

HM thanked by participants

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received thanks and gratitude from the participants of Oman Environment Sustainability Conference. The participants thanked HM for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to them. They lauded the development witnessed by Oman in the environmental sector and natural resources in light of the national priorities of Oman Vision 2040. They also commended the the government's efforts to come up with advanced solutions to protect people, and address climate pollution and global warming.



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GILL HITS DOUBLE AS INDIA WIN FIRST ODI AGAINST NEW ZEALAND



P13

OMAN LNG PENS NEW AGREEMENTS TO EXPORT 1.6 MTPA OF LNG



P20

KHOR SHAM: A PARADISE WHERE DOLPHINS GO TO SWIM



MUSCAT

NEW VOTERS CAN REGISTER IN ROLL

In view of the forthcoming Majlis Ash'shura's Tenth Term Elections, the Ministry of Interior on Wednesday announced the start of registration of new voters and transfer of files of existing voters, with effect from January 19 to August 31. The Ministry urges interested citizens aged 21 to submit their applications online via the election website (elections.om) and to ensure that their personal identity cards are supplied with the PKI (Public Key Infrastructure) system.

ANKARA

ERDOGAN SETS STAGE FOR MAY 14 ELECTION

Turkish President Recep Erdogan on Wednesday signalled that he intended to bring the next general election forward by one month to May 14. It sets the stage for what some analysts view as Turkey's most consequential vote in generations. Erdogan and his party have ruled Turkey for two decades that have seen years of booms and busts as well wars and even a failed but bloody coup. **SEE P6**

DAVOS

SAUDI CHANGING NO-STRINGS AID

Saudi Arabia's finance minister said on Wednesday the kingdom is changing the way it provides assistance to allies, shifting from previously giving direct grants and deposits unconditionally. The kingdom was encouraging countries in the region to enact economic reforms, Mohammed al Jadaan said in Davos. **SEE P7**

INSIDE



MINISTER, KIDS AMONG 18 KILLED IN UKRAINE CRASH

P6



COURT ORDERS NETANYAHU TO REMOVE MINISTER

P7

OMAN, UAE, QATAR, BAHRAIN, EGYPT, JORDAN LEADERS HOLD TALKS

HM takes part in summit meeting



ABU DHABI: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik took part in the fraternal meeting that brought together leaders from some GCC states, Jordan and Egypt in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

His Majesty the Sultan's participation stems from a conviction in the significance of such fraternal meetings and their fruitful outcome that contributes to realising the aspirations of their

countries' peoples.

The meeting was attended by the delegation accompanying His Majesty the Sultan.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik came back after taking part in the fraternal meeting with leaders of some GCC states, Jordan and Egypt.

His Majesty the Sultan was seen off at the Presidential Airport in Abu Dhabi by Shaikh

Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, UAE President, and a number of senior UAE officials. Upon his departure at Abu Dhabi, His Majesty the Sultan sent a cable of thanks to Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan.

His Majesty expressed his appreciation for the warm welcome and hospitality accorded to him during the visit. His Majesty hailed the fraternal

meeting as an opportunity to discuss relations and means of consolidating cooperation among the states in all fields. He prayed to Allah the Almighty to grant the UAE President continued good health and happiness. His Majesty wished the UAE leader success in realising the aspirations of his country's people.

During the visit, His Majesty the Sultan was accompanied by

an official delegation comprising Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office; Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister; and Sayyid Dr Ahmed bin Hilal al Busaidy, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). **— ONA**

Oman target third Arabian Gulf Cup title in finals today

ANUROOPATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 18

Oman are targeting their third title when they meet hosts Iraq in the final of the 25th Arabian Gulf Cup at the Basra International Stadium on Thursday. The match will kick-off at 8 pm (Oman Time).

Oman head coach Branko Ivankovic said the Red Warriors are seeking to end the trend of losing the final against the hosts in the Gulf Cup.

"We want to end our record of losing to the hosts in the final. I am proud of the players for reaching the final. It was not easy, they are eager to play in front of full stands. Iraq are very strong especially with the home fans support. Our goal is also to win. I expect it to be a difficult match, but I trust the players. The players are ready," Ivankovic told a pre-match press conference on Wednesday.



Defender Juma al Habsi, who missed the semifinal due to two yellow cards, will return for the

Theyazin gives directives to operate 4 flights for fans

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth issued instructions today to operate four flights to transport fans to cheer Oman Football Team in its match against Iraq at the final match of the GCC Football Cup (Gulf Cup 25).

The initiative has been made in conjunction with

Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel), Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Vodafone Oman and OQ. HH Sayyid Theyazin also gave directives to give out a bonus to players of the National Team and members of its technical and administrative bodies in recognition for the teams qualifying to the final match of the Gulf Cup. **— ONA**

final. Injured defenders Amjad al Harthy and Mahmoud Mabrouk al Mushaifri will miss the final.

"We have no absences except for the two full backs, the players are well prepared."

Ivankovic said it will be an altogether different approach compared to the opening match of the same teams which ended in a goalless draw.

"In the first match we had a reservation, a point is better than losing, and in the end the draw was satisfactory for both teams. Tomorrow, the matter is different and we are ready for all possibilities. I hope that the match will be over in the original time, like the Bahrain match. Playing in front of a large audience represents an incentive for us and our goal is to win."

Jameel al Yahmadi, who scored the winner against Bahrain in the semifinal, said that Iraq will have more pressure playing in front of their fans.

"It will be a keenly fought match. The Iraqi team is strong, but we are ready to achieve a positive result. We are happy to play in front of the great Iraqi audience." **TURN TO P4**



His Majesty participates in fraternal meeting of leaders of GCC countries, Jordan and Egypt





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His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq welcomed by UAE President Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan at the Presidential Airport in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.





Muscat Nights is here!



The Royal Oman Police has announced its readiness and confirmed that it is well prepared for the activities of the Muscat Nights 2023 events.

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Seventeen nights of fun, frolic, laser and drone shows, international cuisines, amusement and a complete infotainment package for the whole family is beginning today evening under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Governor of Muscat, as the first edition of the Muscat Nights is unveiled in front of a select gathering at the Qurum Natural Park, at 7 pm.

Muscat Nights is the rebranded version of Muscat Festival after four years' gap and, according to the Muscat Municipality, the organisers of the event, this edition of the family festival will be all the more attractive and insightful.

"Muscat Nights is the latest

version of the Muscat Festival which combines the efforts of all active official, private, and even the popular sectors in the country. This festival reflects the magical beauty of the Sultanate, the depth of its history and heritage, the urban development witnessed by the country while preserving its cultural heritage, customs and the authentic Arab traditions of the Omani people," Ahmed al Humaidi, Chairman of the Muscat Municipality and the Head of the Festival Committee, told the Observer.

Organised in association with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the festival also offers the visitors, comprising people from across the world, a variety of cultural, artistic and

traditional events and activities. It will be held at four venues, namely, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre, Al Naseem Park, Oman Automobile Association and Qurum Natural Park which is the largest heritage village where one can see and get to know traditional and artistic Omani life.

LASER AND DRONE SHOWS

There will be laser and drone shows at stipulated timings at different venues and will keep shifting every day so as to attract visitors to all venues and measures are on to ensure smooth traffic flow.

EVENTS AT EACH VENUE

Each venue has authentic socio-cultural activities besides food and other entertainment

activities every day from 4 to 10 pm till February 4, 2023 while on weekends there will be extended timings. Muscat Nights is an excellent opportunity for shopping and sightseeing as it showcases an array of traditional industries from around the world.

"A festival like 'Muscat Nights' has a great role in reviving the economy, travel and tourism and creating a space for entertainment and cultural communication, especially in the post-Covid era. Muscat Nights 2023 will be a launching pad for the activities included in the Muscat Municipality's work agenda during the current year and we are hopeful that the 17 nights would live up to the aspirations of society in all its categories," Al Humaidi added. -- ONA

Forum on developing expertise in dates marketing kicks off

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

The Sultanate of Oman's date production increased 49 per cent in 2021 reaching 374,000 tonnes, thanks to the incessant efforts of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the national strategy for the promotion of date palms.

Oman ranks second at the level of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and eighth at the global level in terms of the total production of dates.

This was announced at the international forum on developing practices for marketing dates, held under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, and in cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and the International Dates Council from January 18 to 19.

importance and it is the first crop in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of number and spread, and the national strategy for the advancement of date palms has contributed to raising date production," said Dr Al Habsi.

He further said that the forum is in the wake of the greater importance of date farming in the region as Arab date cultivation constitutes 77 per cent and Gulf countries constitute 21 per cent of the global production of dates. According to the participants, date cultivation constitutes a historical heritage and a strategic and economic crop in the Arab region and the GCC countries.

The forum also aims to shed light on the importance of dates as an exceptional fruit and its contribution to food security, and its role in improving public health, promoting production techniques and presenting pioneering experiences in the field of investment in the



The two-day forum highlights the importance of dates and its contribution to food security and improving general health. It also sheds light on aspects of dates production and leading experiences in the field of investing in dates-related converting industries.

Date palm is the top crop in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of numbers and varieties and there are approximately 9 million palm trees of 325 varieties in the country. The area cultivated in holdings is estimated at 62,000 feddans, which constitutes 22 per cent of the total cultivated area.

"Date palm holds the utmost

manufacturing industries of dates.

Experts opined that Oman's efforts in enhancing the cultivation is laudable. Out of the various initiatives, the propagation and distribution of about one million tissue palm seedlings of the most important economic varieties during the past 20 years, and the contract between the Ministry and the Oman Palm Development Company to manage and operate the tissue cultivation centre in the Wilayat of Bahla in 2022 aims to develop the date palm sector to meet the needs of the local market.

Environmental sustainability conference concludes

MUSCAT: The first edition of "Oman Conference for Environmental Sustainability" concluded on Wednesday at a ceremony held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Fahd bin al Julanda al Said, Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University.

The three-day conference saw the participation of experts, scientists and specialists from



Oman and abroad. It focused on climate change and air quality.



The conference, held in conjunction with Manafa

Initiative, was attended by more than 400 participants from 25 countries.

At the conclusion of the conference, HH Sayyid Fahd honoured the five best scientific presentations at the conference and felicitated the winners of Manafa Initiative's "Youth Ecothon" members, as well as members of the conference's scholarly committee. — ONA

One step away to history

FROM PAGE 1

Iraq head coach Jesus Casas said the team is just one step away from making history.

"It was a dream to reach the final, the journey was difficult. Our opponents for the final are very strong. We had faced Oman before, and they played many finals recently," Casas said.

"We have several surprises for the Oman team in the final. We have analysed our first match against Oman. Our players will try to reach in several ways to create danger to the Omani team."

"Oman is a stable team with the coach for some time. I hope that we will not reach penalty kicks, and if we go to them, I hope to win."

"We are in the final and each team has a goal, to achieve the title. I see it as a closed match, which will be decided by small details," the Spanish coach added.

"I am satisfied with all the matches. I hope that there will be no mistakes

tomorrow. Our difference is that we know the opponent well, we are clear in front of each other, we will try to correct the mistakes of the first meeting. Each match is different. I repeat our strong desire to make Iraq happy by achieving the title." The Iraq coach said star player Ayman Hussein, who is the tournament top-scorer with three goals, is in good form.

"Ayman Hussein is a very important player, but all responsibilities should not be placed on him. Teamwork, one player does not win, we play collectively and win. I mean everyone, not just the players, the whole system. I did not change anything in the players, we just showed them the way and the rest is their effort. Most of the technical staff were players and this represents a positive point."

Iraq player Amjad Atwan said the players are eager to give a great performance. "The presence of the fans will be a great motivation and we hope to achieve what makes them happy"

■ AN EXHIBITION OF RARE BIRDS



An educational and non-commercial environmental exhibition of rare birds titled 'Gold Exhibition 14' will be held on Friday. Eighteen different breeds of birds, including pigeons, doves, parrots and sparrows, as well as rabbits will be displayed at the exhibition. This fourteenth edition of the event, which is organised and managed by Al Nawader Oman, will take place at Al Bahaa School for Basic Education in Mabela in the Wilayat of Seeb. The exhibition is held annually and it attracts a large number of attendees interested in rare birds and pets from different countries of the world. It provides an educational environment to learn about the birds and proper breeding and care techniques, as well as promoting an interest in the environment.





Oman, Zanzibar review cooperation



MUSCAT: Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, received on Wednesday Haroun Ali Sueliman, Minister of Constitutional and Legal Affairs of the Government of Zanzibar.

During the meeting, the two sides reviewed areas of bilateral cooperation and means of enhancing them in all fields.

The meeting was attended by Saleh bin Mohammed al Saqri, Head of the East Africa Department at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

Amr Diab to perform live in Oman



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 18

Jebel Sifah will once again turn into an al fresco hotspot as it will host the legendary Amr Diab for a one-of-a-kind performance on Friday at the Dunes Beach Club.

Fans in Oman can look forward to a live set featuring signature songs from the iconic international singer, while enjoying stunning views at Jebel Sifah.

Known as the 'King of Arab Pop', Amr Diab is a best-selling Egyptian singer who has created his own style of music, a blend of Western and Egyptian rhythms. His 1996 signature song "Nour El Ain" gained the groundbreaking artist recognition inside and outside the Arab world.

In fact, Diab's unique Mediterranean music genre has earned him international recognition throughout his career, including seven World Music Awards and six African Music Awards, as well as a Guinness World Record for most World Music Awards for bestselling Middle Eastern artist.

Organised by Venture Lifestyle, the open-air staged concert is brought to the audience by master developer Muriya, a joint venture between Orascom Development Holding and OMRAN.

Situated between the sea of Oman and Al Hajar Mountains, what better location to hold a performance by the world-famous Amr Diab than at Jebel Sifah, said Karim Boushra, Area Destinations Director at Muriya, adding, "The Dunes Beach Club, one of the newest hotspots at Jebel Sifah has been serving up not just the finest food but also the finest entertainment including a stellar line-up that so far consisted of DJ Rodge and Tamer Hosny to name a few.

The Dunes Beach Club is part of Jebel Sifah, a residential resort community developed by Muriya, a joint venture between Orascom Development Holding, an internationally acclaimed developer, and OMRAN, the leading government arm for tourism development in Oman.

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. (4/2023)

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

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last Date to Collect the Tender	Tender Return Date	Grade
PRE/23/008	2023/MM/ QS-9	Design & Construction of Road Profile & Sidewalk Modifications to resolve Water Stagnation in Embassies Area	46	29/01/2023	09/02/2023	First
PRE/22/118	2022/MM/ QS-61 (Re-Call-2)	Design and Construction of Pedestrian Bridge and Embankment Protection Works in Airport Heights (Re-Tender)	25	09/02/2023	01/03/2023	First

Tender Conditions :-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of abond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be E-Bond and to be submitted through E-Tendering system, addressed to Muscat Municipality.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@mtcit.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).
- For technical support of E-Bond through e-tendering system please send an email to (esnad@gstb.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200/24402330).

"Mwasalat" invites professional firms for the following tenders:

Tender Number T-03-2023

Tender Name Supply and Delivery of Bunkers (Marine Gas Oil) to MWASALAT Fleet of Vessels and Shore Tanks(3 Years)

Project Summary Framework Agreement for the Supply & Delivery Bunkers (Marine Gas Oil - MGO) to MWASALAT Fleet & Shore Tanks in all locations for 3 Years.

Tender Fee OMR 1,500/- (Waived to SME Bidders Companies)

Grade & Specialty

Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field

Tender Number T-04-2023

Tender Name Shipping Agency Services for the period 2023-2026 (3 years)

Project Summary Framework Agreement for Shipping Agency Services including customs clearance incidental to port operations at Oman Ports. Providing and facilitating ground operations for smooth operations.

Tender Fee OMR 100/- (Waived to SME Bidders Companies)

Grade & Specialty

Qualified & Specialized Companies in the Field

Start date for tender document distribution Thursday 19th January 2023

Last date for tender document distribution Monday 30th January 2023

Last date for submission Monday 27th February 2023

The Tender documents may be shared by email during official working hours between 9:00A.M - 2:00 P.M.

Tenderers are requested to share commercial registration (CR) & business card through email tenders@mwasalat.om and tender number as the subject of email. Tender Document shall be shared by email

The submission Date / Time shall be on or before the deadline specified in the above table.

Participants should submit their offers in the tender box located in the head- quarter National Ferries Company LLC (MWASALAT) at Ghala, Muscat (Jebel Shams Building 5th floor), Any proposal submitted after the given Date & Time shall be rejected.

"Mwasalat"
Head Quarter, Ghala Tel: +968 24121500/24121555
P.O.Box: 911, Al Khuwair, PC: 133, Sultanate of Oman

For more information please send to: tenders@mwasalat.om

SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health (Al Buraimi Hospital) invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tender:

Tender Ref:	Description	Last date for collection of tender document	Last date for submission of tenders	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non Refundable)	Bidding Method
2970/2022 (Re Call)	Providing gardening and agricultural services and maintenance of the irrigation system for the garden in Buraimi Hospital	Before 12 PM on 02/02/2023	Before 12 PM on 22/02/2023	Specialized companies and institutions registered with the Tender Board	R.O 25 Per set	Electronically via the Esnad system for electronic bidding

Please note the following:

- Companies wishing to participate in the tender can purchase the tender documents electronically through the website (etendering.tenderboard.gov.om), provided that they are registered in the system.
- Companies must submit their bids electronically via the above-mentioned website, provided that an electronic copy of the bank guarantee or a check certified by one of the banks operating in the Sultanate of 1% of the bid value is attached, provided that it is valid for a period of (90) days from the date of submission Bids are addressed to the head of the Tender Committee, and bids received without the required guarantee will not be considered.
- The concerned entity is not obligated to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.
- For inquiries related to the above tender, please contact the following:
 - Through the website of the Esnad system for electronic tendering: (etendering.tenderboard.gov.om)
 - By e-mail: (said.alnaaimi@moh.gov.om)
 - Through the following contact numbers: 97875606 / 95772335 time of call: 8:00am to 12:00pm

Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)
16/2023	Training supervisors working in child-rearing institutions	Companies specialized in the field of education, training and human resources development services and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board with the degree of excellent, first, second, third or fourth.	Wednesday 8-2-2023 02:00 PM	Tuesday 28-2-2023 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) , On Thursday 19/1/2023.
- Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- For Inquiry, please contact though the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry "

www.mosd.gov.om



UKRAINE HELICOPTER CAME DOWN NEAR NURSERY, CAUSED FIRE

Minister, kids among 18 killed in crash

BROVARY: At least 18 people including Ukraine’s interior minister, other senior officials and three children were killed on Wednesday when a helicopter crashed near a nursery outside Kyiv in what President Volodymyr Zelenskiy called a “terrible tragedy”. Several bodies lay on the ground of a courtyard, their boots sticking out from under blankets, after the helicopter - described by the air force spokesperson as a French Super Puma - slammed into a building in Brovary, northeast of the capital.

The crash caused a large fire, and an entire side of the local nursery building was charred. The Kyiv region’s governor said children and staff had been in the nursery at the time of the crash on Wednesday morning. “We saw wounded people, we saw children. There was a lot of fog here, everything was strewn all around. We could hear screams,



Emergency personnel work at the site of a helicopter crash in Brovary on Wednesday. – Reuters

we ran towards them,” Glib, a 17-year-old local resident, said. “We took the children and passed them over the fence, away from the nursery as it was on fire,

especially the second floor,” he said. The national police chief confirmed that Interior Minister Denys Monastyrskyi, who was

appointed under Zelenskiy in 2021, had been killed. His first deputy, Yevheniy Yenin, and the ministry’s state secretary also died. Regional governor Oleksiy

Kuleba said 18 people had been killed but the deputy head of the president’s office later announced a death toll of 16, and said 30 others had been injured, including 12 children. Many had burns, officials said. “Today, a terrible tragedy occurred in Brovary, Kyiv region,” Zelenskiy said on the Telegram messaging app. “The pain is unspeakable.”

Officials said it was too early to determine what caused the crash. None spoke of an attack by Russia, which invaded Ukraine last February. The SBU State Security Service said it was investigating and considering several possible causes for the crash, including a breach of flight rules, a technical malfunction and the intentional destruction of the helicopter. Nine of the people confirmed dead were on board the helicopter, the police chief and emergency services said. — **Reuters**



Erdogan sets stage for May 14 poll

ANKARA: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (pictured) on Wednesday signalled that he intended to bring the next general election forward by one month to May 14. The announcement sets the stage for what some analysts view as Turkey’s most consequential vote in generations. Erdogan and his Islamic-rooted party have ruled Turkey for two tumultuous decades that have seen years of economic booms and busts as well wars and even a failed but bloody coup. His secular opposition enters the campaign divided over everything from policy to strategy and has not agreed on a candidate to field against Erdogan. Turkey’s next general election is officially due to be held on June 18. But Erdogan’s allies have been hinting for weeks that they may bring the polls forward because of religious holidays and school exams. Analysts believe that Erdogan’s office is looking for a perfect moment at which his own voters are more likely to turn out than those backing his opponents. On Wednesday, Erdogan delivered a speech to his ruling party in which he recalled the day contemporary Turkey held its first free election in 1950. — **AFP**

French unions dig in for pension battle with Macron

PARIS: France’s hardline CGT union has threatened to cut off electricity supplies to lawmakers and billionaires before a nationwide strike on Thursday, in an increasingly acrimonious showdown over the government’s plan to raise the retirement age. The proposed bill, announced last week, would see the retirement age pushed to 64 from 62, a move opinion polls show is opposed by a vast majority of workers already facing a cost-of-living crisis. Employees in sectors including transport, education and energy across France will take part in Thursday’s strike, with major protest marches expected in Paris



and other cities. The industrial action is seen as a test of whether unions, who in past years have struggled to convince people to

strike, can transform this anger into mass social protest. “I suggest they also go see the nice properties, the nice castles of

Threat to cut off electricity supplies to lawmakers and billionaires before today’s nationwide strike

billionaires,” Philippe Martinez, leader of the CGT, France’s second-largest trade union, told France 2 television on Wednesday. “It would be good if we cut off their electricity so that they can put themselves, for a few days, in the shoes of ... French people who

can’t afford to pay their bill.” In recent days, Sebastien Menesplier, of the hardline CGT’s energy and mine branch, has also threatened electricity cuts targeting the offices of MPs, local media quoted him as saying. Government spokesman Olivier Veran said threats to cut electricity were “unacceptable.” Public transport will be the most affected on Thursday, with most trains as well as some flights cancelled, and Paris’ subway heavily disrupted. Seven out of 10 primary school teachers will walk off their job, as will many refinery workers, unions and transport operators said. — **Reuters**

World’s oldest known person dies aged 118 in France

MARSEILLE: The world’s oldest known person, French nun Lucile Randon, has died aged 118, a spokesman said on Tuesday. Randon, known as Sister Andre, was born in southern France on February 11, 1904, when World War I was still a decade away. She died in her sleep at her nursing home in Toulon, spokesman David Tavella said. “There is great sadness but... it was her desire to join her beloved brother. For her, it’s a liberation,” Tavella, of the Sainte-Catherine-



Sister Andre Lucile Randon

Laboure nursing home, said. The sister was long feted as the oldest European, before the death of Japan’s Kane Tanaka aged 119 last year left her the longest-lived person on Earth. Guinness World Records officially acknowledged her status in April 2022. Randon was born in the year New York opened its first subway and when the Tour de France had only been staged once. She grew up in a Protestant family as the only girl among three

brothers, living in the southern town of Ales. One of her fondest memories was the return of two of her brothers at the end of World War I, she said in an interview on her 116th birthday. “It was rare, in families, there were usually two dead rather than two alive. They both came back,” she said. She worked as a governess in Paris — a period she once called the happiest time of her life — for the children of wealthy families.

She converted to Catholicism and was baptised at the age of 26. Driven by a desire to “go further”, she joined the Daughters of Charity order of nuns at the relatively late age of 41. Sister Andre was then assigned to a hospital in Vichy, where she worked for 31 years. In later life she moved to Toulon along the Mediterranean coast. Her days in the nursing home were punctuated by prayer, mealtimes and visits from

residents and hospice workers. She also received a steady flow of letters, almost all of which she responded to. In 2021, she survived catching Covid-19, which infected 81 residents of her nursing home. Randon told reporters last year that her work and caring for others had kept her spry. “People say that work kills, for me work kept me alive, I kept working until I was 108,” she told reporters in April last year in the tearoom of the home. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

BRUSSELS

Lawmaker to replace arrested EU vice-president

Marc Angel, a socialist EU lawmaker from Luxembourg, is to become European Parliament vice-president, replacing Eva Kaili who is under arrest in Belgium over corruption allegations. Angel obtained 307 votes, exceeding the required 296 votes for an absolute majority, from fellow legislators in the second round of voting at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, France, on Wednesday. Angel won out against two



other candidates, Annalisa Tardino from the Italian right-wing party Lega who received 185 votes and Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, a French lawmaker for the Greens, who got 98 votes.

TAIPEI

Party leader warns against appeasing China

Appeasing China will not bring peace, Taiwan’s vice-president said on Wednesday, days after he was elected head of the ruling party in a move that makes him a prime presidential contender at the next election. William Lai, 63, is seen as a likely successor to president Tsai Ing-wen, who is barred from running again after her second four-year term which ends in May 2024. Lai has been more outspoken on Taiwanese independence, and he is openly



loathed by Beijing for that reason. “Appeasement cannot buy peace,” Lai said in his first comments on China since assuming the Democratic Progressive Party leadership.

HANOI

Vietnam approves president’s resignation

Vietnam’s National Assembly on Wednesday approved the resignation of President Nguyen Xuan Phuc, a day after he dramatically stepped down as part of an anti-corruption drive. His sudden and unprecedented departure comes during a period of significant political upheaval in Vietnam, where the anti-graft purge and factional fighting have seen several ministers fired. More than 93 per cent of National Assembly members voted to approve Phuc’s



resignation, state media said. With no successor yet appointed, Vo Thi Anh Xuan, the current vice-president, automatically becomes interim president.



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In brief

■ DAVOS



UN CHIEF SLAMS OIL FIRMS FOR 'BIG LIE' ON GLOBAL WARMING

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres accused oil firms on Wednesday of peddling a “big lie” about their role in global warming and warned they should be held accountable.

“Some in Big Oil peddled the big lie,” Guterres told the World Economic Forum in Davos, a week after a study said ExxonMobil denied the findings of its own scientists on the role of fossil fuels in climate change.

The study in the journal Science last week found that the firm’s scientists had modelled and predicted global warming “with shocking accuracy”, only for the company “to spend the next couple of decades denying that very climate science”.

■ BRASILIA



LULA SACKS SOLDIERS FROM PRESIDENTIAL RESIDENCE AFTER RIOTS

Brazil’s President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva had 40 soldiers removed from the detail at his presidential residence after vowing a staffing cleanup following anti-government riots on January 8.

Just days after the attack on the presidential palace, Supreme Court and Congress by backers of far-right ex-president Jair Bolsonaro, Lula said the rioters likely had inside help.

In a notice published in the official gazette on Tuesday, it was announced that 40 soldiers have been removed from the presidential detail at Alvorada palace, where Brazil’s presidents live. Leftist Lula beat Bolsonaro by a razor-thin margin.

■ MOSCOW



BELARUS BEGINS TRIAL IN ABSENTIA OF PROTEST LEADER

The trial in absentia of Belarus opposition leader Svetlana Tikhonovskaya began in Minsk on Tuesday as strongman president Alexander Lukashenko cracks down on critics who challenged his three-decade rule.

Tikhonovskaya faces a litany of charges including high treason, “conspiracy to seize power” and creating and leading an extremist organisation. The 40-year-old activist — who was forced during mass protests that followed the vote to leave Belarus for neighbouring Lithuania, a European Union country -- has become the face of Belarusian democratic forces.

■ RESISTANCE GROWS STRONGER



Police officers hold Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg (C) out of a group of demonstrators and activists in Erkelenz, western Germany, on Tuesday, as demonstrations continue against a coal mine extension in the nearby village of Luetzerath. Already abandoned by its original residents, Luetzerath has become a symbol for resistance against fossil fuels. Energy giant RWE has permission for the expansion of the mine under a compromise agreement that also includes that RWE will stop producing electricity with coal in western Germany by 2030 -- eight years earlier than previously planned. With Russia’s gas supply cut in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine, Germany has had recourse to coal, firing up mothballed power plants. — AFP

Saudi changing no-strings aid

DAVOS: Saudi Arabia’s finance minister said on Wednesday the kingdom is changing the way it provides assistance to allies, shifting from previously giving direct grants and deposits unconditionally.

The kingdom, the world’s top oil exporter and an Arab powerhouse, was encouraging countries in the region to enact economic reforms, Mohammed al Jadaan said at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

“We used to give direct grants and deposits without strings attached and we are changing that. We are working with multilateral institutions to actually say we need to see reforms,” the minister said.

“We are taxing our people, we are expecting also others to do the same, to do their efforts. We want to help but we want you also



We are taxing our people, we are expecting also others to do the same, to do their efforts. We want to help but we want you also to do your part

MOHAMMED AL JADAAN

Finance minister

to do your part.” Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states like the United Arab Emirates and Qatar have increasingly moved towards investing rather than extending direct financial aid.

Earlier this month, Saudi state media reported the kingdom could boost its investments in cash-strapped Pakistan to \$10 billion, from \$1 billion announced in August, as well as increase the ceiling on deposits into the Pakistan central bank to \$5 billion.

In June, Saudi Arabia signed deals worth \$7.7 billion with Egypt, including to build a \$1.5 billion power plant, and said it intended to lead investments worth \$30 billion, helping a long-standing ally that faces a weakening currency and shortage of foreign currency.

The kingdom also set up

companies in Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Sudan, Iraq and Oman to seek up to \$24 billion in investments there.

Jadaan added that Riyadh had early on seen global inflation coming and acted accordingly, helping to keep inflation in the kingdom at an average of about 2.6 per cent.

“The likelihood of next year is that inflation will not be as high,” he said.

Asked about Saudi ties with major trade partner China, Jadaan said Riyadh was taking a “wider approach” in which relations with both Beijing and Washington were important as well as building ties with other countries.

“We are looking to enhance our relationship with Europe. We are actually advancing our relationship with Latin America, with Asia,” he said. — Reuters

Israel top court orders Netanyahu to remove key minister

JERUSALEM: Israel’s top court ruled on Wednesday that a senior member of premier Benjamin Netanyahu’s newly formed government cannot serve as minister due to a recent tax evasion conviction.

The decision was slammed by Prime Minister Netanyahu’s coalition, which vowed to push ahead with controversial measures that would weaken the Supreme Court and its power to strike down legislation.

Netanyahu returned to power last month at the head of a coalition with extreme-right and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties following Israel’s November 1 election.

His appointment of Aryeh Deri (pictured) as health and interior minister “could not stand” since it was “extremely unreasonable”, according to a summary of the court’s decision.

In a 10-1 decision, the judges said Netanyahu “must remove Deri from his position”.

Deri, head of the ultra-Orthodox party Shas, admitted last year to tax evasion, was fined 180,000 shekels (\$50,000) and relinquished his parliamentary seat.

The judges said Deri made it appear as if he had intended to resign from politics to get a lighter sentence. He ran for office again in the November polls.

In Israel, which does not have a constitution, the Supreme Court currently has the authority to repeal laws or government decisions it considers discriminatory or unreasonable. — AFP



‘Go bag’ raid drills for embattled Nobel laureate

MANILA: Nobel laureate Maria Ressa says she keeps a prison “go bag”, bundles of cash for bail, and runs simulations of police raids with her staff as she fights for press freedom in the Philippines.

The Rappler editor won acquittal of four tax-dodging charges on Wednesday, but said she’s prepared for the worst with three separate cases outstanding that could see her go to jail or her online news outfit shuttered.

Ressa, who shared the Peace Prize with Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov in 2021, has been battling a series of cases that media advocates said were filed due to her criticism of former president Rodrigo Duterte and his drug war, which claimed thousands of lives.

“I think what President Duterte did there was, he created a climate of fear. And that’s for everyone, for journalists, for business, for



Nobel Laureate Maria Ressa gestures after she was acquitted of the tax evasion cases against her at the Court of Tax Appeals in Quezon City, Metro Manila on Wednesday. — AFP

institutions,” she said.

“And he made a point of making an example of people who stood up to him.”

Since her legal troubles began

soon after Duterte’s election in 2016, Ressa said she has taken steps to prepare her reporters for the prospect of police raiding the Rappler office to arrest staff,

padlock the door and other unfortunate events.

The drills have continued even after Ferdinand Marcos was elected to succeed Duterte last year.

“Yes, we have because who knows what will happen? When you’re on quicksand, you’re on quicksand,” Ressa said.

After the country’s corporate regulator ordered Rappler to shut down in early 2018, Ressa said she gathered her young work force — 120 people with a median age of 23 — and offered to help them find new jobs if they wanted to quit.

No one took her up on it and Rappler has continued to operate while fighting the closure order in court.

“The best part of it is I think these six years — we’re coming up on seven actually — made us stronger. Nietzsche was right.

What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger.”

She and Rappler staff also have had to deal with online harassment and death threats.

“When we were planning what was going to happen today, the first thing we thought about was conviction, and then acquittal, right? Because this is the very first time since President Duterte took office that we have had a legal win.”

Ressa, who also has a US passport, insisted she would never leave the country to avoid prosecution.

“You take your emotion and push it to the very, very bottom of the pit of your stomach,” she said, adding she slept well at night.

Nonetheless, Ressa said a “shift” has taken place, as shown by her tax acquittals, “because we held the line”. — AFP

History of the World Narrated for the Sceptics



Rasha al Raisi
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The writer is a certified skills trainer and author of *The World According to Bahja*

One of the most interesting world history books I've read so far is by Spanish author Juan Eslava Galán called History of the World Narrated for Sceptics.

The book is divided into 125 short chapters that doesn't exceed ten pages and is organised chronologically from Jurassic times till globalisation.

Galán cover ancient civilisations that were on different parts of the world, their rise and fall and how they contributed to humanity in general.

As many Western writers, his focus is on the Roman empire that many believe is the civilisation that founded modern-day Europe.

The rise of Rome and the reasons behind its fall, the division of the empire into two parts and the emperors that ruled throughout the Roman reign are discussed in detail. One of the most interesting

parts of the book is the history of European colonialism and imperialism.

Galán shares his own views of the matter: the most ambitious invaders with the most numbers of colonies and the longest rule were the Portuguese, the worst invaders were the English and the French as their rule always included enslaving and executing their subjects besides exploiting natural resources of the land.

As for the Italians they had the worst luck as they left the country before discovering its riches (i.e: Libya). Galán's explanation of different invasions throughout history is simple: all wars fought were for the sake of riches and land extension.

However, he focuses on the history of the conquests (colonisation of the Americas) and like many Spanish authors, he

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THE BOOK IS SKILFULLY
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defends the motives and outcomes of it.

According to him, Spanish conquistadores were adventurers who were driven by commerce and always mixed with the locals. They didn't kill or destroy civilisations intentionally; it was the fault of the viruses that they carried such as small pox, measles and influenza that killed around 50 million indigenous people (90 per cent of the population).

Unlike British writers that are very objective, I found this Spanish author to be very biased, especially

when it comes to religions in general and Islam in particular. Galán views all monotheistic religions as either politically driven (Judaism), the reason behind the fall of great empires (Christianity) or with followers that never advanced from Ottoman empire days (Muslims).

His hatred of Islam is obvious and he doesn't sugar-coat it the way he does when slamming Spanish politics in his footnotes, ending it with the phrase: "a mere observation, not criticism".

He doesn't even elaborate much on the 800 years of Arab rule of Andalusia and instead focuses more on what happened after 1492 when the Catholic Kings expelled the Arabs and Jews from Spain (and no mention of the Inquisitions either, surprise surprise!).

He's also critical of the Ottoman empire and the negative effect it

had on European culture.

Even the jokes he cracks regarding the matter are humourless and occasionally offensive. Apart from that, chapters that cover the World Wars, its aftermath and how it changed the European continent are exceptional. The last few chapters are dedicated to challenges that Europe faces including Muslim immigrants who he views as a threat to European culture and its existing liberties. The book was published in 2012 and was the second in the 'History for Sceptics' series that comprise eight other books.

Galán's works include essays, historical novels and biographies, legends and enigmas, travels and sociology. He won many prestigious awards in his homeland. All in all, History of the World Narrated for the Sceptics is skilfully structured and richly entertaining.

Effect of social communication on upbringing

AMANI AL JALBUBI

Verbal communication is a kind of interaction while non-verbal communication can be similar to a smack in the the face, which may be seen as an angry gesture.

Whether the message is received positively or negatively, or has no effect, the message has to be communicated.

Communication skills that allow parents to have open and fruitful discussions with their children are very much essential.

When adults and children can talk openly and productively to one another, everyone benefits. Parent-child interactions benefit greatly from open lines of communication.

In most cases, strong communication between parents and children is the driving force behind a harmonious family dynamic. Children with social communication difficulties are at increased risk for isolating themselves, having academic difficulties, difficult time making friends, and being socially marginalised.

One's aptitude for social communication can be affected by factors such as language competency, parenting style, birth order and gender.

Children develop social skills by watching their parents. In general, kids are more forthcoming and direct when speaking with their parents.

A child's life is enhanced by the development of strong communication abilities.

Children learn to think and believe certain things about themselves based on how their parents interact with them.

When children effectively engage with their parents, parents feel pleased. Their self-esteem increases when they realise their parents understand and appreciate them.

On the other hand, if parents and children are unable to communicate effectively or favourably, the child may feel unimportant, unheard, or misunderstood.

The children may also see their parents as unhelpful and untrustworthy. One's resilience in the face of adversity is, according to social support theory, determined by the quality of their social network. Individuals mental health is said to improve when they have more friends, as proposed by the social support hypothesis.

With the support of vast and tight social ties, individuals may develop a high-quality social network that provides rural seniors with both intangible and tangible resources. Elders in rural areas will have easier access to resources, a more optimistic outlook, and reduced psychological strain as a result of adverse events.

Problem(s) with China's population drop



Paul Krugman

China's population declined last year, for the first time since the mass deaths associated with Mao Zedong's disastrous Great Leap Forward in the 1960s. Or maybe it would be more accurate to say that China has announced that its population declined. Many observers are sceptical about Chinese data.

I've been at conferences when China released, say, new data on economic growth, and many people responded by asking not "Why was growth 7.3 per cent?" but rather "Why did the Chinese government decide to say that it was 7.3 per cent?"

In any case, it's clear that China's population is or soon will be at a peak; the best bet is probably that population has been falling for several years. But why consider this a problem?

After all, in the 1960s and 1970s, many people worried that the world was facing a crisis of overpopulation, with China one of the biggest sources of that pressure.

And the Chinese government itself tried to limit population growth with its famous one-child policy.

So why isn't population decline good news, an indication that China and the world in general will have fewer people placing demands on the resources of a finite planet?

The answer is that a declining population creates two major problems for economic management. These problems aren't insoluble, given intellectual clarity and political will. But will China rise to the challenge? That's far from clear.

The first problem is that a declining population is also an aging population — and in every society I can think of we depend on younger people to support older people.

In the United States, the three big social programmes are Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid; the first two are explicitly targeted at seniors, and even the third spends most of its money on older Americans and the disabled. In each case, the funding for these programmes ultimately depends on taxes paid by working-age adults, and concerns about America's long-term fiscal future arise largely from a rising old-age dependency ratio — that is, a rising ratio of seniors to those of

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working age. China's social safety net is relatively undeveloped compared with ours, but older Chinese nonetheless depend on government aid — especially the state pension.

And China's old-age dependency ratio is skyrocketing.

This means that China will either have to inflict a lot of economic pain on its elderly, sharply raise taxes on younger citizens or both.

The other problem is subtler but also serious. To maintain full employment, a society must keep overall spending high enough to keep up with the economy's productive capacity.

You might think that a shrinking population, which reduces capacity, would make this task easier. But a falling population — especially a falling working-age population — tends to reduce some important kinds of spending, especially investment spending. After all, if the number of workers is declining, there's less need to build new factories, office buildings and so on; if the number of families is declining, there's not much need to build new housing.

The result is that a society with a declining working-age population tends, other things equal, to experience persistent economic weakness. Japan illustrates the point. Its working-age population peaked in the mid-1990s, and the country has struggled with deflation ever since, despite decades of extremely low interest rates.

More recently, other wealthy countries whose demographics have begun to resemble Japan's have faced similar issues, although these issues have been sidelined — temporarily, I'd

argue — by the burst of inflation set off by policy responses to Covid-19.

To be fair to the Japanese, they've arguably handled the issue of population decline pretty well, avoiding mass unemployment in part by propping up their economy with deficit spending.

This has led to high levels of public debt, but there has been no hint that investors are losing faith in Japanese solvency.

But can China — whose working-age population has been falling since 2015 — manage things equally well? There are good reasons to be sceptical.

China has long had a wildly unbalanced economy.

For reasons I admit I don't fully understand, policymakers there have been reluctant to allow the full benefits of past economic growth to pass through to households, and that has led to relatively low consumer demand.

Instead, China has sustained its economy with extremely high rates of investment, far higher even than those that prevailed in Japan at the height of its infamous late-1980s bubble.

Normally, investing in the future is good, but when extremely high investment collides with a falling population, much of that investment inevitably yields diminishing returns.

Indeed, at this point China's economy appears to rely on an incredibly bloated real estate sector, which sure looks like a financial crisis waiting to happen.

It would be foolish to assume that China can't cope with its demographic issues. After all, if we're taking the longer view, China has been an incredible success story, transforming itself from a poor, developing nation into an economic superpower in just a few decades.

On the other hand, I'm old enough to remember when every other business book seemed to have a samurai warrior on the cover, promising to teach the management secrets that were turning Japan into the world's economic leader.

Oh, and China is a superpower, with an authoritarian and seemingly erratic leader. I don't think it's alarmist to worry about how it will react if its economy performs poorly.

— *The New York Times*

Biden in an uncertain territory

In a matter of days, things have suddenly taken a very ugly turn for US President Joe Biden. His political career, it appears, has plunged into an uncertain patch. 2023 started with a rather positive note for President Biden: economic indicators were moving upwards, inflation was slowing down, his approval rating was showing improvement and Democrats were united behind him for his 2024 re-election campaign while the Republicans were busy in settling their internal feuds.

All was set for a good start of the new year for Biden, but the case of his “handling” of the classified documents has suddenly changed the whole complexion of the situation. The appointment of Robert Hur – a onetime US attorney appointed by former President Donald Trump – by Attorney General Garland as a special counsel to lead the investigations into this very sensitive case has added more fuel to this. Interestingly, two months back, Garland also appointed a special counsel to investigate a similar case involving Donald Trump. This reflects the fact that the Justice Department is working independently on high-profile cases of two presidents in an inordinately heated political environment.

Not surprisingly, immediate comparisons are being drawn between the two cases. President Biden’s supporters, in particular, are trying to defend his cases as a “milder one.” On two major premises, Biden’s supporters are trying to defend him. One, the volume of documents in Biden’s case is too small when compared with the tons of papers recovered from Trump’s Florida residence. And two, unlike Trump’s revolting attitude, Biden is fully cooperating with the investigation teams in their probe and there is no evidence that Biden has purposely tried to create any hindrance in the search operations.

Indubitably, there is marked difference in their approach towards their respective cases.

Trump was very reactive when



Dr Imran Khalid

The writer is freelance columnist on international affairs

HERE BEGINS A MESSY ELECTION SEASON IN WHICH THE CURRENT AND FORMER PRESIDENTS OF THE UNITED STATES ARE BOTH FACING INVESTIGATION BY SPECIAL COUNSEL

his Mar-a-Lago, his private property, as raided by the federal agents. He bluntly accused the FBI and the Justice Department of conducting a politically motivated investigation in a direct attempt to discourage him from running for the White House again - a campaign he would subsequently announce in November. On the contrary, President Biden has been displaying complete cooperation with the investigators.

It is true that quantum of documents is very insignificant in Biden’s case. But it does not lessen the intensity of the alleged violation of the Presidential Records Act which decrees that records should be stored securely and transferred to the National Archives once an administration ends.

Another supplementary question Biden has to answer is why it took so long to him to tell the public what had happened.

As expected, Donald Trump has seized this opportunity to hit back very hard an mitigate the intensity of his case. Trump roared in a media talk, “It’s over... It really changed the complexion and the intensity that they were showing to me because, you know, what they did is – I don’t say far worse, I did nothing wrong - what they did is not good. What they did is bad.”

Similarly, the Republican House Speaker McCarthy is also demanding deep investigations into the Biden case through Congress and intelligence agencies. From Biden’s perspective, the appointment of a special counsel is a nasty distraction at very inappropriate time that has the potential to also muddy the case against Donald Trump.

It is certainly a very tricky situation – politically and ethically speaking – for a president who always proudly touts about his high ethical standards. So, here begins a messy election season in which the current and former presidents of the United States are both facing investigation by special counsels as they pull up the socks for a potential rematch in 2024.

DANCING TO THE NEW YEAR



A dragon dance performance is seen ahead of the Lunar New Year celebration in Bangkok on Wednesday. – Reuters

The importance of scientific research for both the community and the researcher

Scientific research development is regarded as one of the most important goals of countries and societies seeking to expand their knowledge and scientific infrastructure, and thus achieve prosperity and excellence in all aspects of life.

The importance of scientific research stems from the fact that it is a one-of-a-kind tool for staying relevant in our complex world, which is constantly evolving, and without it, we will have to rely solely on intuition, and the authority of others.

Although many people are confident in their ability to decipher symbols, analyse phenomena, and interact with the world around them, history is littered with examples of how wrong they can be when they fail to recognise the importance of evidence to support hypotheses.

Scientific research is a method of objectively proving a hypothesis, claim, or observation. Research methods, unlike reliance on mental processes or group inductive reasoning, are not constrained by the limitations of critical thinking, biased discussion, or personal opinions.

Conducting research is also beneficial for developing and improving the body of knowledge



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RESEARCH METHODS, ARE NOT CONSTRAINED BY THE LIMITATIONS OF CRITICAL THINKING OR PERSONAL OPINIONS.

and information that drives innovation, allowing us to live a healthier and more prosperous life in an educated, aware society that is aware of what is going on around it in terms of events and phenomena.

Scientific research is also necessary to disprove inaccurate or inadequate research claims. Scientific research brings together observations, knowledge, and data to solve problems, develop solutions, and generate new ideas.

This applied science also allows individuals, industries, and countries to put information to the test by transforming abstract theories into practical applications, which is one of the factors that confirms the importance of scientific research.

In terms of the society’s importance, scientific research is a tool for increasing knowledge and promoting learning, providing a comprehensive understanding of various issues and raises community awareness, assisting in achieving business leadership, debunking lies and bolstering facts, seeking, analysing, and seizing opportunities, plant the seeds of a lifelong passion for reading,

writing, analysing, and sharing useful information and educating the mind and acquainting it with the practice of criticism and analysis.

In terms of the researcher’s importance, the true value of scientific research is enriching the researcher’s knowledge in his field of specialisation, making him a fertile scientific reference for all researchers and students, and capable of analysing all potential research issues and problems, in



The primary goals of research are to gather evidence to support theories and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of study.

addition to the following: Allowing the researcher to gain access to all reliable scientific sources that will help him improve his knowledge, experience, and practice. Scientific research helps the researcher achieve a prominent position in the society in which he lives, as well as the job position that he deserves at his workplace (promotion). Furthermore, it aids in the development of the researcher’s

analytical and critical thinking skills. The primary goals of research are to gather evidence to support theories and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of study. Understanding the significance of research may appear obvious, but many people are unaware of its true significance.

However, whether a person is a member of a research institution or not, conducting research for them is not only important, but also necessary for a variety of reasons, including the following: scientific research is a tool for increasing knowledge and improving learning, scientific research is a tool for better understanding issues and raising public awareness, scientific research aids in business success, scientific research allows us to debunk myths and validate facts.

Scientific research is a method of identifying, measuring, and capitalising on opportunities. Scientific research fosters a love of reading, writing, analysing, and sharing useful information and scientific research feeds and exercises our minds.



OMAN

TARGET THIRD TITLE

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 18

Oman will aim to show a different style in today's final clash of the 25th edition of Arabian Gulf Cup against the hosts Iraq other than their opener's performance which ended in a goalless draw on January 6. Though Red Warriors are aware that Thursday's encounter at Al Basra International Stadium will be a major test, Salah al Yahyaei and his teammates are confident Oman can snatch the third title of the Gulf Cup and present a more solid performance than the opening game.

The opener between Oman and Iraq and the previous matches in the tournament are considered as a positive accumulated experience and learnt lessons that will assure helping the team's presence professionally in today's assignment against the hosts.

The team need to focus on some key factors to contend with the opponent:



Ivankovic.

1. STUDYING THE OPPOSITION

The head coach of the team, Branko Ivankovic, is fully aware of the importance of today's fixture. The coaching staff studied the opposition very well and the opening match unveiled the weakness and strong areas of the opponent. The players are instructed by the coaching staff on focusing on the weakness areas to score.



Jameel al Yahmadi.

2. CALM AND FOCUS

The players have to be very focused especially in the first 20 minutes as the opponent will be attacking with the support of the huge crowd. It is essential for the starting line-up to be calm on how to deal with the first quarter of the game. All the players should be in top level of focus and concentration in order to enter

smoothly in the mood of the game and deliver a top match.

3 DISCIPLINE ON THE PITCH

It is mandatory that all the lines including defence, midfield and the attacking should be connected in a proper discipline that will ensure breaking of all the opponent's chances. Important role for the experienced players like Hairb al Saadi, who will monitor the midfield and deliver the right passes to his teammates for creation of scoring attempts.

4. YOUNG ENERGY

Oman team has a balanced squad which comprises experienced and young faces who will work hard to show their top performances. The young players including Salah al Yahyaei, Zaher al Aghbari, Ahmed al Kaabi, goalkeeper Ibrahim al Mukhaini and the others are eager to deliver top show and prove themselves at the big stage.



Gill hits double as India win first ODI against New Zealand

HYDERABAD: India claimed a thrilling 12-run victory over New Zealand after Shubman Gill scored a double century and Mohammed Siraj picked up four wickets as they kicked off their one-day international series in Hyderabad on Wednesday.

The 23-year-old opener scored 208 off 149 balls, smashing an incredible 19 fours and nine sixes as he helped India set New Zealand a target of 350.

Apart from Gill, the rest of India's batting order struggled to add runs, with captain Rohit Sharma making the second-highest contribution with 34. Big-hitting Virat Kohli could only manage eight runs.

New Zealand opener Finn Allen made 40 but the rest of the batsmen did very little until



Michael Bracewell produced a batting masterclass after coming in at number seven.

He made 140 runs, hitting 12 fours and 10 sixes, as he kept the visitors in the contest and took the game until the final over, where he was the last player to be sent packing as they were bowled out with four balls to spare.

India seamer Siraj was the pick of the bowlers with 4-46, including two late wickets at a crucial stage, while Kuldeep Yadav and Shardul Thakur also bagged two wickets each.

The second ODI will be in Raipur on Saturday followed by the third game in Indore on Tuesday. The teams are due to play three Twenty20 internationals after the ODI series.

— Reuters

Tatterson emerges winner in first Oman digital drift

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, JAN 18

Rhys Tatterson claimed the title in the first Oman Digital Drift Championship after beating Khalid al Azwar in the final round at the Oman Automobile Association's (OAA) Muscat Drift Arena on Tuesday night.

The competition brought together professional racers and local gamers to race in the digital challenge for the first time in the history of the Oman international Drift Championship (OIDC) 2023 in Muscat.

The OIDC drivers competed with the local gamers in the digital challenge.

The drift digital championship was a mixed event between pro drivers and digital drivers. Eight players from each team competed in eight rounds, and the player who gathered the most points



qualified for the top-four stage.

Alan Hayens, Rhys Tatterson, Khalid al Azwar from the driver's team, and Ahmed al Amri — the only player from the gamer's team — made it to the top four.

Khalid al Azwar beat Alan Hayens, both from the drivers' team, in the first round of the top-four to qualify for the final.

Ahmed al Amri finished third after defeating Alan Hayens in the

play-off.

Rhys Tatterson emerged as the first Oman digital drift champion after beating Al Azwar in the final round.

Earlier, Faisal al Kharsi from the gamer's team won the opening round against Sam Sheffield from the driver's team.

A capacity crowd was present at the Oman Automobile Association Muscat Drift Arena to watch and support both teams.

Alan Haynes got the first win for the driver's team against Noha al Balushi from the gamer's team.

Jordan driver Ahmed Daham from the driver's team lost the competition against Mustafa al Balushi in the starting round.

After the end of the competition, the drift fans had the opportunity to meet their favourite drift stars in the OAA's 'meet and greet' programme for the fans.

WVTT players enjoy with an opportunity to explore Oman



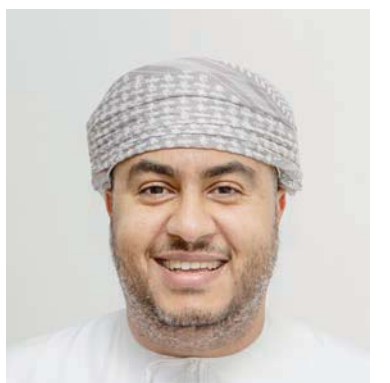
MUSCAT: A break in play on the third day of the World Veteran Table Tennis Championships — Muscat 2023 allowed competitors a unique opportunity to explore Oman and become better acquainted with the host city and its surroundings. While some remained at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) to fine tune their technique, many others took the chance to discover Oman with a trip to Wadi Shab and Nizwa.

The World Veteran Table Tennis Championships also will welcome HRH Princess Zeina Rashid of Jordan, ITTF Foundation Board Member and a table tennis player herself, to watch next round of action and take in the atmosphere. The ITTF Foundation promotes the physical and mental health benefits of table tennis to people of all ages irrespective of gender, culture, social background, or physical ability.

The day concluded with a Gala Dinner in the evening, prepared by the organising committee to share Omani culture and officially welcome the players to the country. Alongside a traditional meal of local dishes, the visitors were treated to a musical performance and a chance to immerse themselves in Oman's rich heritage.

The previous day saw some fierce competition in the Men's and Women's Doubles and Mixed Doubles as teams completed their two group matches to determine who would be advancing to the next round. The top two teams in the group will progress to the knockout rounds while the third placed team will drop into the Consolation Rounds. Both sides of the draw will resume tomorrow when play continues.

Soman Ukkath Variath and Husam Shalaby advanced to the Round of 32 where they will face Robert Shahnazari and Thor Truelson from the USA. Elsewhere, Diccon Gray and Shirley Gelder of England played out a dramatic five-game match with Stephen Hochman and Wendy Fang of the USA after being pegged back twice and finally triumphed in the deciding game. India's Jayant Bhalchandra



Mohammed bin Salim Al Oufi

Kulkarni and Neeta Jayant Kulkarni went through a similar battle in their match with Jean-Marc Leroy of France and Hyelan Kim of Korea, overcoming a tie-break loss in the fourth game to edge the fifth and deciding game and take the match 3-2.

There was an equally dramatic match on table 37 as the German team of Jürgen Bayer and Simone Döbler won three successive games to come back from two down and win over Kailash Nichani and Deepa Vinod Jain of India.

Mohammed bin Salim al Aufi, Treasurer of the Omani Table Tennis Association and a member of the Organising Committee for the World Veteran Table Tennis Championship — Muscat 2023, explained that hosting this world championship in Muscat has greatly enhanced the presence of the Sultanate of Oman on the map of international sports, adding that the Omani Table Tennis Association has worked to host many international tournaments during the past several years, which has contributed to the accumulation of experience among the organising members, which greatly qualified them to host international tournaments.

He added, "I would like to commend the great role of the volunteers in this tournament, as they provide great services in various fields, including the organisational aspect within the competition halls, as well as their positive role in organising transfers for the participants, as well as approving and issuing special cards for players, escorts and referees, and other services they provide throughout the tournament period, highly appreciating their great role in the success of the tournament."





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Oman LNG pens new agreements to export 1.6 mtpa of LNG

HIBBA AL KINDI
MUSCAT, JAN 18

Oman LNG signed two agreements with two global gas companies covering the supply of 1.6 million metric tonnes per annum (mtpa) of LNG starting from 2025. The signing took place under the auspices of the Minister of Energy and Minerals, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi yesterday. The company is set to supply Thailand's PTT Global LNG Company Limited and French TotalEnergies each with a 0.8 million metric tonnes per annum of LNG.

The binding term-sheet agreements were signed by the Chief Executive Officer of Oman LNG, Hamed al Naamany, with the Managing Director of PTT Global LNG Company Limited, Ratchada Lertwanichwatana, and Senior Vice-President of LNG of TotalEnergies, Thomas Mauriss.

Hamed al Naamany, Chief Executive Officer of Oman LNG, shared the following remarks after the event.

"The signing of the term-sheet agreements with PTT Global LNG Company Limited and TotalEnergies enhances our efforts to further grow and strengthen our market positions including



PER THE AGREEMENT, THE SUPPLY OF LIQUID NATURAL GAS TO TOTALENERGIES IS EXPECTED TO BEGIN IN 2025 OVER A PERIOD OF TEN YEARS, WHILE THE SUPPLY TO PTT GLOBAL'S IS SET TO BEGIN IN 2026 OVER A DURATION OF NINE YEARS.

new business opportunities."
"Such a step complements our

mission to add value to the local economy through increasing capacity, and strengthening collaborations with international firms," he added.

Per the agreement, the supply of liquid natural gas to TotalEnergies is expected to begin in 2025 over a period of ten years, while the supply to PTT Global's is set to begin in 2026 over a duration of nine years.

The Chief Executive Officer of Oman LNG Development

Foundation, Dr Amer al Matani, stated, "These agreements embody the company's quest to reach new global markets."

Last December, the company signed agreements with 3 Japanese firms for the delivery of a total of 2.35 mtpa of Omani LNG. More recently, Oman LNG inked a similar deal with Shell International Trading Middle East FZE for the offtake of 0.8 mtpa of LNG for ten years starting from 2025.

Nakheel Oman's dates output to rise to 85,000 tonnes per year by 2025

JOMAR MENDOZA
MUSCAT, JAN 18

Dr Ahmed bin Nasser al Bakri, Under-Secretary for Agriculture at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said that Nakheel Oman Development Company, the investment arm of the Million Date Palms Project (an initiative of the Diwan of Royal Court), plans to produce 85,000 tonnes of dates and its derivatives by 2025.

Dr Al Bakri said, during the first international forum on 'Developing Practices of Marketing and Promotion of Dates', that Nakheel Oman Development Company — founded by Oman Food Investment Holding Company and Oman National Investments Development Company — is the country's flagship and one of the world largest date palm products and by-products producer.

Nakheel industrial complex, located in Nizwa — planned for opening for Q1 of this year — specialises in transporting, storing, sorting, manufacturing and packing dates according to the highest standards and international practices in the food industry.



The national strategy for the promotion of date palms has contributed to the increase of dates production, which reached 374, 000 tonnes in 2021, an increase of 49 per cent from 2005 to 2021.

DR AHMED BIN NASSER AL BAKRI
Under-Secretary for Agriculture at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources

The Under-Secretary said that palm trees are historically, strategically and economically important in the Arab region and the GCC countries. **TURN TO P14**

Shell announces start of gas production from Oman Block 10

MUSCAT: Shell Integrated Gas Oman BV announced the start of gas production from the Mabrouk North East field at Block 10 in the Sultanate of Oman.

Production from Block 10 concession area is expected to reach 0.5 billion standard cubic feet of gas per day (bscf/d) by mid-2024, with the produced gas supplied to the OQ Gas Network that feeds local industries and export facilities alike.

Shell holds a 53.45-per cent working interest in Block 10, with OQ and Marsa Liquefied Natural Gas LLC (a joint venture between TotalEnergies and OQ) holding 13.36 per cent and 33.19 per cent respectively.

Commenting on this milestone, Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Minister of Energy and Minerals, said, "This accomplishment strengthens Oman's rich natural gas reserves, whilst bringing value to support Oman's energy transition and achieving Net Zero Emissions by



2050.

Attracting foreign investment to Oman is a key enabler for achieving economic growth and realising Oman Vision 2040."

Walid Hadi, Oman Shell's Senior Vice-President and Country Chair, said, "Shell and the Government of Oman are developing options for a separate downstream gas project in which Shell could produce and sell low-carbon products and support the development of blue hydrogen in Oman."

The proposed blue hydrogen project is subject to further agreements and future investment decisions. — **ONA**

ADNOC taps Omani start-up's prize winning tech in CO2 capture pilot

QASIM AL MAASHANI
ABU DHABI, JAN 18

UAE state-owned energy giant ADNOC has announced a partnership with 44.01, an Omani sustainability start-up, in the implementation of a pilot project that seeks to permanently mineralise carbon dioxide (CO2) within rock formations found in the UAE Emirate of Fujairah.

Pilot partners also include the Fujairah Natural Resources Corporation (FNRC) and Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company (Masdar). The partnership was announced on Tuesday on the sidelines of the Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week (ADSW) under way in the UAE capital.

The project, due to commence in January 2023, will use 44.01's Earthshot prize-winning Carbon Capture and Mineralisation (CCM) technology to eliminate CO2 from the atmosphere. It will be the first CCM project by an energy company in the Middle East.



Commenting on 44.01's role in the venture, Talal Hasan, Founder and CEO, said: "Removing CO2 from the atmosphere is vital if we are to halt and ultimately reverse climate change. Unlike CO2 storage, mineralisation removes CO2 permanently by turning it into rock, minimising the need for long-term monitoring and insurance.

This pilot will enable us to test our technology at scale, on our way to offering a safe, cost-effective, natural solution for eliminating captured CO2 internationally."

Sophie Hildebrand, Chief Technology Officer at ADNOC, stated: "Across ADNOC we are committed to finding new ways to decarbonise our operations, while meeting our responsibility to supply vital energy to the world. As the first energy company in the region to run a carbon-negative project of this kind, this pilot marks the latest step in our \$15 billion investment into projects that will reduce our carbon footprint and help us achieve our Net Zero by 2050 ambition."

Fujairah has been selected for

this pilot due to its abundance of peridotite, a form of rock that naturally reacts with CO2 to mineralise it.

Eng Muhammad Saif al Afkham, Chairman of the Board of Directors for Fujairah Natural Resources Corporation, added: "We are proud to support ADNOC and our other partners to catalyse this natural process with 44.01's technology. Success here could pave the way to help us make a significant contribution towards the UAE Net Zero by 2050 Strategic Initiative."

In this pilot, CO2 will be captured from the air, dissolved in seawater, and then injected into peridotite formations deep underground, where it will mineralise — ensuring that it cannot escape back into the atmosphere.

The project will be powered by solar energy supplied by Masdar. A successful pilot would open the possibility of mineralising billions of tonnes of captured CO2 across the region.



CMA signs pact to support differently-abled citizens

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 18

The Capital Market Authority and the Ministry of Social Development have signed a permanent cooperation programme aimed at training and qualifying differently-abled citizens in areas related to the capital market and insurance sectors.

The initiative is targeted at holders of 'Disabled Persons' Card', issued by the CMA in coordination with insurance companies. The card entitles holders to special packages, including discounts on insurance premiums up to 30 per cent, exemption from payment of the excess on insurance claims in the

event of perils, and discounts on home insurance, travel insurance, loan insurance and health insurance policies.

The memorandum was signed at the premises of the CMA to achieve the common objects by creating community partnership for the service of disabled persons in the Sultanate of Oman to enhance the community efforts to integrate them in the community and enable them through special training and qualification programmes to develop their competencies in the fields related to CMA's business and employment needs beside providing job opportunities commensurate with their physical and mental capabilities.

Beehive celebrates launch of crowdfunding platform in Oman

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 18

UAE-headquartered fintech firm Beehive celebrated on Tuesday the official launch of its crowdfunding platform in the Sultanate of Oman with an event at the Crowne Plaza Muscat. It was held under the auspices of Abdulaziz al Raisi, Deputy Head of the Public Authority for SME Development.

Beehive soft-launched its platform in June 2022 in partnership with Ahlibank on its Tamkeen product, bringing an alternative finance solution for small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to Oman.

Beehive, headquartered in the UAE, uses its fintech platform to connect a crowd of investors with small businesses looking for finance.

It has funded over \$400 million in total in the GCC since its inception in 2014. In partnership with Ahlibank, the company has funded twenty businesses and a total of RO 1.4 million in finance since launching in Oman.

Peer to peer lending is an established source of funding for SMEs in many countries and is becoming increasingly widespread across the GCC.

The finance is unsecured, meaning businesses don't have to provide physical collateral



Abdulaziz al Raisi, Deputy Head of Public Authority for SME Development; with Mayan al Asfor, Oman Country Manager of Beehive, and Peter Tavener, CFO & COO of Beehive.

BEEHIVE SOFT-LAUNCHED ITS PLATFORM IN JUNE 2022 IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AHLIBANK ON ITS TAMKEEN PRODUCT, BRINGING AN ALTERNATIVE FINANCE SOLUTION FOR SMALL TO MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SMES) TO OMAN.

for security, and instead the approval is based on the business's creditworthiness, which is assessed using Beehive's robust

credit decisioning engine.

Amongst the first companies to receive funding from Beehive and Ahlibank were Charisma Clinic and Al Naamani.

Dr Ghaith Sleman, Co-owner of Charisma Clinic said, "We chose to use Beehive for our funding because of the lack of tangible securities needed. The process was quick and easy and was used to purchase new machines, as well as making us cash-rich which was instrumental in speeding up our expansion plans."

Mazin al Mahrouqi, Owner of

Al Naamani said, "From the start, getting finance from Beehive was a smooth process. To my knowledge there is nothing else like this in Oman, it is collateral free, and they do not ask for unnecessary documents to get approved."

Craig Moore, CEO and Founder of Beehive commented, "There is much potential for SMEs to bring economic growth to Oman. Improving their access to finance supports this, and we are excited to be part of that journey."

Petroleum Development Oman fetes graduates of Shababuna programmes



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 18

Under the auspices of Mohsen bin Hamad al Hadhrami, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Minerals and Energy, Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) celebrated yesterday, January 18, the achievements of 782 Omani staff from the Company's Shababuna Programme at an official ceremony held in Muscat, and attended by PDO's senior management and colleagues.

PDO has also launched the new identity of its programme 'Shababuna' which was previously known as the Graduate Development Programme (GDP).

The aim of the new identity is to reconfirm PDO's commitment to empower young people and



create a coherent framework that focuses on preparing a promising generation capable of building a prosperous future for the Sultanate of Oman.

PDO Managing Director Steve Phimister said: "We are extremely proud of the achievements of our Omani staff who have successfully completed the Shababuna Programme." "

This programme is designed

THE AIM OF THE NEW IDENTITY IS TO RECONFIRM PDO'S COMMITMENT TO EMPOWER YOUNG PEOPLE AND CREATE A COHERENT FRAMEWORK THAT FOCUSES ON PREPARING A PROMISING GENERATION CAPABLE OF BUILDING A PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR THE SULTANATE OF OMAN.

to provide our young employees with the skills and knowledge they need to excel in the oil and gas industry, and we are confident that they will make a significant contribution to PDO in the years to come."

The programme, was introduced in 2013 to provide structured, on-the-job training, monitoring and assessment for Omani staff who join the

Company after graduating from universities and colleges with Bachelor's degrees or above.

The programme's main objective is to support graduates during the early stages of their careers and quickly integrate them into the workplace through a combination of on-the-job and off-the-job training enhanced with e-Learning, focused coaching and mentoring.

Furthermore, this programme has been rolled out to different technical and non-technical functions, covering more than 20 disciplines with dedicated policies, processes and resources.

It is based on the learning philosophy of 70:20:10 model -70 per cent on-the-job learning, 20 per cent coaching and 10 per cent training.

Nakheel Oman's dates output to rise to 85,000 tonnes per year by 2025

FROM PAGE 13

The Arab region produce 77 per cent while the GCC countries produce 21 per cent of the global production of dates.

Date palms are the largest crop in the Sultanate of Oman in terms of number and spread, where there are approximately 9 million date palm trees and about 325 varieties. About 62,000 acres of land are allotted for date palms cultivation. The Sultanate of Oman comes second in GCC countries, and eighth globally in terms of total production of dates.

"The national strategy for the promotion of date palms has contributed to the increase of dates production, which reached 374, 000 tonnes in 2021, an increase of 49 per cent from 2005 to 2021."

Last year, Nakheel Oman Development Company launched an initiative called 'Ghars' as part of its efforts to support Omani farmers and achieve self-sufficiency in food.

The initiative aims to sell date seedlings, called Al Fardh, to farmers and institutions through three chosen outlets – Agricultural Textile Centre in Bahla, Al Kamil W'al Wafi and Al Najd Farms.

Shipments of dates were sent to India and Singapore, in line

with the efforts to increase the country's national income by enhancing the global market of Omani products.

As for marketing and promotion of the dates sector, Al Bakri said, "The Ministry has implemented 8 local festivals specialised for Omani dates from 2013 to 2022 which benefitted more than 500 in the field of production, manufacturing and marketing of dates. It also contributed to opening outlets and markets for dates and their derivatives and providing job opportunities to many Omani youth."

The first international forum on 'Developing Practices of Marketing and Promotion of Dates' is organised by the International Dates Council in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources and is being held until today at the Sheraton Muscat Hotel.

The forum will address issues of production and methods of marketing dates to the consumer, and the benefits of consuming dates for all segments of the value chain (farmers, manufacturers, marketers, traders, consumers, the national economy, the environment, and sustainable development).





Oman Towers inks RO 30 million financing pact with Bank Dhofar

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, JAN 18

Oman Tower Company (Oman Towers), a leading telecom wireless passive infrastructure provider in the Sultanate of Oman, has announced the signing of a financing agreement with Bank Dhofar for a sum of RO 30 million to help fund the rollout of new telecom towers across the country over the coming years.

Muscat-headquartered Oman Towers said the pact will help the company finance the construction, management, maintenance and leasing of new communication towers

in line with a strategic plan to expand its passive infrastructure. Passive infrastructure typically encompasses the steel towers, shelters for the base transceiver stations, power supply, generators and batteries, air-conditioning, and so on.

In a post, Oman Towers said the agreement will also enable the company to provide “innovative solutions that meet the requirements of telecom operators” in Oman.

“The signing of this agreement comes within the framework of the growth witnessed by the company during the past years, which has achieved financial



sustainability in its operations coupled with qualification and training of human cadres. This is the main element in managing the helm of work in the

organisation, through planning, implementation, supervision and sustainability to achieve the approved financial model for the company,” it stated.

Oman Towers was established in 2018 to provide the passive infrastructure to licensed wireless telecom service operators, as well as government entities, in an open access manner.

The company provides various infrastructure solutions, such as greenfield towers, rooftops, in-building solutions and other innovative ideas for the 4th Industrial Revolution. The company has also been working with suppliers of street furniture to accommodate antennas based on 5G, IoT and others technologies.

According to Oman 70, a major shareholder, Oman Tower

Company has successfully rolled out over 900 telecom towers with over 1400 tenancies during the first three of its operations.

“OTC is the fastest growing tower company in Oman that has created over 200+ direct and indirect employment and training opportunities for graduates and is assisting many SMEs via sub-contracting mandates,” it stated on its website. Shareholders in Oman Towers include Oman 70, Al Suroh Investment, Oman Broadband and Aktivco, (part of Camusat Group), a leading player in assets management for telecom energy infrastructure.

Sustainable funding channels necessary to help the visually impaired



HAIDER AL LAWATI
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

The author is a Muscat-based economic analyst who previously worked for the CBO and OCCI.

Some private institutions, within the framework of their social responsibility commitments, make efforts to support differently-abled members of society.

Their aim is to provide a voice to these people, so they can be heard by the concerned authorities who in turn must do their part in sustaining the work of institutions dedicated to their welfare.

One such organisation is “Al-Oyoun Newspaper and Platform” which has organised a number of events and activities over the past years to understand the problems facing disabled members of the communities, including those challenged by vision, hearing, movement and other infirmities.

Recently, the organisation conducted a forum, titled “Oman for the Care of the Blind”, that aimed to provide sustainable support for the programmes of associations caring for disabled members of the communities.

The aim was the get corporates to support these associations through fixed contributions within the framework of corporate social responsibility (CSR) obligations.

Today, there are an estimated 25,000 vision-impaired people in the Sultanate of Oman, according to details shared at the forum. Some of them were born with this disability, while other lost their sight

due to certain diseases. All these people need continuous services, especially since most of them aspire to an education and to have academic degrees.

However, many of them are waiting for job opportunities so they can be independent. In the forum, all those who recited the Holy Quran and made presentations or took part in the panel discussions were blind, but they distinguished themselves nevertheless. They were able to shed light on their issues and highlight the challenges they face in society.

A key point of discussion was the kind of work that can be provided to them in governmental and private institutions, given their fluency in Arabic and other languages, ability to use computers, Braille equipment and other devices. In this regard, the forum proposed the construction of a suitable building to cater to the needs of the visually impaired at a cost of RO 316,000.

While some private sector institutions continue to extend financial support to them, the Ministry of Social Development continues to rely on well-established professional associations to come up with sustainable financial channels to support these organisation. This requires community members and commercial institutions to find other alternatives for financial sustainability for them to continue covering the costs of education, training, equipment purchases, white cane, Braille Sense and customised smartphones and prosthetic devices that they need.

It also requires members of society to communicate with the blind, present their creativity, ideas and suggestions, and involve them in the responsible committees in the state to address their issues, as they are closer than others in searching for the required solutions.

One of the ideas put forward in the forum was that some Omani families could adopt a blind person to cover their annual needs to alleviate their daily suffering.

Marafiq reports ramped up output from Duqm power project

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 18

The Centralised Utilities Company (Marafiq), a company owned by OQ [a subsidiary of Oman Investment Authority (OIA)], has announced a ramp-up of electricity output in the Duqm Special Economic Zone (SEZAD) following the launch of its gas-powered power plant in Duqm.

This plant has been developed in cooperation with the Rural Areas Electricity Company (Tanweer).

Eng Abdullah al Farsi, Director General of Operation and Maintenance at Marafiq, noted the new gas-powered plant started operation in 2021 in place of an existing diesel-powered plant.

“The production volume of the new plant reached around 212 gigawatt-hours in the first 10 months of last year,” he explained.

Al Farsi pointed out, “Establishing the new gas-powered plant in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm reflects the joint efforts of Marafiq and Tanweer to meet the increasing demand for electricity in the Zone, which is witnessing rapid population and development growth.”

The gas-powered plant consists of four mobile gas turbines with



a production capacity of 80 megawatts, which is sufficient to meet Tanweer’s power requirement to cover the needs of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm over the next five years.

Commenting on the economic benefit of the new plant, he added that the plant would reduce the cost of power production and ease the government subsidy burden on power supplied within the SEZ.

Moreover, Al Farsi remarked that using natural gas instead of diesel in power production contributes to reducing carbon

dioxide emissions and limiting environmental pollution. The gas-powered plant aims to reduce the annual CO2 emissions to 90,000 tonnes, which is equivalent to the emissions of about 20,000 cars.

“Marafiq Company is tirelessly working to support the economic and urban development in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. In this regard, the Company carried out last year, the soft commissioning of the Integrated Power and Water Plant that supplies power and water to Duqm Refinery (OQ8) and Oman Tank Terminal Company

(OTTCO). In addition, the Company, through its potable water production plant, provided 9,000 cubic metres of potable water per day for residential and commercial purposes”, Eng Abdullah al Farsi affirmed.

Marafiq enjoys a competitive advantage by owning a share of the gas, as part of a long-term contract with OQ Gas Company.

Furthermore, it has the technical know-how in the field of operation and maintenance, thanks to its strategic partnerships with international companies in the power sector.

Oman oil price rises \$1.40 per barrel

MUSCAT: The official price of Oman oil yesterday, for delivery next March, reached \$84.14 per barrel. The price of Oman oil increased by \$1.40 per barrel compared to Tuesday’s price of \$82.74 cents. The monthly average price of Omani crude oil for delivery in January was \$86.15 cents per barrel, down \$4.64 per barrel compared to the December 2022 delivery price.

Meanwhile, oil prices rose on Wednesday to their highest since early December on optimism that the lifting of China’s strict Covid-19 curbs will lead to a fuel demand recovery in the world’s top oil importer. Brent crude futures were up \$1.21, or 1.41%, to \$87.13 a barrel by 09:42 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures



were up \$1.36, or 1.7%, to \$81.54. Both were at their highest since early December.

China’s economic growth slowed sharply to 3% in 2022, missing the official target of “around 5.5%” and marking its second-worst performance since 1976. But the data still beat analysts’ forecasts after China started

rolling back its zero-Covid policy in early December. Analysts polled by see 2023 growth rebounding to 4.9%.

The lifting of Covid-19 restrictions in China is set to boost global oil demand this year to a new record high, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Wednesday, while price cap sanctions on Russia

could dent supply.

The IEA report followed expectations from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) that Chinese oil demand would grow by 510,000 barrels per day (bpd) this year after contracting for the first time in years in 2022 due to Covid containment measures.

But Opec kept its 2023 global demand growth forecast unchanged. Referring to China, PVM analyst Stephen Brennock said that “no other single entity will play a more significant role in shaping oil balances over the coming months”. Further support came from expectations of a drawdown in US crude stocks by around 1.8 million barrels in the week to January 13, according to a poll.

— ONA & Reuters

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HIS MAJESTY ADMINISTERS OATH TO NEW MINISTER

UN HAILS OMAN'S SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN YEMEN

NEW YORK: António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, has commended the role of the Sultanate in supporting international efforts to establish security and peace in Yemen.

In a virtual video call to countries lacking the global ceasefire initiative, Guterres said that the international community is grateful to the Sultanate of Oman for its crucial role in enhancing efforts aimed to establish peace and security in Yemen.

"The United Nations values this vital and positive role," he said.

Guterres added that the "Sultanate represents a unique model, not only in the Middle East, but also in the world." He urged other countries to follow the example of the Sultanate in advocating and supporting peace and stability — OMA

MUSCAT: Before His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, Chairman of the Agriculture Court, Piousness Dr. Saad bin Hamoud bin Ahmed al Habsi (right), Chairman of the Supreme Court, Sayed Khalifa bin Said bin Khalifa al Rusaidi, and Chairman of Administrative Judiciary Court, Shaikh Al Mubtar bin Abdullah bin Saad al Hartthy, took the oath of office at Al Sarakah Palace on Thursday. SEE ALSO P2

NEW RO 50 BANKNOTE FROM THIS MONTH

MUSCAT: To mark the 50th anniversary of the Omani Renaissance and in commemoration of the memory of its founder late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) issued a sixth series of new RO 50 banknote, which will begin circulation this month.

CBO will also issue new banknotes for all other denominations during the last quarter of 2020. TURN TO P4

SOME PEOPLE NOT FOLLOWING SOCIAL DISTANCING RULES

MUSCAT: The frequent orders and fervent appeals by the authorities to follow social distancing guidelines are falling on deaf ears.

A drive around the downtown Ruwi and its adjoining areas reveals how recklessly people crowd at different corners and walls shoulder-to-shoulder.

While most people across the country are following the guidelines that health authorities say are necessary to keep the coronavirus from spreading, many are not.

"In these critical moments of uncertainty with both physical and mental stress, we should discipline ourselves."

and in some cases, it is necessary to police the behaviour of other people as well," said Hamad al Wabshah, who stopped his car to scare away a group of people at a sidewalk in Ruwi. The Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health have said it more than enough times that social distancing is the best way to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Even if we do not turn the authority to lay charges on the offenders, at least we can scare them away," he told the Observer. TURN TO P4



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Khor Sham: A paradise where dolphins go to swim

Stretching almost 20 km, Khor Sham in Musandam is an ideal getaway for tourists boasting serene landscapes with plenty of water adventures including dhow cruises and dolphin watching. Here's why you should check it out soon ... **P20**

The Mediterranean diet really is that good for you. Here's why.

IN THE 1950S, researchers from across the globe embarked on a sweeping and ambitious study. For decades, they scrutinised the diets and lifestyles of thousands of middle-aged men living in the United States, Europe and Japan and then examined how those characteristics affected their risks of developing cardiovascular disease.

The Seven Countries Study, as it later became known, famously found associations between saturated fats, cholesterol levels and coronary heart disease. But the researchers also reported another notable result: Those who lived in and around the Mediterranean — in countries like Italy, Greece and Croatia — had lower rates of cardiovascular disease than participants who lived elsewhere. Their diets, rich in fruits, vegetables, legumes,

whole grains, nuts, seeds, lean proteins and healthy fats, seemed to have a protective effect.

Since then, the Mediterranean diet has become the bedrock of heart-healthy eating, with well-studied health benefits including lower blood pressure and cholesterol, and a reduced risk of Type 2 diabetes.

"It's one of a small number of diets that has research to back it up," said Dr. Sean Heffron, a preventive cardiologist at NYU Langone Health. "It isn't a diet that was cooked up in the mind of some person to generate money. It's something that was developed over time, by millions of people, because it actually tastes good. And it just happens to be healthy."

Here are some of the most searched questions about the Mediterranean diet, answered by experts.



WHAT EXACTLY IS THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET?

The Mediterranean diet isn't as much a strict meal plan as it is a lifestyle, said Julia Zumpano, a registered dietitian who specialises in preventive cardiology at the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio. People who follow the Mediterranean diet tend to "eat foods their grandparents would recognise," Heffron added: whole, unprocessed foods with few or no additives.

The diet prioritises whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, herbs, spices and olive oil. Fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids, like salmon, sardines and tuna, are the preferred animal protein source. Other lean animal proteins, like chicken or turkey, are eaten to a lesser extent. And foods high in saturated fats, like red meat and butter, are eaten rare-

ly. Eggs and dairy products like yogurt and cheese can also be part of the Mediterranean diet, but in moderation. And moderate alcohol consumption, like a glass of wine at dinner, is allowed.

Breakfast might be smashed avocado on whole-grain toast with a side of fresh fruit and a low-fat Greek yogurt, Heffron said. For lunch or dinner, a vegetable and grain dish cooked with olive oil and seasoned with herbs — roasted root vegetables, leafy greens, a side of hummus and small portions of pasta or whole grain bread, with a lean protein like grilled fish.

"It's very easy to follow, very sustainable, very realistic," Zumpano said.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET?

A number of rigorous studies have found that the Mediterranean diet contributes to better health, and in particular better heart health, in a variety of ways. In one study, published in 2018, researchers assessed nearly 26,000 women and found that those who followed the Mediterranean diet most closely for up to 12 years had about a 25

per cent reduced risk of developing cardiovascular disease. This was mainly because of changes in blood sugar, inflammation and body mass index, the researchers reported. Other studies, in men and women, have reached similar conclusions.

Research has also found that the diet can protect against oxidative stress, which can cause DNA damage that contributes to chronic conditions like neurological disease and cancer. And some studies suggest it can help reduce the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

The diet may also have profound health benefits during pregnancy, said Dr. Anum Sohail Minhas, an assistant professor of medicine at Johns Hopkins Medicine. In a recent study of nearly 7,800 women published in December, researchers found that those who followed the Mediterranean diet most closely around the time they conceived and during early pregnancy had about a 21 per cent reduced risk of any pregnancy complications, such as pre-eclampsia, gestational diabetes or preterm birth.

"There definitely seems to be a protective effect," Minhas said.

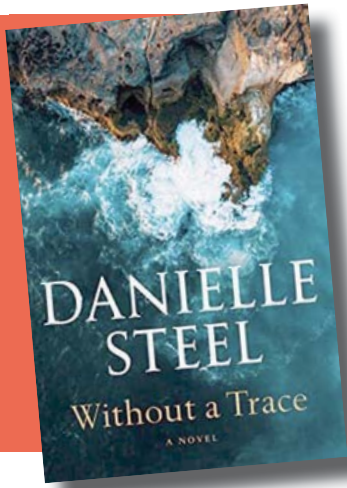
On its own, though, the Mediterranean diet isn't a panacea, Heffron said — it won't eliminate your chances of developing cardiovascular disease, and it won't cure a disease, either. It's important that people also pay attention to other tenets of good heart health, like getting regular exercise and adequate sleep and not smoking. — **NYT**

READ

WITHOUT A TRACE

BY DANIELLE STEEL

Charles Vincent meets someone who ignites his passion and must decide whether to walk away from his perfect-from-the-outside life.



ENTERTAINMENT

In this file photo taken on January 02, 1878, French actress Sarah Bernhardt performs as the queen "Dona Maria de Neubourg" in a "Ruy Blas", theatre piece of Victor Hugo, in 1878 at La Comedie-Francaise theatre in Paris. An exhibition at the Petit Palais in Paris, a ball, period literary dinners and guided tours: several events will pay tribute in March 2023 to the legendary French actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923), who died 100 years ago. — **AFP**



CULTURE

Jordan Stimpson, a member of the Tower Ballroom team, cleans one of the 14 crystal Edwardian chandeliers that illuminate Blackpool Tower Ballroom, during its annual clean in Blackpool, northern England. The Ballroom in Blackpool Tower is undergoing its annual spring clean which includes lowering the ornate chandeliers for one week to be cleaned ahead of the coming season of ballroom dancing. — **AFP**





How to make fast friends while travelling? Try playing pickleball

IN 2022, TESS JACOBY, 36, took 47 flights. She packed her pickleball paddle on each one.

"I joke that I'm an addict," said Jacoby, who works in commercial real estate in Chicago. "I will bring my paddle anywhere it's warm."

Pickleball websites, apps, Instagram and LinkedIn help her find competition — and new friends — away from home, opening doors in distant places. In January, she plans to honeymoon in Cape Town where she hopes to find a pickleball group.

"I won't Google where to eat," she said. "If I find a game down there, that's where I would ask."

For travellers who love it, pickleball — a racket sport played with a hollow plastic ball on a court about a fourth of the size of a standard tennis court pad — is not only portable, but an easy entree to new destinations through fast friends made on the courts.

"The beauty of pickleball is you can find drop-in times, show up and you don't have to know anybody," said Karen Hawkes, 58, a postsecondary education counsellor and consultant, who serves as a co-ambassador at the public pickleball courts in Aspen, Colorado, which organises drop-in sessions. "We embrace people who drop in here. It's inclusive and we try to promote that."

A devoted tennis player, I started playing pickleball about a year before the pandemic and discovered how travel-friendly it is. On a trip to Scottsdale, Arizona, last year, I played at public courts packed with locals who directed me to their favourite breakfast spot (Farm & Craft) and where to catch the sunset (Pinnacle Peak Park). The game, I discovered, was the social equivalent of walking a dog in the park, a conversation starter that paid off in local insights.

To test my theory, I talked to dozens of adult pickleball players across a 60-year age spectrum to glean their insights into pickleball as a travel portal, and looked into hotels, resorts and cruise ships where travellers can find a game. Here's what I found.

'IT'S SOMETHING EVERYBODY CAN DO'

In case you haven't heard, pickleball has exploded in the past decade, becoming the fastest growing sport in 2021 and 2022, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association. The global trade association counts roughly 4.8 million participants, up 39.3 per cent over the past two years.

For many newcomers, pickleball

was a pandemic lifeline.

"It's something everybody can do," said Matt Manasse, 34, an instructor based in Los Angeles, who Vanity Fair called the "pickleball coach to the stars" for instructing celebrity clients like Matthew Perry and Larry David. "During the pandemic, it got people out and they could be socially

Westin, Florida, where local players lent him a paddle. Last spring his doubles team won an eight-school tournament held at North Carolina State University.

"Everyone starts somewhere," he said of playing with less skilled enthusiasts while on a recent family vacation in the Dominican Republic. "I

teacher and travel agent who travels seasonally from her home in Lewes, Delaware, to destinations such as Florida and Arizona where she brings her gear. "I did fall once and broke my wrist."

Most public courts and drop-in sessions are free or inexpensive.

"It's more accessible than other



distanced and competitive."

Along the way, its reputation as a geriatric pastime began to fade as younger players discovered the thrill of fast volleys, the strategic art of drop-shotting (known as "dinking") and the inclusive culture where seniors can play with grandkids.

"One of the reasons I love pickleball is the community is so nice," said Martin Michelsen, 21, a senior at the University of Florida in Gainesville who plays on the college squad (pickleball is a club sport at many colleges and universities).

In high school, he learned pickleball at a park near his home in

would love to be a part of someone's pickleball journey."

According to USA Pickleball, the national governing body of the sport, there are nearly 10,000 pickleball locations nationwide. Its website, Places2Play, offers a searchable database.

Travellers say they just need a paddle, as locals always have balls.

"For ease of portability, it's a no-brainer," Jacoby, of Chicago, said, referring to the solid yet lightweight paddle. "It's flat and fits in a carry-on, tote or backpack."

"You do need court shoes," cautioned Sue Baker, 75, a retired

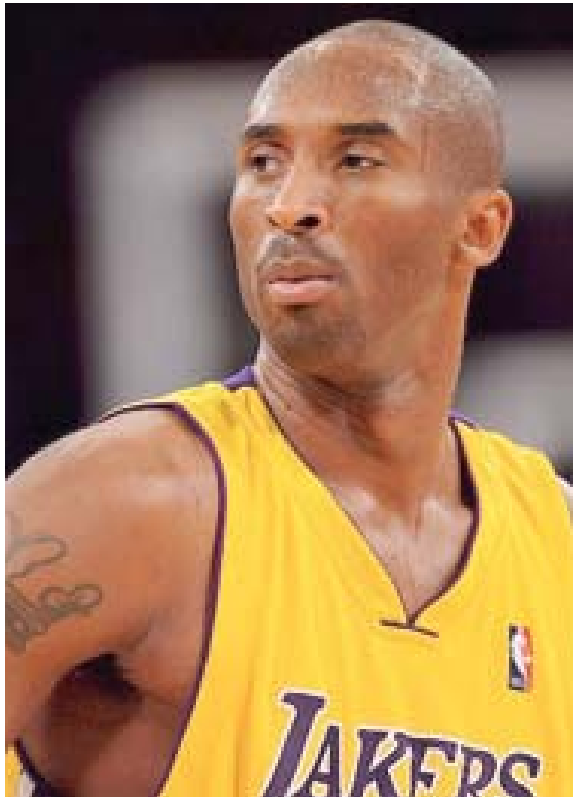
sports," said Laura Gainor, 40, a marketing consultant in Ponte Vedra, Florida, who discovered the sport three years ago and founded Pickleball in the Sun, a travel and leisure brand that profiles pickleball resorts and sells apparel. "You're not paying to practice like golf."

Tournament entry fees, she added, can range from \$25 for a local contest to a little more than \$100 to participate in a professional event.

Apps including Pickleball+, Places2Play and PicklePlay help travelling players find courts and other players. For some, a game can break out anywhere. — **NYT**

AUCTION

Iconic Kobe Bryant jersey could fetch up to \$7 million at auction: Sotheby's



Sotheby's estimates that a jersey worn by US basketball legend Kobe Bryant, who died almost three years ago in a tragic helicopter accident, will sell for up to \$7 million next month, the New York auction house said on Thursday.

If the early February sale reaches the upper end of Sotheby's estimates, it will nearly double the previous high of \$3.7 million paid for a jersey worn by the Los Angeles Lakers titan, who won five NBA titles and two Olympic gold medals.

It would not be enough, however, to surpass the world record for a game-worn jersey, set in September 2022 at \$10.1 million with the sale of Michael Jordan's number 23 Chicago Bulls jersey, which he wore in 1998 during his last NBA title run.

The previous record was set earlier in 2022, with the sale of a jersey worn during the 1986 World Cup by football legend Diego Maradona.

Bryant's iconic yellow-and-purple number 24 jersey, put up for sale by an anonymous owner, was worn by the legendary Laker in 25 games during the 2007-2008 season, according to Sotheby's.

In one of those appearances — a post-season game against the Denver Nuggets on April 23, 2008 — photographers famously captured Bryant celebrating after a successful three-point shot, gripping his jersey and letting out a primal scream.

The image has since been plastered on walls around the world by street artists, espe-



cially in Los Angeles, where Bryant played his entire professional career.

The last time this jersey was put up for auction, in 2013, it only fetched \$18,678.

Sotheby's says that small sum can be explained by the context of the time: the jersey had not yet been "photo-matched," which the auction house describes as being "one of the most sought-after forms of authentication for sports memorabilia."

It was also years before Bryant's fatal helicopter crash, after which his April 2008 celebration became "the image that galvanised the public," Sotheby's said.

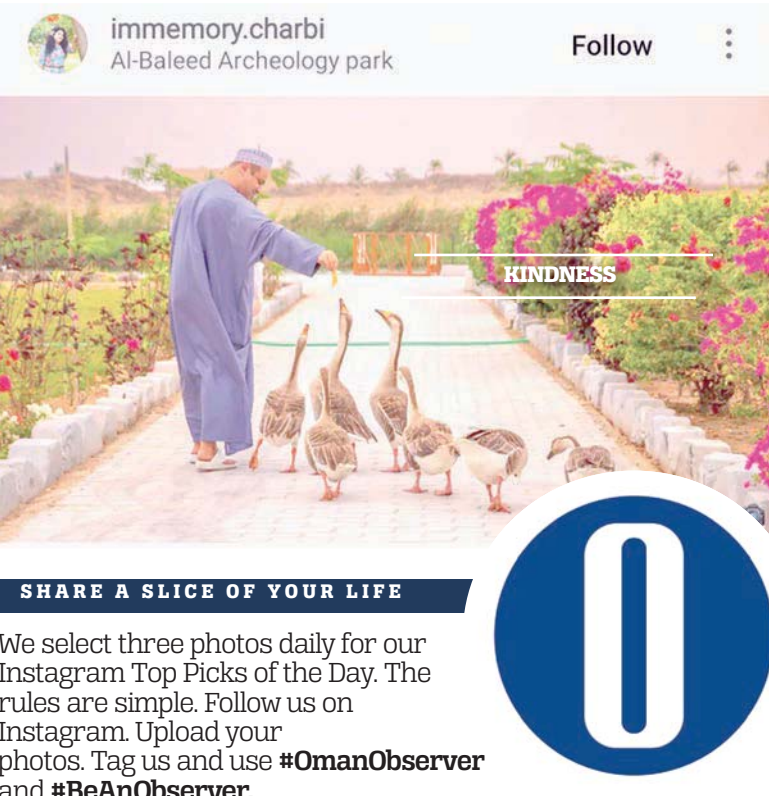
Throughout the 2007-2008 season — Bryant's only as the NBA's Most Valuable Player — "this jersey was worn 25 times, and he scored 645 points in this jersey," Brahm Wachter, head of streetwear and modern collectibles at Sotheby's, said.

The item will be on display in New York starting February 1, and is part of a larger online sale of collectible sports memorabilia lasting from February 2 to 9. — **AFP**



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AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

A Fossil flower trapped in amber had a mistaken identity for 150 years



EVA-MARIA SADOWSKI, a postdoctoral researcher at the Natural History Museum in Berlin, didn't have a particular agenda in mind when she decided to borrow the biggest fossil flower preserved in amber ever found.

But her curiosity pulled the thread of a more than 150-year-long case of mistaken identity, resulting in a clearer picture of what the Baltic amber forest of Northern Europe looked like more than 33 million years ago.

The preserved flower bloomed about halfway between the extinction of the last non-bird dinosaurs and the evolution of humans, who found it in the 19th century in territory that is now part of Russia. In 1872, scientists classified it as *Stewartia kowalewskii*, an extinct flowering evergreen.

The Baltic amber flower's identity hadn't been revised until Sadowski's paper in *Scientific Reports* was published on Thursday.

Plants in amber are a rarity. Among Baltic amber specimens, only 1 to 3 per cent of trapped organisms are botanical.

While they're harder to come by, plants in amber provide paleobotanists with a wealth of information, Sadowski said. Amber, which forms from tree resin, preserves ancient specimens in three dimensions, revealing "all the delicate features that you normally don't get in other fossil types."

Under a powerful microscope, Sadowski saw perfectly preserved details of the flower's anatomy, along with specks of pollen, which she used to see if the plant had been sorted into the correct family 150 years ago.

Sadowski scraped grains from near the amber's surface with a scalpel. After isolating and imaging the grains, her co-author on the study, Christa-Charlotte Hofmann at the University of Vienna, investigated the pollen, along with microscopic features of the flower's anatomy. That pointed to an entirely different genus group than had been assigned in 1872: *Symplocos*, a genus of flowering shrubs and small trees not found in Europe today but widespread in modern East Asia.

The re-designation of the giant flower helps to flesh out what scientists know about the ecological diversity of the Baltic amber forest. It also sheds light on how Earth's climate has changed over the last 35 million-odd years: The presence of *Symplocos* helps to show that ancient Europe was balmy than it is now for most of human history. — KATE GOLEMBIEWSKI/NYT

LOCAL SCENE



Oman, a melting pot of cultures

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Oman is undoubtedly a melting pot of different cultures, religions and customs and the scores of nationalities that live here and follow their tradition and rituals on a daily basis is an epitome of the blend of such a diverse spectrum of people.

The diverse and all-inclusive cultural fabric has been repeatedly in the attention of the international media and that has prompted some 11 students from the United States to visit the country as part of the Ibrahim Student Leadership and Dialogue Middle East Programme to understand the culture and tradition of the Arabian countries and their lifestyles.

Their nearly 1-week long visit to the Sultanate gave them a chance to experience various aspects of the Middle Eastern cultures and perspectives, particularly in the fields of religious understanding, social entrepreneurship, and conflict transformation that helped them fortify their role as thought-leaders and informed actors on the frontlines of hope, empathy and innovation.

The Winter 2023 Ibrahim study tour under the leadership of Mark Rosenblum, Director; Sophia Salguero Mcoee, Associate Director; Hindy Goldstein, Programme Coordinator and Alumni Trip Leader; Nashwa Lylah El Sayed, Alumni Trip Leader; and Dr Samir Altaqi, Ibrahim Distinguished Scholar and Content Expert, had 10 students from diverse backgrounds.

They included Seena Alamarie, City University of New York; Charlie Ehrman, City

University of New York; Yaas Farzanefer, University of California, Berkeley; Brice Fisher, City University of New York; Ekram Ibrahim, University of Pennsylvania; Aman Javid, City University of New York; Gav Meiri, City University of New York; Tasfia Nawar, City University of New York; Suaad Nour, University of California, Berkeley; and Jacob Shofet, University of California, Berkeley.

"It is a totally different feeling to have visited Oman and met and talked to people. The image that we comprehended from the region is totally different from what we were fed by some western media and the warmth of the Middle East is truly admirable," a student from Queens College said.

The visit, as the first leg of their visit to the region, encompassed several socio-cultural exchange programmes between the students of both countries.

The team has visited the Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) and Grand Mosque, and on Monday, the students are visiting SQU, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs, and the US Embassy, besides meeting many individuals, as part of the 7th such visit from the Ibrahim Student Leadership and Dialogue Middle East Programme.

In addition, there is a plethora of cultural events as part of the five-day-long visit by the multicultural diverse group from different religious backgrounds, according to a source from the programme.

The Ibrahim Student Leadership and Dialogue Middle East Programme is a unique once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for university students and early-career professionals to directly learn from and engage with experts in poli-

cymaking, conflict resolution, social entrepreneurship and grassroots activism.

"This experience of meeting and greeting, interacting and spending time together goes beyond the traditional confines of study abroad programmes, incorporating practical and applied activities designed to improve and expand participants' leadership and dialogue skills," said Maggie Jeans OBE, who is part of the organising team.

This Programme also empowers cross-cultural and multi-faith networks of student-scholar activists with a nuanced understanding of the region.

The Ibrahim Student Leadership and Dialogue Middle East Programme is an opportunity for university students and early-career professionals with strong leadership potential to gain firsthand experience in the region.

The 11 visiting US students are being given an opportunity to engage with organisations and leaders in the Middle East working to overcome religious, cultural, ethnic and political prejudice and hostility in the region.

"From the diplomatic perspective, this programme aims to create a more knowledgeable cohort of young scholars who will become the thought leaders influencing US foreign policy in the Middle East," she adds.

From Oman, these students with four group leaders will head to Jordan, then Israel followed by Palestine before they get home by second week of January with a better understanding of the Arab region and the life of people in this part of the world.

This is a continuous process and an ongoing programme and the next group will visit the region in May, she added.

ANIMAL PLANET

Dolphins can shout underwater, but it's never loud enough



MAMMALS IN THE ocean swim through a world of sound. But in recent decades, humans have been cranking up the volume, blasting waters with noise from shipping and oil and gas exploration. New research suggests that such anthropogenic noise may make it harder for dolphins to communicate and work together.

When dolphins cooperated on a task in a noisy environment, they called louder and longer, researchers reported on Thursday in the journal *Current Biology*. "Even then, there's a dramatic increase in how often they fail to coordinate," said Shane Gero, a whale biologist at Carleton University in Ottawa who wasn't part of the work.

Scientists worked with a dolphin duo at an experimental lagoon at the Dolphin Research Centre in the Florida Keys. The pair were trained to swim to different spots in their enclosure and push a button within one second of each other.

Pernille Sorensen, a biologist and doctoral candidate at the University of Bristol in England, and her team piped in sounds using underwater speakers. Tags, stuck behind the animals' blowholes, captured what the dolphins heard and called to each other as well as their movements.

Through 200 trials with five different sound environments, the team observed how the dolphins changed their behaviour to compensate for noise. The cetaceans turned their bodies towards each other and paid greater attention to each other's location. At times, they nearly doubled the length of their calls and amplified their whistles.

The noisier it got, the less success they had. At the loudest condition, they succeeded 62.5 per cent of the time, simultaneously striking their buttons around 20 per cent less than under ambient sound levels.

"It's usually really hard to do these kinds of studies in the wild," said Mauricio Cantor, a behavioural ecologist at Oregon State University in Newport who wasn't part of the study. But the experimental setup used by Sorensen's team provided "clear evidence for the effect of noise," he said, because the researchers could control for most everything that could interfere with results.

Dolphins hunt together, using sound to communicate, and find their way through echolocation. In the long run, Cantor said, noisy conditions could affect food intake and ability to reproduce.

"We're absolutely impacting animals in this way already," Gero said. "The unfortunate reality is that, in some ways, this story is 35 to 50 years late."

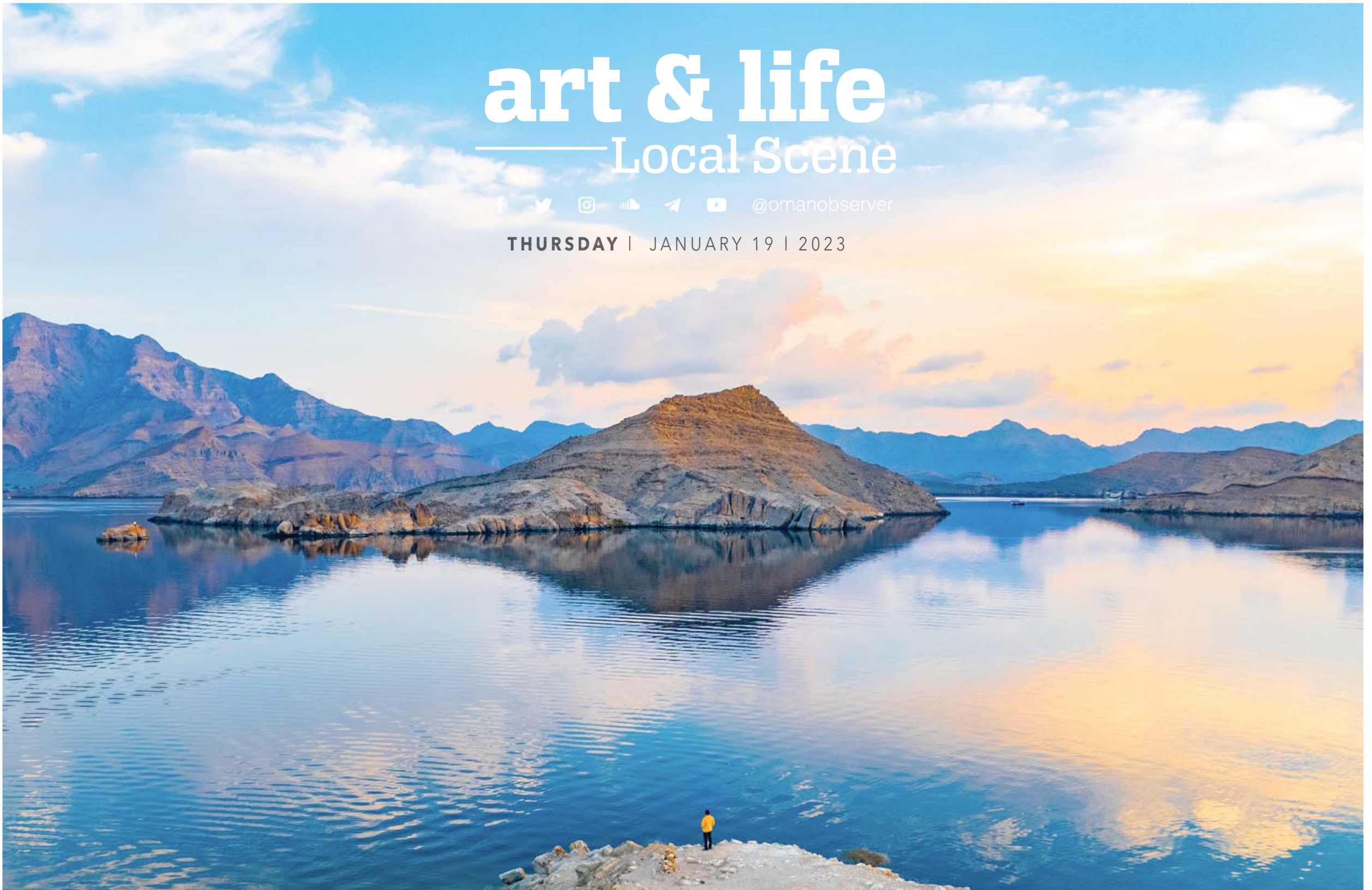
— CAROLYN WILKEN/NYT

art & life

Local Scene

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THURSDAY | JANUARY 19 | 2023



Khor Sham: A paradise where dolphins go to swim

By Zuwaina al Sulaimani

Khor Sham is a unique natural destination that attracts tourists in the Wilayat of Khasab in Musandam Governorate. It stretches for almost 20 km containing many villages.

Traditional vessels crossing the sea are the means of transportation. The famous "Telegraph Island" is located in this creek. The reason behind its name is the first telegraph cable line (extended in the sea) in the Middle East connecting Basra in Iraq and Mumbai in India in 1860. On this small island, tourists can see the relief of land, geological

formations, and topography of the site. In addition, they can enjoy watching dolphins as they follow the tourist ships and boats, which represents an experience that should not be missed during a visit to the Governorate of Musandam, according to the website of the Omani Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. An Omani photographer,

Mohammed al Malki, using a drone camera, succeeded in documenting charming serene scenes that reflect the unique location of this island and creek with their extraordinary nature, historical importance, and unique environment. The importance of this island is that it is considered as the site where the first line of modern



communication in the Gulf was extended between India and Iraq. It is a transmission station, which indicates the importance of its geographical location, which is also located close to The Strait of Hormuz, which is one of the most important sea passages in the world, and the gateway for oil passage from the Gulf to the world. The "Telegraph Island" is unique in its picturesque nature and distinct terrain, as well as the frequent visits of tourists from all over the world, as traditional

boats stand on its banks, which constitutes a painting in harmony with the island. Regarding trip planning, Muhammad says, "I was on a roaming mission to go this time to Musandam so that I would see the places I had not seen before, starting from the Wilayat of Dibba to the Wilayats of Khasab and Bukha, and my idea was to take sea tour to some places, including Khor Sham and Kumzar. I was lucky on this trip that the weather was beautiful and cloudy. Of course, the

plan was that on the first day after arriving in Khasab, I would take a boat, starting with Khor Sham." He continued saying "We agreed with the owner of the boat to take us on a tour Khor Sham before sunrise so we can watch its strong and beautiful colours, especially in winter. The distance from the port to the creek took about 30 minutes or less." He adds expressing his feelings seeing the magical places over there "In fact, it was a strange feeling when you look at the sea

with small mountains behind it, and then large mountains with clouds over them, and at sunrise and birds flying between the two sides, it is difficult to describe the scene and say that the scene is in our beloved country, Oman." In Khor Sham, you can rent a large boat and you can camp in the boat for the night in that place. Moreover, the creek's water is characterised by purity, as well as the presence of dolphins in it which gives the tourist the experience she/he wished for.

