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, FEB 13

The important strides made by the Sultanate of Oman in decarbonising its power generation sector have been highlighted by the International Energy Agency (IEA) in a newly published report that tracks global efforts to switch to low-carbon fuel resources for electricity generation.

Titled 'Electricity Market Report 2023', the document underscores the importance of electricity security and affordability amid the current global energy crisis, sparked in part by the Ukraine-Russian conflict.

"Electricity is central to many parts of life in modern societies and will become even more so as its role in transport and heating expands through technologies such as electric vehicles and heat pumps," the Paris-based intergovernmental agency noted in its report.

"Power generation is currently the largest source of carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions globally, but it is also the sector that is leading the transition to net zero emissions through the rapid ramping up of renewables such as solar and wind.

At the same time, the current global energy crisis has placed electricity security and affordability high on the political agenda in many countries," the Agency further stated.

According to the report, Oman's electricity consumption posted a sharp 8 per cent rebound in 2021 (after a 2 per cent drop in 2020) and is projected to rise at an annual average of 2.6 per cent over the 2022-2025 period. At least 1.9 gigawatts (GW) of renewables capacity is targeted for development by 2026, which comes on top of the existing 550 MW of grid-connected capacity currently in place, it said.

Oman's state-owned energy capacity procurer Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) is overseeing the procurement by competitive tender of a pair of solar PV-based Independent Power Projects with a combined capacity of 1 GW of electricity output. The two projects, dubbed Manah-1 and Manah-2, will be built in the Wilayat of Manah in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate.

Separately, OPWP has plans to procure a new 500 MW capacity solar PV project at Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate, next to an existing 500 MW capacity plant that was brought into operation in November 2021. A slew of wind farms offering around 400 MW of capacity are also envisioned for development



by 2026. Significantly, natural gas consumption for electricity generation is projected to fall as new renewables capacity is brought online, according to the IEA report.

"We estimate that the share of gas in total generation will decline from 97 per cent in 2021 to 87 per cent in 2025, while the share of renewables is on course to rise from below 2 per cent in 2021 to around 11 per cent by 2025," it said, adding that Oman's long-term plans target a renewable generation share of 39 per cent by 2040.

The IEA also cited Oman's success in launching the region's first electricity spot market in 2022 in an "effort to increase system-wide efficiency and support energy transition goals".

شركة الدقم لتوليد الكهرباء ش.م.ش.
Duqm Power Company S.P.C.

Tender Announcement

Introduction

Duqm Power Company SPC (herein the "Employer" or "DPC") inviting proposals from qualified and experienced Tenderers to undertake the Supply and Delivery based on a **Call-Off Supply and Delivery of Chemicals to DIPWP at Duqm**. The Company invites Bidders to submit their proposals as described below.

Tender Number	Tender Title	Tender Description	Tender Fees	Clarification Closing Date	Bid Submission Date
DPC-DPW-00-000-LE-TND-0037	Call-Off Supply and Delivery of Chemicals to DIPWP at Duqm.	Supply and Delivery of Chemicals to DIPWP at Duqm on a call-off basis for a Contract period of 12 months. The type of chemicals is both Commodity and branded chemicals.	175 OMR	08.03.2023	12.03.2023

Request for proposal

The RFP will be made available in electronic form only from 9:00 AM, 15th February 2023 Oman time until 5th March 2023 12 pm.

Contractor Minimum Qualifications

Contractor must hold valid registration with Government Entities for works of this nature and have necessary experience in Oman for similar Contract of Supply and Delivery of chemicals for operating power and water plants. We particularly encourage suppliers currently operating in Duqm area (Al Wusta Region).

Interested Suppliers shall contact DPC via email to tender@marafiq.om with the subject heading **"Call-Off Supply and Delivery of Chemicals to DIPWP at Duqm."** to receive further instructions related to payment of tender fee and collection of RFP Package.

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Bank Nizwa marks 10-year anniversary; highlights achievements, growth strategy and future outlook

MUSCAT: As the fastest-growing Islamic bank in the country, Bank Nizwa has consistently set new benchmarks and established itself as the fastest-growing bank in the country.

To celebrate its decade-long success, the bank recently hosted a distinguished media roundtable to commemorate its 10-year anniversary.

The event was attended by renowned journalists from various media outlets, who were given the chance to engage in meaningful discussions with the bank's Chief Executive Office, Khaled al Kayed, and other top executives from Bank Nizwa.

This provided valuable insights into the bank's strategies, operations and plans for the future, further solidifying Bank Nizwa's position as a leader in the industry.

During the gathering, Al Kayed expressed his gratitude for the support received from customers, the community and shareholders over the past decade.

He stated, "Celebrating our 10-year anniversary is both an exciting and humbling experience, as we reflect on the numerous achievements of Bank Nizwa during this time. Our commitment to Islamic finance goes beyond being a prominent player and



industry leader, it allows us to make a positive impact on people's lives and uphold the trust of our valued customers. At Bank Nizwa, we remain dedicated to maintaining the highest standards of excellence, integrity, and transparency, values that have been crucial to our success."

Al Kayed highlighted the remarkable journey of Bank Nizwa since its establishment. He emphasised how the bank has strategically aligned its

growth with that of conventional banking, while also contributing to the overall enhancement of the banking ecosystem in Oman.

The total market share of Bank Nizwa stands at 24 per cent in the Islamic Banking sector according to the Central Bank of Oman's recent report. Bank Nizwa has recorded a positive trajectory of growth as reflected in its financial results in the last quarter of 2022. As a testament to its progress, Bank Nizwa has turned in

a commendable financial performance by registering a 20 per cent growth in net profit.

The bank's total assets also increased by 6 per cent, reaching RO 1.486 billion in December 2022 from RO 1.405 billion in December 2021. The gross financing portfolio improved by 10 per cent to RO 1.242 billion, whilst the total customer deposit portfolio rose by 7 per cent to RO 1.189 billion.

The bank's operating income

witnessed a growth of 18 per cent. Bank Nizwa has driven significant expansion and development in the Islamic banking sector.

The bank recognises the importance of maintaining sustainable business practices and is focused on increasing margins through responsible decision-making.

Additionally, Bank Nizwa is committed to diversifying its income streams by exploring new products, clients, and segments.

The bank also places a strong emphasis on keeping its cost-to-income ratio in check and ensuring that it operates as efficiently as possible.

To achieve these goals, the Islamic institution is dedicated to continuously monitoring its performance and making necessary adjustments to drive growth and success.

In addition, Bank Nizwa has achieved significant growth in its retail and wholesale business and also has showcased its strong dedication to maintaining a people-centric approach and spearheading initiatives that add value to the lives of its employees as well as the community at large.

The bank's increased emphasis on integrating ESG into operations and its unwavering commitment

to the digitalisation agenda were strongly applauded at the event. As a bank that has advocated the principles of Shariah, Bank Nizwa reiterated its keen focus on nurturing a knowledge economy that is financially conscious, pragmatic and reserves a savings mindset.

The bank was also able to share interesting insights and statistics from the various Islamic banking awareness campaigns it conducted across a number of wilayats. As the Islamic banking sector continues to evolve and expand, Bank Nizwa remains at the forefront, driving innovation and setting new standards for excellence.

With a deep understanding of its customer's needs and a steadfast commitment to ethical and transparent banking practices, Bank Nizwa has become a trailblazer in the industry, delivering a range of cutting-edge financial products and services that are fully aligned with Islamic values and principles.

The bank's team of knowledgeable and experienced professionals is dedicated to providing personalised and efficient solutions, ensuring customers receive the highest level of service and support.

2023 Lexus ES with exclusive benefits ending soon



MUSCAT: Lexus is offering luxury automotive enthusiasts in Oman a perfect opportunity to own the 2023 Lexus ES with exclusive benefits. Service 3 years / 30,000 kms (whichever is earlier) and 1 year free Registration. The campaign ends on February 16, 2023. (Conditions apply. Visit any Lexus showroom for details).

The Lexus ES makes a fine impression with its stylish and sleek exterior, thoughtfully detailed interior and a list of advanced safety features and technology.

The Lexus ES is available with two powertrain options. The ES350 is powered by a 3.5-litre 24-valve V6 engine that produces 298 hp and 36.3 kg-m of torque.

While the ES250 is powered by, high-efficiency 2.5-litre 16-valve DOHC engine that produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg-m of torque. The two powertrains on ES350 and ES250 are paired to an eight-speed direct-shift automatic transmission.

The ES is also available as an ES hybrid electric model. It has a hybrid battery that is available with 8 years /160,000 kms warranty and is automatically charged either by petrol engine or during braking or decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord.

Furthermore, it hosts number of advanced technologies, yet drives like any other conventional car and does not require special fuel. The ES300h offers an impressive 24.1 km/L mileage.

On the other hand the ES350 F Sport version, gives a new dimension to how thrilling driving experiences can be.

In addition to a thrilling exterior that highlights its bold and aggressive personality, the Lexus ES350 F SPORT has features such as a retuned suspension, 19-inch wheels and tyres, and unique aluminium interior trim that gives the machine a more dynamic look and feel.

New logo to aid Omani SMEs

MUSCAT: SIMPA Marketing Research has come up with a simple and successful idea to help SMEs with their accounts receivables. It has developed a logo which can either be used electronically or as a physical stamp that goes on all invoices and payment requests made by the SMEs.

It simply says, 'Thank you for supporting Omani SME'. The idea is to remind the B2B purchaser of the goods or services that they are dealing with 100 per cent local SME company and



thanking them for their business hoping that this in turn will help the SME by receiving their due payments sooner rather than later.

Khalifa al Mukhaini, SIMPA's Managing Director says, "The idea behind the logo is basic behavioural psychology. When a business client sees the logo, they will hopefully be reminded or 'nudged' to process the invoice quicker knowing they are supporting an Omani SME.

Such simple ideas have been used in many industries for different purposes and they have proven that they are worth trying." In the last few months SIMPA themselves have been

experimenting with the logo on all their invoices and so far, the results have been very encouraging and positive. The hope is now that more SMEs will make use of this initiative.

Hafeez Ul Haq, SIMPA's Operations Manager, said, "We know first-hand that SME's most important accounting issue is cash flow and when clients and customers pay on time or a little quicker it makes a big difference and, in some case, it is life saving for small sized companies."

Bank Muscat invites first time borrowers to take advantage of special offers

MUSCAT: In response to the positive feedback from customers, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has invited all customers to take advantage of the extension on discounted offers on Baituna and Personal Finance for first time borrowers till March 31, 2023.

The bank's special offer featuring highly-competitive interest rates starting at just 4.25 per cent for Baituna home loans and 4.5 per cent on personal loans is available to Omani employees of government and quasi-government institutions as well as Tier 1 companies with salaries of RO 500 or more.

Also, the bank offers reduced interest rates on short term personal loans starting at just 4 per cent for 12 months. Bank Muscat is keen to follow up on the latest developments in the sector to meet the needs of customers and address feedback on the bank's various services.



Customers who wish to benefit from the current offer on Baituna home financing can easily apply for home finance by visiting any of the Bank's Baituna Sales Centres in Qurum, Maabelah, Barka, Suhar, Saham, Sur, Ibra, Nizwa, Ibri, Buraimi and Salalah or any Bank Muscat branch in Oman. Financing up to RO 500,000

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

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

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

Bank Muscat offers a wide choice of financing products, considering the different needs of customers and as part of its aim to enhance financial inclusion.

As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman for the last four decades, Bank Muscat has the largest banking network in Oman with 146 retail banking branches. With over 800 ATMs, CDMs and FFM's and state-of-the-art Internet and Mobile Banking, customers can meet the vast majority of their financial needs 24/7 from the ease of their homes or offices.



Challenges of digital transformation in accounting



DR SUAAD JASSEM

The author is an Assistant Professor in Accounting and Head of Managerial and Financial Sciences Department at Al Zahra College for Women.



DR KARIMA SAYARI

The author is an Assistant Professor in Finance at Al Zahra College for Women.

Accounting has always been impacted by digital technology, although the majority of the digitalisation process has included swapping out analogue instruments for comparable digital alternatives.

The creation, transport, management, and storage of financial data in a digital form utilising tools like e-documents, e-ledgers, and e-registration are all examples of digital accounting.

By reducing the influence and presence of accounting professionals, it also enables the use of information technology, such as artificial intelligence applications, to manage procedures.

This has improved financial information preparation, transport, analysis, and interpretation at a speed and effectiveness never previously witnessed.

Numerous new blockchain-based business models, including but not limited to cryptocurrency mining, cryptocurrency exchanges, and cryptocurrency trading, have emerged in response to the ascent of Bitcoin and other crypto assets.

In addition, certain nations, including Venezuela, are adopting Bitcoin as legal cash; the mayor of Miami plans to pay state employees in Bitcoin; and in 2022, big companies like Microsoft,



PayPal, and Starbucks will begin taking cryptocurrencies.

In the Metaverse, other “old economy” businesses like Adidas are selling their goods, while McDonald’s has submitted patent filings indicating that it is creating “virtual restaurants.”

This demonstrates a distinct pattern of a growing number of organisations changing their business models to include crypto-assets and taking cryptocurrencies now or in the process of doing so.

This emphasises how critical it is to comprehend how blockchain technology alters a number of accounting standards, forensic accounting, auditing, and tax preparation processes.

Numerous basic issues and difficulties are brought up by the digitisation of accounting, particularly the adoption of

blockchain.

The necessity for quick adaptation and transformation of company practices and business processes without deviating from basic accounting laws and principles reflects challenges for the accounting profession.

Accountants need to be alert for the developments and threats to their competitiveness.

Some of the challenges of digitalisation in accounting are:

First, accountants need to be equipped for digitisation, which calls for distinctive and innovative knowledge and skills.

Digital systems are susceptible to human error and may need specialised knowledge and skills to function properly.

Accounts should be knowledgeable and proficient in using modern digital tools and

systems, like Artificial intelligence, blockchain, big data and cloud computing.

Another challenge that can face the adoption of digital techniques in accounting department involves the resistance to change from the part of traditional accountants who are hesitant to the transition from traditional to digital accounting methods. Traditional accountants may not be comfortable with digital systems.

Second, the cost of adopting and implementing new digital systems can be expensive, especially for smaller businesses. Digitalisation frequently demands significant investments in technology and infrastructure, which can be a challenge for small businesses and startups with constrained budget.

The cost can be also to compatibility and integration issues.

In some cases, implementing digital systems won't be able to interact efficiently with current processes, software, and systems, which can be difficult and time-consuming.

Moreover, Digital technologies may have restricted functionality, or they may become outdated over time, necessitating expensive updates and upgrades.

Third, digitisation of accounting department brings new dangers, particularly cyberattacks. For any digital transformation strategy to be successful, cybersecurity risks

must be considered. The risk of data breaches and cyber-attacks rises as more financial data is kept and sent electronically. Additionally, digitally storing sensitive financial data raises concerns about the security of the information and who has access to it.

To examine their cybersecurity standards and lay out who will be responsible for what, the accounting department should meet with their IT department and potential suppliers before selecting new technology. Another type of risk can arise from human error when manually entering data into digital systems, as well as the risk for data loss or deterioration.

Data quality and consistency is an important issue. The accuracy of financial data depends on the quality of the input, and digital systems can be vulnerable to errors and inconsistencies if proper controls are not in place.

The above-mentioned issues are some of the challenges, among others, that might face the digitalisation of accounting.

However, these challenges can be addressed under a clear strategy formulated by a company; given that the main obstacle to a digital transformation initiative is a lack of a strategy. It is not sufficient to just decide to invest in advanced analytics or artificial intelligence.

A comprehensive plan that covers training, implementation, and maintenance is necessary.

Russian production cut lifts crude oil



OLE S HANSEN

The author is Head of Commodity at Saxo Bank.

The commodity sector spent the first full week of February trying to recoup some of the losses that hit the market after a stronger than expected US job report hit risk sentiment as the dollar strengthened and US Treasury yields moved higher in anticipation of additional US rate hikes followed by a prolonged period before any cut would be contemplated.

Into the mix, we saw industrial metals adopt a more cautious stance with expectations for a strong demand rebound from a reopening China being moderate and delayed.

Meanwhile, the energy sector, having recently gone through a long-liquidation phase from overreager hedge fund bulls, received a bid after Russia, faced with a sanctions related drop in demand for its crude oil and fuel products, decided to cut March production by 500,000 barrels

per day.

Overall, the Bloomberg Commodity Index hit a one-year low earlier in the week after the strong US job report drove profit taking across the board. Since then, the mentioned energy-led recovery has seen it show the first weekly rise in three.

Continued strength in US data has forced the Fed to turn up the hawkish rhetoric in order to steer the market away from expectations that a one or two-and-done rate hike(s) will be followed swiftly by rate cuts. This development has seen gold run into an overdue correction, taking it back below support-turned-resistance in the 1900 area with further weakness carrying the risk of an extension towards \$1828, the 38.2 per cent retracement of the run up from early November.

On Friday, Russia announced a unilateral cut in its March crude oil output by 500,000 barrels a day, apparently without consulting with its Opec+ partners first. Since the introduction of EU and G7 sanctions on crude oil from December and fuel products from early February, Russia has increasingly been forced to cut its selling price as its client base continued to dwindle.

While talking about retaliatory measures the move has probably more to do with the lack of demand forcing the reduction in order to reduce the discount Russia is currently

forced to sell its crude and fuel products at. While jumping 3 per cent on the news, Brent crude oil continues to trade within a range that has prevailed since November.

However, the output reduction, which is the equivalent of about 5 per cent of Russia's January output, will support and potentially speed up a move towards higher crude oil prices — a development that was not expected until later in the year when a pick-up in Chinese demand became more apparent.

If that ends up being the result, the focus will return to Opec and its resolve to maintain stable prices by potentially adding barrels to offset the loss of Russian barrels at a time where global demand look set to remain robust.

Brent crude, rangebound since November traded above its 21-day moving average on Friday, still below the trend line from the 2022 high and recent resistance in the 89 to 90 area.

In our outlook, we look for Brent to spend the first quarter trading in the 80's before moving into the 90's as demand picks up. The Russian decision may speed up the timing of a break. However, in the short-term, US data — especially next week's CPI print — may hold an equally large sway over the market given its potential impact on risk appetite and the dollar.

CMA to set up Virtual Assets Regulatory Framework

FRO MPAGE 13

The proposed new regulatory framework is envisaged to cover activities such as crypto assets, tokens, crypto exchanges, and initial coin offerings, among others.

The regulation for virtual assets in Oman is important, as it will provide a clear and secure framework for the growth of the virtual assets industry.

The move towards digitalisation and the adoption of virtual assets aligns with the Sultanate of Oman's Vision 2040 of a digitally transformed economy and financial sector, while attracting foreign investments into Oman.

The CMA has also appointed XReg Consulting Limited, an international policy and regulatory consultancy specialising in virtual assets, and Said al Shihri and Partners, Advocates & Legal Consultants (SASLO), an Omani law firm, to advise and assist the CMA.

This collaboration brings together expertise in policy, law and technology to assist in the creation of a comprehensive regulatory framework for virtual assets in Oman.

Oman's foray into the world of virtual assets positions it as one of the leaders among its regional peers.

With this important initiative to regulate and develop virtual assets, the CMA continues to play a crucial role in the development of Oman's financial sector.

Oman Air Cargo highlights Oman's logistics capabilities



BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, FEB 13

Oman Air, the national airline of the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the introduction of its first freighter by the end of 2023, while celebrating outstanding 2022 results at its annual cargo workshop, under the theme 'Journey to Success'.

The two-day event, which was held at Hormuz Grand, Muscat, brought together employees and stakeholders from across the company's global network, to celebrate its accomplishments in the past year and discuss future strategies. Attendees engaged in a series of presentations and discussions led by senior executives, as well as visiting the state-of-the-art Cargo Terminal at Muscat International Airport. An awards ceremony was also held for the top performers of 2022. During his keynote speech, Oman Air Chief Executive Officer, Eng Abdulaziz al Raisi, stated, "In spite of a challenging environment, Oman Air Cargo continues to deliver numbers ahead of its budget. In 2021, our revenues were 86 per cent above target. In 2022, we achieved another 44 per cent increase,

exceeding our budget revenue by 37 per cent, as well as a 36 per cent increase in the amount of cargo transported compared to the previous year.

This underscores the success of our many policies to ensure we remain ahead of the curve in an ever-changing industry and meet the growing demand for air cargo."

He added, "In 2023, we are keeping up the momentum. In the coming months, we look forward to introducing our first ever freighter and we will also be launching several new markets. This will offer exciting new opportunities for our guests and cargo alike, while continuing to unlock Oman's potential as a global logistics hub in line with Oman Vision 2040."

Jaafar al Lawati, Vice-President Commercial Cargo, also said, "The workshop was a valuable platform for us to engage with some of our most important global air cargo partners. The overall tone was one of optimism and confidence as we continue to tap into Oman's strategic location as a link between East and West and position Oman Air Cargo at the centre of a rapidly developing industry."

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m.alrahdi86@yahoo.com

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The last inhabitants of the canyons of Dmeitha

In the canyons of Dmeitha in the heart of Wadi al Hijri, in Oman's Dakhiliyah Governorate lives a couple whose primary means of living is agriculture and raising farm animals like goats. Despite the many challenges of their remote home, the couple finds comfort in nature and living a simple life... **P20**

Pregnant Rihanna lights up Super Bowl stage with 'Diamonds'

POP AND R&B SUPERSTAR Rihanna made a grand return to the stage on Sunday, floating high above the Super Bowl field, dazzling the crowd with a fast-paced medley of her hits and revealing that she is pregnant with her second child.

Dressed in a hot pink jumpsuit and baggy coat, Rihanna opened the biggest showcase in music by singing "Bitch Better Have My Money" as she

stood, with a noticeably rounded belly, on a platform suspended in the air. She was gradually lowered to the ground as she went through well-known songs from "Only Girl (In the World)" to "Rude Boy" and "Work."

Rihanna was surrounded throughout the 13-minute performance by dozens of dancers in baggy white outfits.

It was the 34-year-old Grammy



winner's first stage performance in five years. Her last album, "Anti," was released in 2016.

Rihanna's appearance led social media users to speculate she was expecting another child.

A representative for the singer confirmed after the show that Rihanna was indeed pregnant.

The singer gave birth to her first child, a boy, with rapper ASAP Rocky in May 2022. Rocky was spotted in the stadium crowd cheering on his girlfriend's performance.

Rihanna concluded her Super Bowl set with "Diamonds" as fireworks lit up the sky around the stadium.

Rihanna joined a list of music luminaries who have performed at the Super Bowl, from Lady Gaga to Beyonce, Prince, Madonna and the Rolling Stones. The telecast usually draws around 100 million viewers in the United States alone.

In the pre-game ceremony, country star Chris Stapleton sang the US national anthem while Oscar-winning "CODA" star Troy Kotsur performed the song in American Sign Language.

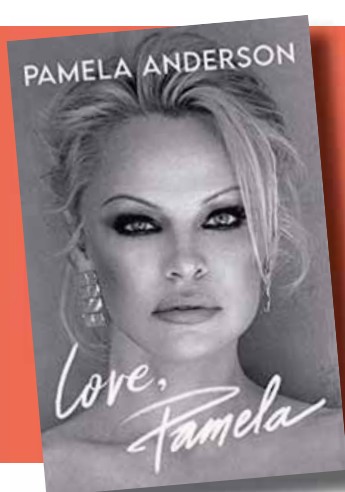
Emmy-winning "Abbott Elementary" star Sheryl Lee Ralph sang "Lift Every Voice and Sing," a hymn that has become known as the Black national anthem, accompanied by a choir. — Reuters

READ

LOVE, PAMELA

BY PAMELA ANDERSON

The actress and activist details her childhood, rise to fame and the ways she is reclaiming the narrative of her life.



TRAVEL TALES

The Cambodian government is undertaking a mammoth operation to relocate, on a "voluntary basis", some 10,000 families who are squatting on public land near the temples. The scheme involves revegetation and is essential to preserving the site's heritage status, Cambodian authorities say. — AFP



FASHION

Models present designs from Ulla Johnson Autumn Winter 2023 collection during New York Fashion Week, at The Spiral in Hudson Yards in Manhattan. — AFP





Exhibition, art talk to mark 50 years of Oman-Austria diplomatic relations

ON THE OCCASION of the celebration of 50 years of diplomatic relations between the Sultanate of Oman and Austria, the Austrian Embassy in Oman, in collaboration with Stal Gallery and Studio, presents a cross-cultural initiative, stimulating a dialogue



between both countries, through the interactive art programme at Stal Gallery. "Growth" is a cross-cultural programme, initiated and supported by the Embassy of Austria in Oman. The programme is focused on the cultural aspect and will culminate in a public exhibition with an inauguration on February 14, 2023 at 7:00 pm and Art talk on February 15, 2023 at 6:00 pm. The opening ceremony is attended by the guest of honour Sayyid Said bin Sultan al Busaidy, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Culture and is held under the auspices of Christian Brunmayr, Ambassador of Austria to Oman. The programme is curated by the

Austrian artist Marjan Habibi, and featuring artworks of Austrian artists Elisabeth Gschiel, Marlene Gollner, Walter Kratner and Marjan Habibi. "The celebration of 50 years of diplomatic relations between the Republic Austria and the Sultanate



of Oman represents an excellent framework to work together on contemporary art projects, such as the exhibition "Growth" at Stal Gallery in Muscat," added Austrian Ambassador Christian Brunmayr. "Growth is always accompanied by pain. Be it the growth of a plant seed, or the physical growth of a human being or an animal, or the intellectual growth of a human being, or even the growth of a culture, society, and civilisation. All of this requires awareness and steps of which pain is an integral part. Prosperity, beauty and progress reach higher levels, achieving results requires effort, perseverance, tolerance and awareness," added exhibition curator Marjan Habibi.

They are four artists living in Austria presenting their art by using the tools of different forms of art. This includes words, photos, space, materials, lines, shapes, colours or hybrid mixtures of these. From the individual works and groups of works in this exhibition you can



easily recognise that the artists primarily understand "growth" as an aesthetic transformation process. Elisabeth Gschiel, whose motifs do not draw with a pen, but sew them like threads on paper with a sewing machine, invites you to witness a craft traditionally attributed to women from the female point of view. The sculptures, vessels or body volumes by Marlene Gollner allow a resonance and interaction between the visible and the hidden to be experienced. Wild silk fibers are the material of these body shells, obtained from the cocoons of silkworms in the metamorphosis between chrysalis and butterfly. Walter Kratner's work is about

standardised portraits which have been retouched with graphite and oil. The viewer will realise that nationality or cultural background cannot even be guessed at a second glance. Finally, Marjan Habibi's expressive drawings and



paintings are interspersed with painterly elements and also contain influences from Persian ornamentation. In the context of the exhibition "Growth", the artists all strive to soften traditional media boundaries and open them up for discussion. The Artists' Talk is the introduction to the one-week Art residency programme in Oman, with four established artists from Austria. The artists will share some work-in-progress and their thoughts on Austrian contemporary art, as well as on the exciting Exhibition in Stal Gallery. The exhibition at Stal gallery in Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos runs from February 14 - 28, 2023.

A LOOK AT THE ACADEME

By Dr Zainab al Ajmi
zeinbf@moe.om

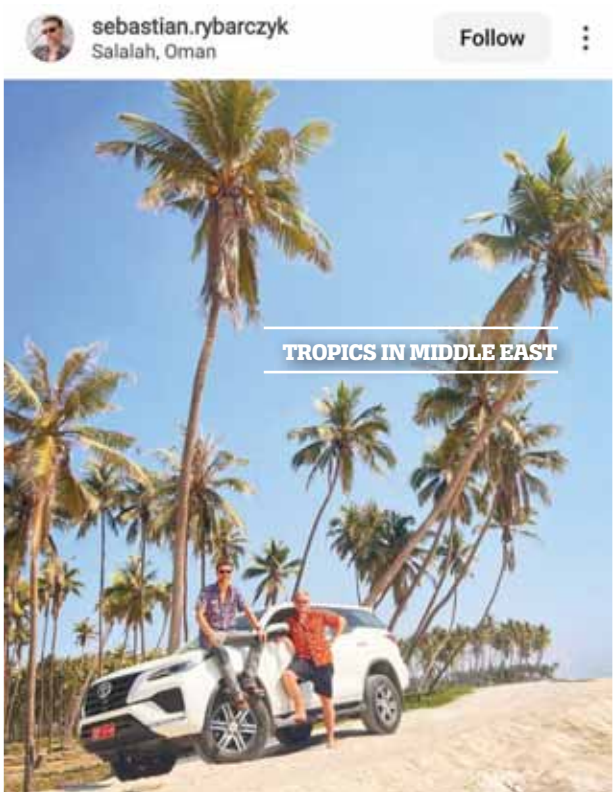
Is a competition/ competitive learning environment suitable for students?

THERE IS NOTABLE criticism of the current school system, especially regarding how it stresses testing and competition. Some argue that this system doesn't help students learn effectively and that academics focus on test scores. Cognizant of this fact, when students compete in a healthy environment, the competition encourages each student to do their best rather than remain at perform poorly. Some educators indicate that while competition can motivate students to solve, stir, and resolve issues and increase the value of collaboration, however, it can also cause stress or anxiety if taken seriously. The team of "resilienteducator.com (2018)" Discuss the pros and cons of a competition-competitive learning environment. Succinctly, students can learn better when they learn in a cooperative environment and help teach others, where in this case, there is likely to students who might be left behind with poorly performing can be brought up by their peers. However, the disadvantages of this type of learning environment are: It can be difficult for a teacher to accurately evaluate the progress of individual students. Also, students may not be motivated to excel if they cognize that their classmates will do the same activities that are needed. What's more, students get frustrated if their efforts are not recognised. On the contrary, students in a competitive learning environment, face the real-world challenge of competition. In addition, students can still work in teams yet compete against other teams — it can be a convenient way to enliven the classroom environment. However, the cons of this learning environment are several students may become apathetic if they fall too far behind the rest of their classmates. Furthermore, earning high grades and teacher approval is further important than actual learning. Despite this, it is critical that educators work to teach students in a healthy environment, to this end, Cameron (2013) suggested that protecting students in a competitive learning environment, for instance: Competition can be healthy when it provides feedback to students about their performance and improvement, when winning is not the sole or primary objective, and when students learn about themselves in challenging situations. In these circumstances, competition can teach invaluable lessons students do not typically learn in the classroom. Unfortunately, the frequent win-at-all-costs mentality associated with many competitive endeavours can undermine children's motivation and lead them to avoid or even disengage from activities they may otherwise enjoy. It is standard for people to judge themselves against others, thus in that respect competition is relatively healthy. A supportive environment can teach students to accept failure without losing self-esteem. Also, a competitive environment teaches students critical thinking skills, creative problems solving, and decision-making. Without those skills, countries can't compete in a global economy. End the 'all must have prizes' culture; thus, students enjoy activities with a highly competitive spirit". In conclusion, there is a fact that a good design of a competitive-learning environment is suitable for students, where students are encouraged to do their best and face a real challenge that prepares them for real life. However, there is a "healthy boundary that should be respected in the competitive learning environment, and students, teachers, and parents can work together to find the right balance" (American heritage schools).



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AROUND THE WORLD

DINING

‘Enlightened tingle’: Aussie cafe offers \$140 cup of coffee



At US\$140 a pop, one cafe in Melbourne, Australia is serving up no ordinary cup of joe.

Melbourne has long been famed for its coffee culture, with Italian and Greek migrants infusing the city with all things bean and cup since the 1940s.

And for those looking for a next-level experience, one cafe is selling a cup at 50 times the price of a regular flat white or espresso.

The coffee — hailed as one of the world's finest — is grown in Panama's Chiriqui region.

Dubbed "Black Jaguar", the beans came first at the prestigious 2022 Best of Panama auction in the Natural Geisha category, scoring 96.5 out of 100.

They sold for over US\$2,000 per pound (450 grams). Only 100 pounds were up for grabs and Australian cafe group Proud Mary snapped up a pound.

"I had an out-of-body, enlightened kind of tingle. It was really clearly a special cup of coffee, taste-wise, character-wise," said Proud Mary owner Nolan Hirte, who was on the judging panel.

"It was right in your face, so expressive and so clear. There's something about it that's just 'wow'."

The Black Jaguar is the most expensive coffee Proud Mary has ever bought.

They made 22 cups available in Melbourne, and a limited amount was stocked at their cafes in Austin and Portland in the United States.



One connoisseur flew two hours from Sydney to buy the deluxe drop, which is served as a pour-over.

Melbourne is one of the richest cities in one of the richest countries in the world. Even so, US\$140 is well above what most people would pay for a cup of coffee.

But cinematographer Jake Reeder, a self-described "massive coffee nerd" who won a taste of the Black Jaguar in a competition, said he would have no qualms paying for it.

The 27-year-old described it as a "moving experience." "Anytime you're on the receiving end of a product that's received so much love and care and attention," he said, "it makes you feel something."

Hirte believes coffee is a snip compared with more expensive drinks such as wine and tea.

"Coffee is far more complex than wine will ever be, but it often gets roasted dark, has sugar added to it and milk poured on it -- it can be so much more," he said.

"And does anyone talk about how expensive tea can be, because it outplays coffee massively?"

"Why are we trying to hold it back, to think coffee can just have a ceiling?" — AFP

CULTURE

Nice carnival celebrates 150 years, with a nod to Rio



MORE THAN 200,000 visitors are expected in Nice this weekend for the southern French city's famous carnival — one of the three largest in the world — now in its 150th year, hoping to recapture pre-Covid numbers, and sending a special wink at its sister celebration in Rio.

Started in 1873, this party with a global flair has since become a major economic force on France's Cote d'Azur, supporting 1,800 jobs and raking in 30 millions euros (\$32m).

The annual event was cancelled in 2021 and greatly reduced last year, due to the pandemic. This year, from Saturday to February 26, the public can expect to find those famous floats and big heads, where many mimosas will be shared, along with some 20 tons of confetti.

"We're a bit stressed, but still on track," said Jean-Pierre Povigna, 17, whose family has had "the honour and privilege" of constructing party floats for five generations.

In a large warehouse situated in the centre of town, he worked tirelessly to complete the crowd's two most popular floats: those belonging to the king and queen of the carnival, "for months, from 6:00 am to 8:00 pm these last few days," he said.

- 'CAN'T WAIT' -

Povigna can count on his grandfather to learn the ins and outs of a profession "that's passed down from one generation to the next," a man of whom he's "proud to carry the same name."

The elder Jean-Pierre Povigna, 79, has seen his job change with the times: "The first carnival I remember is the one from 1954. It started in the snow," he said.

"Every year, we can't wait to see people's faces and see if all our work was worth it."

For the last three years, the large styrofoam heads have been created by a computer-programmed robot, instead of the longstanding tradition by hand.

"This saves us so much time," said Vincent Povigna, 21, another family member. "Nowadays, it only takes three days to sculpt one head, instead of two weeks."

Once set up on the floats, the

giant figurines themselves are also programmed by a computer, along with the dozens of spotlights on board.

Although many of the floats still run on gas, "they've also been adapted, two of which are equipped with electric motors," said Jean-Marc Mathe, 64, a retired firefighter.

small price, unless revellers attend "in full costume."

This year's theme is "The World's Treasures", with the parade's king travelling between the Taj Mahal, the Leaning Tower of Pisa and the Statue of Liberty. The city of Nice has invited Rio as its guest of honour.



er in Nice, who added "it's an honour" to steer the queen's float "for the past 25 years".

Even one week before kick-off, the carnival was already showing 95 per cent capacity.

Nice's festival in 2023 is expected to attract more than 200,000 spectators, according to the city hall.

That ranks it among the top three largest celebrations in the world, after Rio de Janeiro and Venice.

Attending the event will cost a



One float was even designed by two Brazilian "carnavalescos," Gabriel Haddad and Leonardo Barra.

The city's Villa Massena museum, located on Nice's popular Promenade des Anglais, will add to the festivities with a month-long exposition of costumes from Brazil's biggest samba schools.

Another party to look out for is Nice's "Queernaval," the largest gay carnival in France. First taking place in 2015, that party returns to the scene on February 17. — AFP

LIFESTYLE

Love in a time of inflation: how much will Valentine's Day set you back?



THIS VALENTINE'S DAY is set to look different after a year of record food inflation that has sent up prices of everything from flowers to chocolates and dining in restaurants.

Covid-era supply chain logjams and Russia's invasion of Ukraine have meant that Britons paid a record 16.7% more for food in the four weeks to January 22 compared to the same period last year, according to research firm Kantar.

As a result, romantic Valentine dinners out will cost more and restaurants are modifying their offerings to attract cash-conscious customers.

Last year, British restaurant chain PizzaExpress offered a three-course set menu complete with "a prosciutto and raspberry mimosa, heart-shaped dough balls and a main, such as our Padana, with creamy goat's cheese and sweet caramelised onion".

Priced at 23.95 pounds (\$29) per person, the ad for the meal asked: "Will the Triple Salted Caramel Cheesecake tickle your fancy?"

This year, PizzaExpress is advertising a slightly less impressive "love bundle" of a starter and a "classic" pizza for 15 pounds.

According to the latest data from Britain's Office of National Statistics, eating at restaurants in December cost 9.4% more than last year.

Other expenses associated with date nights — from flowers and cinema tickets to taxis and childcare — also rose. As companies such as Mondelez, Nestle and Lindt hiked prices, people paid 10.7% more for chocolates.

The nation's supermarkets are seeking to cash in, keeping prices for their Valentine's Day meal-deals stable in the hope of luring customers from restaurants.

Morrisons is selling a 15-pound package for a starter, main, two sides, drink and dessert. Its members will get 1 pound off a dozen fresh red roses from February 11, the retailer said. The price of flowers rose 6.2% in Britain in December.

Tesco, whose CEO recently noted that consumers are shifting away from eating out, has reduced the price of its Valentine's Day dinner-for-two to 12 pounds — down from 15 pounds last year — for a main, side dish, dessert and drink.

Sainsbury's has tied up with Uber Eats to offer 15 pound "emergency bundles" of a three-course meal, drinks and gifts with free delivery in parts of East London.

"It's an opportunity for the supermarkets to sell their premium ranges to people who wouldn't normally buy them," said Chris Beckett, head of equity research at investment firm Quilter Cheviot. "That could lead to repeat purchases in the future."

Even diners with deeper pockets will have to dish out more this year.

London's Michelin-starred Ritz Restaurant, whose ad boasts "breathtaking" interiors "with spectacular garland chandeliers and romantic twinkling candlelight all reflected in the mirrored panels", this year priced its four-course set Valentine's menu at 395 pounds per person, up from 325 pounds last year.

Both years, the deal included a glass of Barons de Rothschild "Ritz Reserve" Rosé NV Champagne and a menu created by the Ritz's Executive Chef John Williams, Member of the Order of the British Empire.

Elsewhere in Europe, a similar trend has taken hold. Luxury hotel Le Bristol in Paris, for instance, is this year charging upwards of 2,190 euros (\$2,338) for its "seductive offer" that includes a room for one night, late check-out, a "gastronomic dinner for two", chocolate and a bottle of champagne. Last year, a similar experience cost 1,090 euros.

The Ritz and Le Bristol did not respond to a request for comment. — Reuters

The last inhabitants of the canyons of Dmeitha

By Khaled Abdul Malak

He was more than 80 years old when I first met him in the caves of the small hamlet of Dmeitha in the heart of Wadi Al Hijri, in Oman's Al Dakhiliyah Governorate. Musabbah had spent all his life in this barely accessible canyon, indifferent to the comforts that modernisation and development offered.

Musabbah boasted that he had lived in 35 different locations in the canyon, moving from one place to another in search of grazing fields for his goats. But ten years ago, medical concerns forced him and his wife Nasra, to leave their secluded haven and resettle in Tanuf, the closest town to his "paradise".

My first contact with this unique couple was during an exploration trip to Wadi Al Hijri 14 years ago. Along with family and friends, I was surveying the terrain in preparation to make the full crossing of the rugged canyon. We had been hiking for two hours in the wadi's bed, climbing rocks, crossing water ponds, and ascending rocky slopes, when suddenly a herd of goats appeared out of nowhere just in front of us. A few metres away, we discovered the most unexpected hamlet nestled in the greyish rocks. There were chickens, goats, and one dog but no human beings. We were bewildered to find signs of a living soul in such a remote and desolate place!

Leaving the company behind, I advanced in the wadi, when, all of a sudden, I heard a voice from the cliff. "As salamu aleykom" ("Peace be upon you"), the voice greeted. It was just unreal! I saw this skinny old man through the zoom lens of my camera. He was walking easily on the edge of the dangerous cliff, overlooking the wadi bed.

"Don't go further in the wadi, it is full of dangers! Join me for coffee and some dates at our house," he shouted, as he waved his hands.

I realised that my unexpected host was the master of the place that we had just discovered. I thanked him and promised to visit after completing the exploration of the wadi. Musabbah and Nasra had lived in their isolated area in the middle of the rugged canyons for as long as they remember, refusing to leave even when many others deserted it.

"We were around ten families living in Dmeitha until 30 years ago. With Nasra, we decided to remain in our house when the rest of our relatives preferred to move to the city," Musabbah said. "We have everything we need here. We have water running in the wadi the whole year round and enough grass to feed our animals."

The goats and chickens constituted Musabbah's wealth and unique source of living. Once a month, the couple travelled to Nizwa, the capital of the governorate, to sell chickens, eggs, and dairy products from goat milk, and buy provisions of rice, dates, fruits, and vegetables.

In addition, the army supplied the hermit couple with food for more than 15 years. "Every two to three weeks, they used to come by helicopter and drop food provisions," Musabbah said.

The couple sold their goats and moved to Tanuf around ten years ago. Old age and health problems made it impossible for them to stay in Dmeitha.

"I go back there regularly, even alone, just to spend one night or two

in our house in Dmeitha... I really miss that life," a nostalgic Nasra said during a May 2nd visit last year.

Musabbah, as well, cannot stay away for long. His age did not prevent him from going for regular walks in the wadi "to check on his bees".

Musabbah has adopted the wadi's bees. He can tell exactly where bee-hives could be found. "Whenever you see a yellow spot on the rock, it is wax dropped by a

bee, it also indicates that there is a honeycomb somewhere in the vicinity," he explained.

In his new home in Tanuf, Musabbah receives his guests in the garden, even in May when the temperature is above 40 degrees Celsius.

"I can't sit inside the house with these machines blowing cold air in my face," he said, pointing at the air cooling units. "I'd rather stay in the open air," he added, not mind-

ing the feeling of sitting in a furnace.

Musabbah and Nasra are a unique couple whose attachment to the traditional Omani culture and ways of living, made them popular figures in their Dakhiliyah region.

"Of course, I know

Musabbah and Nasra... Who doesn't," exclaimed a shopkeeper in Nizwa, with a big smile on his face. "They are the most unusual couple on Earth!"

