

Oman, Syria discuss relations

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office Dr Faisal Mekdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic. The two sides exchanged cordial conversations and reviewed the bilateral relations between the Sultanate and Syria. **DETAILS ON P3**



The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, on Sunday visited the Child Care Centre affiliated to the Ministry of Social Development in Al Seeb. During the visit which coincided with the Mother's Day, the Honourable Lady had a close look at the programmes and facilities of the centre. She also listened to a briefing about efforts made to promote the children's capabilities in preparation for their accommodation in society through the application of the best international practises that cater to their humanitarian, educational and rehabilitation needs. **SEE ALSO P2**

Stress on National Education Strategy

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
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Members of the Majlis Ashishura stressed the need to urgently refer the Education Law to the Council keeping in view its importance in the overall improvement of the education sector in the Sultanate. It is also important to resolve cer-

tain problems and legal loopholes in the education system. This was part of the discussion on the statement by Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, during the Majlis session. The statement included aspects such as school education within the framework of the Oman Vi-

sion 2040, National Education Strategy 2040, raising the efficiency of spending (2015-2020), quality of school education, the ministry's policies in employing teachers and future needs of the teaching staff, the document on Omani national framework for teaching profession, among others. **DETAILS ON P2**

Covid-19 vaccination begins in Musandam

ROYAL DIRECTIVES OF HIS MAJESTY

MUSCAT: As per Royal directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Ministry of Health (MoH) on Sunday rolled out vaccination campaign against Covid-19 for all citizens aged 18 and above in the Governorate of Musandam.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, said in a statement: "We are delighted to launch the expanded campaign for Covid-19 vaccine in the Governorate of Musandam".

The minister said that about 2,000 people have been vaccinated in Musandam and that the vaccination drive targets around 16,500 people there.

Dr Al Saeedi reaffirmed that the vaccine will be available also for the teaching staff, so that students can return back to schools.

The minister also added that the number of Covid-19 patients admitted in the intensive care units (ICUs) stands at 103; therefore, the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic is monitoring the situation and that taking further precautionary measures is not ruled out.

Sayyid Ibrahim bin Said al Busaidy, Minister of State and

Programme to attract private investments

MUSCAT: At the behest of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, a programme to attract private investments and support Omani exports in foreign markets was launched on Sunday during the first meeting of the supervisory committee tasked with this special programme.

Held at the Diplomatic Institute, the meeting was chaired by Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in the presence of Dr Khamis bin Saif al Jabri, Head of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit.

The programme is one of the accelerators of the first phase of Oman Vision 2040 and it is closely associated with the themes of "Economy and Development" and "Fiscal

Sustainability". It is a stimulator par excellence in the national economy support scheme.

The programme focuses on empowering the private sector to take the helm of economic development, a core objective of the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025). The Council of Ministers' financial and economic committee will supervise this programme, whose launch was flagged by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion in cooperation with the Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit and the Ministry of Economy. The programme's indicators will be listed under the banner of performance indicators of the Follow-up Unit, which will keep a regular record of the programme's progress. **TURN TO P2**

Governor of Musandam, commended the significant efforts exerted in tackling the pandemic and providing the vaccines for all citizens in the Governorate of Musandam.

During the launching ceremony, free Covid-19 PCR tests were announced for all citizens

in the Wilayat of Madha in the Governorate of Musandam at a rate of 4 times a year. The ministry called on the target groups to take the vaccines as there is a very significant decrease in the number of ICU patients among those over 65 years after receiving the vaccine. — ONA



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HONOURABLE LADY VISITS CHILD CARE CENTRE



MUSCAT: The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, on Sunday went on an inspection tour of the Child Care Centre affiliated to the Ministry of Social Development, in Al Seeb. During the visit, the Honourable Lady had a close look at the programmes and facilities of the Centre. She also listened to a briefing about efforts made to promote the children's capabilities in preparation for their accommodation in society through the application of the best international practices that cater to their humanitarian, educational and rehabilitation needs. The Honourable Lady's visit comes within the context of her interest and great keenness to ensure the welfare of this segment of society and to guarantee a decent and stable life for the children. – ONA

Majlis hosts Minister of Education

FOCUS ON CHALLENGES, RESPONSES AND PLANS TO ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY OF EDUCATION

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Members of the Majlis Ash'ishura stressed the need to urgently refer the Education Law to the Council keeping in mind its importance to the overall improvement of the education sector in the Sultanate. It is also important to resolve certain problems and legal loopholes in the education system.

This was part of the discussion on the statement of Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed bin Nasser al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education, during the eighth regular session of the second annual sitting (2020-2021), chaired by Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of the Majlis Ash'ishura.

The statement included five main aspects such as school education within the framework of the Oman Vision 2040, National Education Strategy 2040, raising the efficiency of spending during the period from 2015-2020, quality of school education, the ministry's policies in employing teachers, and future needs of the teaching staff, the document of the Omani national framework for the teaching profession, private school education, and the ministry's efforts to support private schools in light of impacts of the pandemic.

In his opening speech, Al Maawali said, "His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik affirmed his interest in the education sector in all its types and levels and providing a supportive and stimulating environment for scientific research and innovation. Education is the main factor in building the nation and it



is placed on the top priorities of the national Vision 2040, in recognition from His Majesty to the requirements of the next stage, and the importance of education as a fundamental pillar in the future of modern Oman".

In her statement, Dr Madeeha talked about the aspects of development in the education system in the country as well as the ministry's plans in this regard.

She also talked about the priorities set by the ministry during the next five years. "First is sources diversification of education financing to ensure sustainability, raising spending efficiency through a partnership with the private sector to establish government school buildings, expansion of pre-school education in Al Wusta Governorate and in oil concession areas in partnership with the private sector. Also important is allocating some lands affiliated to the ministry for private educational Investment in coordination with the Oman Investment Authority," she explained.

About raising the efficiency of spending, the minister referred to some programmes, including,

Minister of Education shed light on priorities set by the ministry for the next five years

transfer of the management of some support services such as (transferring students and guarding school buildings) from the ministry to the private sector or another related government institution.

The Minister of Education also spoke about the ministry's efforts to ensure the sustainability of education in light of Covid pandemic and the most prominent features of the educational system based on the blended learning curriculum. "Among the most prominent of these features: commitment to health measures, the adoption of an operating system for public and private schools, the adoption of e-learning, as well as the adoption of a mechanism for evaluating students in line with the distance education system for the various educational stages" she pointed



out.

The minister also indicated that there is a shortage in some important jobs, such as social workers, learning resource specialists, laboratory technicians, and assistant principals in some schools due to resignations during the past five years. She emphasised that there will be a need for these jobs in the Tenth Five-Year Plan with about 2,800 new jobs to cover the needs of the new schools that will be operated, which are estimated at 196 schools.

Regarding the ministry's policies in employing teachers and the future needs of academic bodies.

Dr Madeeha indicated that the number of Omanis appointed as teachers during the period from 2015-2020 stood at 6,877 male and female teachers, Omanis occupying the teaching staff positions in the current academic year 2020-2021 totalled 48,173 male and female teachers, at a rate estimated at 84.8 per cent, while there are 8,644 non-Omanis male and female teachers, which is 15.2 per cent of the total number. In some specialisations Omanisation reached nearly 100 per cent.

Dr Madeeha stated that private school education has witnessed remarkable development and expansion in quantitative and qualitative terms during the past two five-year plans. "The number increased to 880 private and international schools and kindergartens during 2019-2020 academic year. They have some 189,000 students. The number of teachers has reached 14,250, and the percentage of Omanisation in private schools has reached 43 per cent in teaching positions, and 73 per cent in administrative positions."

The ministry has worked to take a package of measures that will work to encourage private schools and support their efforts in light of the pandemic crisis, as the operating mechanism has been adopted for all school grades, provided that they adhere to what is stated in the approved operating manuals and health procedures document within the school environment. "They have been approved to receive their students, unlike public schools, which were not allowed to return except gradually and for certain classes," the minister clarified.

Project to attract investments

The programme envisages a set of goals, including the analysis of the investment environment of local funds and foreign capital, addressing the challenges and studying successful global experiences of advanced nations.

The programme will focus on Omani exports and means of supporting them in foreign markets so that they could develop into a basic component of national economy.

Prior to the launch of the programme, a number of joint sessions were held among different economic sectors of relevance to the programme. The sessions aimed to establish consensus about the target investments that figure in the first package of the programme, which cover the sectors of tourism, fisheries, converting industries, information and communications technology, logistics services, energy and mining.

A list of initiatives and projects targeted by the programme will be developed over the next three years.

Other different sectors related to development will be incorporated in the future stages of programme targeting local and foreign investments, and these include the sectors of education, health and sports.

To ensure the success of the programme, a set of enabling programmes were included such as "planning and development of instruments to stimulate investments and open up markets", "streamlining and enumeration of government services", "the development of special economic zones, free zones, mega projects and economic gateways", "enhancing economic efficiency in governorates", "developing national capabilities and employment", "developing laws and legislations" and "management of the performance of related government establishments and media interactivity".

Sultanate, Syria hold consultation session



MUSCAT: The Sultanate and the Syrian Arab Republic held a round of official talks at the Foreign Ministry here on Sunday.

The Omani side was headed by Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, while the Syrian delegation was led by Dr Faisal Mekdad, Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates.

During the session of consultations, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and expressed their common keenness to promote cooperation

in various spheres.

The discussions also covered developments and efforts to establish peace and stability in the region. The two sides exchanged views about various regional and international issues of mutual interest.

They underscored the significance of dialogue as a means of finding solutions and enhancing security and stability in the region and the world at large.

An agreement for mutual waiving of visas for holders of

diplomatic, special and service passports between the Sultanate and Syria was signed by Sayyid Badr and Mekdad.

The consultations session was attended by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Foreign Ministry's Under-Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs, Dr Bashar al Ja'fari, Deputy Foreign Minister of Syria, Sayyid Turki bin Mahmoud al Busaidy, the Sultanate's Ambassador to Syria, Dr Bassam Saif Eddin al Khatib, Syrian Ambassador to Oman, and senior officials from both sides. — ONA



Sayyid Asaad receives Syrian FM

MUSCAT: Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received in his office on Sunday Dr Faisal Mekdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic, who is currently visiting the Sultanate.

The two sides exchanged cordial conversations and reviewed the bilateral relations between the Sultanate and the Syrian Arab Republic. They also discussed aspects of the existing cooperation between them to serve the common interests of the two countries and their brotherly



peoples.

ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER RECEIVES SYRIAN FM

General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office here on Sunday Dr Faisal Mekdad, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the Syrian Arab Republic.

The meeting exchanged conversations on the march of the fraternal relations binding the Sultanate and Syria.

They also reviewed fields of the joint cooperation and means of promoting them to serve the common interests between the two brotherly countries, besides touching on a number of matters of common concern. — ONA

Govt warns action against violation of isolation norms

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Relief and Shelter Sector said that it continues to monitor the institutions and private sector companies and hotel establishments that have been designated for the purpose. They should be committed to the requirements and precautionary measures applicable to institutional isolation as during the visits, it was found some authorised institutions do not comply with isolating their workers according to the requirements and precautionary measures.

"Legal action will be taken against violations, including on permission granted to them."

There have been reports of several incoming passengers, both citizens, and residents, collaborating to skip institutional isolation after paying due room rates.

Another complaint frequently received by the *Observer* was sharing of hotel rooms by more than one person, raising doubts over the effectiveness of isolation.

Last week, the Court of the First instance in North al Batinah, Dhofar, and Buraimi issued rulings against five violators for non-compliance with the institutional quarantine, frequenting the beaches during the period of the ban, and gathering. They received jail sentences of up to three months and a fine of RO 300.

Over 11,000 incoming passengers were subjected to institutional isolation and ten per cent of them are Omanis, said the Under-secretary of the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) and head of the Relief and Shelter Sector recently.



1,665 new Covid cases, over 100 patients in ICUs

The Ministry of Health reported over 100 patients in the Intensive Care Units (ICUs), which promoted the Minister of Health to say that the situation is worrisome and more stringent measures will be enforced in the coming days.

MoH reported 1,665 new cases of Covid-19 and two Covid-19-related deaths on Sunday, taking the total number of cases to 150,800 including 139,100 recoveries and 1,622 deaths.

Fifty-two were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 331, including 103 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

The increase in patients in intensive care units is worrying and dangerous and the failure to comply with precautionary

measures is one of the reasons, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, said.

He was speaking at the official launch of a vaccination campaign in Musandam Governorate.

Al Saeedi said that the Supreme Committee has taken some precautionary measures during the past two meetings and more stringent ones cannot be ruled out if the epidemiological situation continues to rise.

He called on the target groups to take the vaccines and said there is a very significant decrease in the number of ICU patients among those over 65 years after receiving the vaccine.

MoH, meanwhile, continued home visits for vaccines in various wilayats including Sur.

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express their sincere condolences
on the sad demise of

MR. SUHAIL QASSIM AHMED AL ZAWAWI

Brother of

MR. SALEEM QASSIM AHMED AL ZAWAWI

Whose soul departed from this world on 18-Mar-21.

We pray to Allah to grant him best place in the
Paradise and to grant the family the strenght to
endure this immeasurable loss.

DOWN BUT NOT OUT!

INTERNATIONALLY,
THE BIRTH
PREVALENCE IS
ESTIMATED TO BE
1 IN 600
TO **1 IN 800**

IN OMAN, IT IS
2.4 IN 1,000
WHICH LEADS
TO ABOUT
120 AFFECTED
BIRTHS/YEAR

Awareness on life with 21 chromosomes

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD) which comes on March 21, is a global United Nations awareness day observed since 2012. The date has its significance. The 21st day of the third month was selected to signify the uniqueness of the triplication (trisomy) of the 21st chromosome which causes Down Syndrome. This year the theme is ‘We Decide.’ The theme is inspired by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which supports effective and meaningful participation as a core human right.

Coincidentally March 21 is also Mother’s Day in the Arab World. This year the day is exceptionally significant for Zuweina al Barwani and her daughter Ruiya bint Humaid al Habsi, a Special Olympics champion in roller skating. The 19-year-old Ruiya is ambitious and has beautiful dreams but the pandemic has been keeping her away from her activities at the Association for the Handicapped Children. It opened on Sunday (March 21) after closure due to Covid-19. Zuweina chose to go with a cake to celebrate the occasion. According to a publication by the Directorate General Primary Healthcare, Ministry of Health,

“Down Syndrome is one of the commonest chromosomal abnormalities known today. Internationally, the birth prevalence is estimated to be 1 in 600 to 1 in 800. In Oman, it is 2.4 in 1,000 which leads to about 120 affected births/year. (MoH, 2011).” Zuweina has been throughout these years looking at various opportunities that would help her child with Down Syndrome come up with self-expressions. “She learns reading and writing as well as physical education and works with a physiotherapist and speech therapist”, explained Zuweina. In 2018 in Abu Dhabi when

Ruiya won roller skating, she cried out to her mother, “Mum I did it!” Now she is learning ice skating every week, but what has been most interesting for her mother is the way Ruiya quickly accepted the situation of the pandemic. “We explained to her the pandemic situation and why we should not shake hands now. She picked it up very fast and follows it with great discipline,” explained Zuweina. But Ruiya’s frequent question is, “When will Corona end?” “She loves socialising, having birthday parties and being with her friends all of which have come to a standstill for Ruiya during the

pandemic. She has lots of hobbies and one of them is baking. The pictorial description at the back of the box helps her tremendously and so she enjoys making them. She likes cooking”, her mother reflected. Ruiya speaks two languages — Arabic and English. She has a presence on Instagram, where she likes to demonstrate DIY projects like tie and dye and making hot chocolate milk during winter nights. HER DREAM? To be a nursery teacher — one more reason why she cannot wait for the pandemic to come to an end is to explore and develop her

skills in this area. Her mother has been doing research. “Studies prove that they can be great at nurseries because individuals with Down Syndrome are wonderful with children.” MOTHER’S DREAM “I wish we can have options for teenagers like in other countries so they can also work later as they do in other countries. Now they do not have any place where they can go for training”, she said. “All parents with Down Syndrome children must be working very hard to get their children to develop the life skills as well as the talent to bring out the best in them”, she noted.



Oman Air marks anniversary

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAR 21

Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate, on Sunday celebrated the 28th anniversary of its first-ever flight, which took place between Muscat and Salalah in March 1993.

The inaugural flight, operated by Boeing 737-300, saw the beginning of the airline's regional footprint in Oman and launched four months ahead of its first international flight to Dubai in July the same year.

Oman Air, which is recognised as a major global airline connecting cities across the world to Oman, Air has played a major role in making Muscat a leading traffic hub in the Middle East and supporting commercial, industrial and tourism activities.

The Oman Air fleet consists



of modern, fuel-efficient aircraft with attractive, award-winning interiors.

Oman Air is certified as a Five Star Airline for the quality of its onboard product and staff service.

Most recently, Oman Air earned a Five Star rating in the Major Airline category from the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX), a globally recognised organisation. This award was given to less than 10

per cent of the world's airlines.

"Oman Air has come a long way since our beginnings as a regional carrier," remarked Abdulaziz al Raisi, CEO of Oman Air.

"From connecting local communities here at home, we've since expanded our reach to connect Oman to the rest of the world, uniting families and loved ones for 28 years. It's a milestone that we're proud to celebrate, and we look forward

to continuing our remarkable journey in the years ahead."

"Oman Air strives continuously to maintain the highest standards of performance in all aspects of its operations. Its fleet comprises ultra-modern, fuel-efficient aircraft renowned for their aesthetically designed interiors, with innovative in-flight service equipment delivering exceptional onboard safety and performance. Ongoing investment in the latest technologies, planning, and product innovation has helped propel Oman Air to the forefront of modern aviation."

Prior to Covid-19 related travel restrictions, Oman Air operated a network of 50 destinations in 27 countries from its primary hub at Muscat International Airport, with a fleet of 53 including the Boeing Dreamliner and 737 Max types.

National Museum corner at Al Mouj

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

History lovers and those who love the rare collections kept at the National Museum will have an opportunity to see them at the Al Mouj Muscat.

A range of such artefacts is to be displayed at the Al Mouj Muscat's new Community Hub along with a library of cultural resources.

Many museum exhibits and art pieces of local artists will feature the National Museum Corner located within the iconic community hub. It will have

the opportunity to host cultural events in its public spaces.

"This is an initiative to foster mutual collaboration in the cultural field based on broad goals of the museum," said Jamal bin Hassan al Moosawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum.

He said the initiative will help maintain a direct link between Omanis and their heritage while enhancing connectivity between the past and future through the present.

This reaching out will also highlight Oman's cultural heritage to domestic and international audiences.

SAF chief receives French naval commander

MUSCAT: Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis bin Abdullah al Raeesi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), on Sunday received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa Rear Admiral Jacques Fayard, French Joint Forces Commander in the Indian Ocean and his accompanying delegation, currently visiting the Sultanate.

The two sides exchanged viewpoints and discussed military matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Brig Abdulaziz bin Abdullah al Manthri, SAF Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Planning and the Military Attaché at the French Embassy in Muscat.

VISIT TO MARITIME SECURITY CENTER

Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser bin Mohsen al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), received at Maritime Security Center (MSC) on Sunday French commander and his delegation, currently visiting the Sultanate.

The meeting discussed views on several



matters relating to the naval fields between the two friendly countries.

The meeting was attended by the MSC Acting Chairman and the Military Attaché of the French Embassy in Muscat.

The French guest, accompanied by the RNO Commander, toured the MSC's

facilities.

He was briefed on the tasks and roles of the centre in managing and leading operations of maritime security in terms of maritime hazards, mainly search and rescue operations and protecting the marine environment from various risks. — ONA

Omani students in UK gearing up for time difference, sunny days and Ramadhan

SAUD AL BUSAIDI

MUSCAT, MARCH 21

On March 28 the time difference between Oman and the UK will be three hours. It was four hours since October. The change in the clock occurs twice a year, as it goes one hour back at 2 am on the last Sunday in October and goes forward 1 hour at 1 am on the last Sunday in March.

Interestingly, some people do not notice the change, as most devices that are connected to the Internet, do the change automatically.

Some people have a genuine grievance of losing one hour of sleep that particular night. The good side of this change is that the hours of daylight increase. This also means that people can stay outside the home for long hours.

For Majid al Rahbi, a final year student at the University of West of England, the winter nights are 'gloomy' because of "too cold and long".

From the perspective of Covid, by March 29, according to the UK government's website, the stay-at-



home rule will come to end. This means that people — with other households or within the 'rule of six' — will be allowed to meet outside.

However, in England, all shops will not be allowed to open until April 12. For the Omani students, this means some ray of hope, including the change in the clock.

"The latter means that they will have longer daylight hours, with which they can do plenty of activities. This includes meeting only one of their friends, doing exercises outside the home, and having enough time to go shopping for necessary things."

Majid said the change in the clock means sunnier days. For the Omanis families in Bristol and

the UK in general, an extra hour of daylight means that they can take their children out or play at their nearest parks.

Majid said shorter daylight hours mean that the night comes fast, and people hurry to go back home. People stay longer hours at home during the winter. For Majid, longer daylight hours mean staying at the library for longer hours, which means more productive days.

As the clock changes in the month of Shaaban, according to the Islamic calendar, some students say that the long daylight hours also mean fasting for long hours in Ramadhan.

Ramadhan will probably begin in the UK on April 14. On that day, the Fajr prayer is going to be at 4.34 am, while the Magrib prayer is going to be at 8.06 pm. This means that Muslims in the UK will be fasting for around 15 hours and 32 minutes. In Oman, however, Muslims will fast for 14 hours and 4 minutes.

Omani students in Bristol are looking forward to the end of the third lockdown, the clock change, and enjoying Eid in the UK.

Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection Authority

SAUD BAHWAN Group

Ford Recall Campaign



Service Campaign on : 2016-2018 MKX, 2015-2018 Edge, 2013-2017 MKZ & 2013-2017 Fusion
Date of Campaign : 21/03/2021
Recall Type : Safety
Product Description : Front brake hoses

Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected vehicle VIN / Chassis Range	No. of Affected vehicles
2016 - 2018	LINCOLN	MKX	2LMPJ8KP2HBL21682 - 2LMPJ8LP5GBL45715 2LMTJ6JRXGBL70262 - 2LMTJ8KP4GBL89270	24
2013 - 2017		MKZ	3LN6L2GK7FR605626 - 3LN6L2GK0ER836284	48
2015 - 2018	FORD	EDGE	2FMPK4K97GBC19103 - 2FMPK4G82GBB90738	159
2013 - 2017		FUSION	3FA6P0G79GR128343 - 3FA6P0H71ER395696 WF0FCADC5HVL34323 - WF0FCADC7HVL53195	423

Description of defect:

In some of the affected vehicles, the front brake hose may be prone to rupture under certain operating conditions resulting, increased brake pedal travel and extended stopping distances, increasing the risk of an accident.

Procedure:

Replace the front brake hoses

For More Information:

Customers of affected vehicles may please contact M/s. Arabian Car Marketing Co. LLC for further details/booking appointment etc. from 21/03/2021 onwards.

Contact Details:

Toll free No.80073111 on all working days (Sunday to Thursday) between 08:00 to 17:00 hrs.

Palestinians roll out vaccines as Coronavirus cases spike

RAMALLAH: Thousands of Palestinian health workers, the elderly, and patients with cancer or kidney disease were set to get Covid-19 vaccines from Sunday as the health ministry ramped up its inoculation campaign.

The rollout came days after some 60,000 doses of Pfizer/BioNTech and AstraZeneca doses arrived in the Israeli-occupied West Bank via the Covax scheme of the World Health Organization.

Cases of Covid-19 have spiked in the enclave in recent weeks, sparking a flood of patients hospital officials say they are struggling to treat.

Palestinians in the West Bank and the Israeli-blockaded Gaza Strip have had limited access to vaccines compared to Israelis, roughly half of whom have received the recommended two shots of the Pfizer/BioNTech jab.

Israel has resisted calls from rights groups and the United Nations to inoculate all Palestinians, saying the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority is responsible for obtaining vaccines.

The Israeli army says it has vaccinated some 100,000 Palestinian workers who have permits to enter Israel and West Bank Jewish settlements.

About 60,000 doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine have reached Gaza from the United Arab Emirates.

Those deliveries were orchestrated by prominent Palestinian political figure Mohammed Dahlan, a rival of president Mahmud Abbas exiled in Abu Dhabi.

The Palestinian Authority is



A Palestinian healthcare worker administers the vaccine to a patient at the start of the inoculation campaign in the West Bank city of Ramallah. — AFP

waiting for another 100,000 doses from China.

Abbas on Saturday published a photograph of himself getting vaccinated. It was not clear when the picture was taken.

The Palestinian health ministry said in early March that top Palestine Liberation Organisation officials over the age of 65 had been given shots. Abbas is 85.

As of Sunday, 2,416 people had died of Covid-19 in the West Bank

Cases of Covid-19 have spiked in the enclave in recent weeks, sparking a flood of patients hospital officials say are struggling to treat

and Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

Another 221,500 were reported infected cross the two Palestinian

territories.

In Israel, more than 6,000 people have died of Covid-19, but the infection rate has plummeted and only about 18,300 people were sick with Covid-19 Sunday, the Israeli Ministry of Health reported.

The Palestinian vaccine campaign comes ahead of the first Palestinian election in 15 years. Legislative elections are scheduled for May 22 and a presidential vote for the end of July. — AFP

Saudi Arabia, UAE expand vaccination drive

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia and neighbouring United Arab Emirates said on Sunday health authorities have expanded Covid-19 vaccinations to all citizens and residents aged 16 and above as Gulf states race to bring the virus under control.

Riyadh said the health ministry will start inoculating its population aged 16 and above with Pfizer vaccines, while its citizens and residents aged 18 and above will have Astrazeneca shots. It did not provide further details.

The government said on Saturday around 3 million vaccines had been distributed across 500 vaccination centres.

The UAE, the region's commercial and tourism hub and a global travel centre, has set a blistering pace for its vaccine rollout to keep its economy open for business. It ranks second globally behind Israel for doses per 100 people.

The Emirati health ministry urged its citizens and residents aged 16 and over to

register for Covid-19 vaccinations, a statement published on state media late on Saturday said. The move, it said, comes after nearly 73 per cent of elderly Emiratis, residents and those with chronic diseases have been vaccinated.

The country is providing four types of vaccine free of charge. The UAE's daily Covid-19 cases surged to nearly 4,000 in late January from about 600 in September after Dubai opened its doors to visitors during the peak winter tourism season.

The rate has fallen after authorities tightened restrictions at public venues but stopped short of imposing new lockdowns. Some restrictions have since been eased but mask-wearing in public and social distancing are still required.

The UAE, which does not give a breakdown for each of its seven emirates, registered 2,013 new infections on Saturday to take its total tally to 438,638 with 1,433 deaths. — Reuters

In pandemic year, Syrians blocked from Zoom, Netflix

DAMASCUS: Virtual platforms like Netflix and Zoom have emerged as lifelines for a pandemic-hit world forced indoors, but in sanctioned Syria where both websites are blocked, Mohammad Habash feels increasingly disconnected.

"We are living in a bubble isolated from the outside world," the 35-year-old tech expert says from an electronics repair shop in Damascus.

"This isolation has meant that an entire generation of young Syrians is technologically disadvantaged compared to their global peers."

Even before the war started in

Syria is among only four countries without access to Netflix and also only one of five countries barred from Zoom

2011, tech giants like Amazon, Apple and Google couldn't freely operate in Syria because of US sanctions forbidding the export, sale or supply of goods, software, technology and services without US government authorisation.

The tight restrictions, although rare, are not unique to the war-torn country. They also apply to



Zeina Shahla, a Syrian journalist, checks her twitter at a cafe in Damascus. — AFP

other US-sanctioned states such as North Korea.

While they were intended to weaken the Syrian government, the controls have also restricted access to an online universe that helped many cope with coronavirus confinement.

"Syrians can't access any Western platform on the Internet — not for education, online shopping, work or leisure," says Habash.

"This became even clearer to us last year with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic."

Syria is among only four countries without access to Netflix, the world's top movie

streaming platform. Syria is also only one of five countries barred from Zoom — the new leader in video conferencing applications.

Such codes can't be sent to numbers registered in Syria, effectively blocking Syrian users, unless they rely on numbers of friends abroad.

To compensate for Netflix, Syrians in Damascus resort to pirated movies and television series sold on discs and hard drives.

As an alternative to Zoom, many opt for WhatsApp or Skype, both of which offer a video call option.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

ISTANBUL/AMMAN

5 killed as rockets hit hospital in Aleppo

Seven civilians were killed and at least 14 medics were injured when artillery shelling from a Syrian army outpost hit a hospital in a rebel-held town in northwestern Syria, medics and rescuers said.

They said a woman and a child were among those killed when several mortar rounds hit the hospital in the city of Atareb which was taken out of service. Turkey's defence ministry earlier said five people were killed and 10 injured in an artillery attack



on a hospital in northwest Syria, where they have a military presence. Videos received from two witnesses showed a ward damaged and civil defence rescuers carrying blood-stained patients outside. — Reuters

CAIRO

Arab author, women's rights icon dies

Famed Egyptian author Nawal el Saadawi, a champion of women's rights who revolutionised discussions on gender in the Arab world, died at the age of 89, *Al Ahram* newspaper said. Saadawi died in a Cairo hospital after suffering a long illness, her family said. A prolific author who shot to fame with the widely translated novel 'Women at Point Zero' (1975), Saadawi was a fierce advocate for women's empowerment in Egypt's deeply conservative and patriarchal



society. With more than 55 books to her name including the taboo-breaking work, she was briefly jailed by late president Anwar Sadat and also condemned by Al Azhar, the highest authority in Egypt. — AFP

FIGUIG

Border farmers protest over Algeria evictions

Hundreds of Moroccans protested after Algeria expelled farmers from a disputed border area where they had long been allowed to farm dates. The border between Algeria and Morocco has been closed since 1994, but Algiers had allowed some 30 Moroccan farming households to use an area of farmland known to Moroccans as Arjal and to Algerians as the Laaroda oasis.

Algiers had given "Moroccan farmers exploiting these Algerian lands an agreed timeframe



to leave the area" and closed the border post at midnight Wednesday evening, according to the official Algerian news agency APS. — AFP

In brief

■ KABUL



AFGHAN PRESIDENT DISMISSES INTERIOR MINISTER

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has dismissed Interior Minister Masoud Andarabi, the national security council said, amid a spate of attacks against the country's security forces. The current chief of army staff General Yasin Zia has been appointed acting defence minister until Asadullah Khalid recovers from an illness which has hospitalised him for months, the statement also said.

It did not give further details on Andarabi's dismissal but a security official said the former minister had failed to arrest a militia commander whose forces shot down a helicopter in central Wardak province on Thursday. — Reuters

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES TO EXPAND CORONAVIRUS CURBS

The Philippines will expand tighter Covid-19 restrictions to include four provinces surrounding the capital region, President Rodrigo Duterte's spokesman said on Sunday, as the country battles a renewed surge in infections.

The restrictions currently in effect in Metropolitan Manila will also be imposed in the provinces of Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna and Rizal, including night curfews and the prohibition of mass gatherings, Harry Roque said.

The Philippines recorded 7,757 additional Covid-19 cases on Sunday, the second-highest single-day increase in the Southeast Asian nation since the pandemic began. — Reuters

■ BANGKOK



DOZENS OF THAI PROTESTERS INJURED AFTER RALLY

More than 30 civilians and police were injured in anti-government protests in Thailand, an emergency medical centre said on Sunday after police used water cannon, teargas and rubber bullets to disperse the rally the night before.

Video circulated on social media showed police hitting and stomping on people with others fleeing from police in riot gear and some abandoning their motorcycles.

Another video showed people taking refuge from teargas in a restaurant.

Thirteen police officers and 20 others were injured, the Erawan Medical Centre said.

— Reuters



North Korean Embassy Counsellor Kim Yu Song reads a statement outside the compounds of the North Korean Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

North Koreans leave Malaysia after ties cut

KUALA LUMPUR: North Korea's diplomats in Malaysia shuttered their embassy and flew out of the country on Sunday, after Pyongyang severed diplomatic ties over the extradition of a citizen to the United States.

Pyongyang announced the shock move on Friday, labelling Malaysia's extradition of a North Korean man an "unpardonable crime" carried out under "blind obedience" to American pressure.

The Southeast Asian country had been one of Pyongyang's few allies but ties were already strained following the 2017 assassination of leader Kim Jong Un's half-brother at Kuala Lumpur airport.

A court ruling this month that Mun Chol Myong could be extradited to the United

States to face trial for allegedly exporting prohibited items to North Korea in violation of sanctions proved the final blow.

After Pyongyang cut ties, Malaysia gave North Korean diplomats 48 hours to leave the country.

On Sunday, the North Korean flag and a plaque were taken down from the country's embassy — a large house in an upmarket area of Kuala Lumpur — and the gates were chained up.

Before departing, North Korean charge d'affaires, Kim Yu Song, accused Malaysia of siding with Washington in a "conspiracy" against Pyongyang, and committing a "large hostile act".

Malaysia had aligned its policies with those of the United States. — AFP



A still image taken from video shows a flooded area following heavy rains in Port Macquarie, New South Wales. — Reuters

Heavy rains in Australia's east bring worst floods in 50 years

MELBOURNE: Heavy rains along Australia's east coast over the weekend have brought the worst flooding in half a century in some areas, authorities said on Sunday, forcing thousands to evacuate and damaging hundreds of houses.

New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said the downpour across the state, Australia's most populous with 8 million people, was worse than initially expected, especially for low-lying areas in Sydney's northwest.

"Yesterday, we were hoping it will only be a one-in-20-year event, now it looks like a one-in-50-year event", Berejiklian said at a televised briefing.

People in parts of Sydney's northwest were ordered to flee their houses in the middle of

the night as fast-moving waters caused widespread destruction. Late on Sunday, about another 1,000 people were asked to evacuate, after Berejiklian said that some 4,000 people may be asked to leave their houses.

Television and social media footage showed fast-moving water unmooring houses, engulfing roads, breaking trees and damaging road infrastructure. Emergency services estimate the total number of damaged houses to be "in the hundreds".

Several major roads were closed across the state while many schools called off classes for Monday.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison in a Facebook post announced federal financial assistance for those affected.

Health workers protest in Myanmar after crackdown

YANGON: Doctors and nurses in central Myanmar rallied in the streets at first light on Sunday, avoiding a confrontation with security forces after another deadly weekend crackdown on anti-coup protesters.

The country has been in turmoil since soldiers ousted civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi last month, triggering nationwide protests demanding a return to democracy.

Security forces have responded with lethal force, using live rounds along with tear gas and rubber bullets in an effort to bring the demonstrations to heel.

The violence failed to deter hundreds of doctors and nurses donning hard hats and brandishing posters of Suu Kyi as they marched through Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city and cultural capital.

Mandalay has been the scene of some of the worst violence from police and troops since the coup and local media said the rally was staged at dawn to evade security forces. The protests came a day after a local monitoring group confirmed the killing of four protesters at the hands of security forces around the country.

Two of the deaths were in Yangon, the country's commercial hub, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP).

Mourners in the city farewelled a 26-year-old who died on



Medical staff and students take part in an early morning protest against the military coup and crackdown by security forces on demonstrations in Mandalay. — AFP

The violence failed to deter hundreds of doctors, nurses donning hard hats and brandishing posters of Suu Kyi

Saturday while in custody after being shot and arrested the previous night. Myo Myint Aung's mother cried over the coffin at the funeral service, saying that her son was still a child in her eyes.

"I am really proud of what you did for democracy and this country", she said, in a video of the funeral service posted on social media. "You are a real hero."

Overnight, protesters staged a candlelight protest in the northern

town of Kale and left signs on the street calling for United Nations intervention to stop the violence in Myanmar.

Nearly 250 deaths have been confirmed in the weeks since the coup, the AAPP reported, although the true toll could be higher. More than 2,300 others have been arrested, the group said.

International condemnation by Washington, Brussels and the United Nations has so far failed to halt the bloodshed.

European Union foreign ministers are expected to approve sanctions against 11 junta officials at a meeting on Monday.

Meanwhile, Australia's foreign ministry confirmed Sunday it was providing consular assistance to two of its nationals in Myanmar.

— AFP

Religious gathering worries India as Covid cases surge

NEW DELHI: India's health ministry warned on Sunday that a huge gathering of devotees for a Hindu festival could send coronavirus cases surging, as the country recorded the most new infections in nearly four months.

The ministry said up to 40 people were testing positive for Covid-19 daily around the site of the weeks-long Mahakumbh that began this month and peaks in April in the Himalayan holy town of Haridwar, next to the Ganges.

Organisers have said more than 150 million visitors are expected, as many Hindus believe bathing in the river during this period absolves people of sins and bring salvation from the cycle of life and death.

In a letter to the state government of Uttarakhand, where Haridwar is located, the ministry told local authorities their daily coronavirus testing of 55,000 people in Haridwar was not enough given the large numbers of pilgrims expected, and that cases were already rising.

"This positivity rate has the potential to rapidly turn into an upsurge in cases, given the expected large footfall during Kumbh", the ministry said in a statement, citing the letter.

"Currently more than 12 states in India have shown a surge in Covid-19 cases during the past few weeks, and pilgrims expected to visit Haridwar during the Kumbh Mela could also be from these states."

Uttarakhand's government says it has made mask-wearing



A wall mural depicting medical staff as frontline coronavirus warriors in Mumbai. — AFP

mandatory for devotees, would distribute millions of masks for free and also keep sanitising public areas, apart from following rules laid down by the federal government.

India reported 43,846 new coronavirus cases in the past 24 hours, with its richest state Maharashtra again accounting for about 60 per cent of the infections.

Deaths rose by 197, the highest in more than two months, to 159,755, data from the health ministry showed.

India's new Covid-19 cases peaked at nearly 100,000 a day in September, and had been falling steadily until late last month.

But now five states — Maharashtra, Punjab, Karnataka, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh — account for nearly 78 per cent of the new cases. Maharashtra, home to India's financial capital Mumbai, alone reported 27,126 cases and 92 deaths.

As cases increase, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has been criticised for exporting more vaccines than the number of people inoculated at home so far. — Reuters



Two soldiers from the first protection battalion of the incumbent Congo President, Denis Sassou block crowds of supporters as he leaves the polling station after casting his ballot in Brazzaville. – AFP

Internet blackout as Congo votes, with Sassou set to win

BRAZZAVILLE: The Republic of Congo voted on Sunday in a presidential election boycotted by the main opposition and attacked by critics as tilted towards veteran leader Denis Sassou Nguesso. Access to the Internet and social media was cut hours before polls opened at 7 am, AFP correspondents said.

The 77-year-old Sassou Nguesso is widely expected to win against six contenders, led by economist Guy-Brice Parfait Kolelas, who revealed on Saturday that he is gravely ill with Covid-19. Sassou Nguesso, a former paratrooper, first rose to power in 1979 and has since accumulated 36 years in office, making him one of the world's longest-serving leaders. He is hoping for a first-round victory to secure a fourth term running the central African oil exporter.

Speaking after he cast his own vote, Sassou Nguesso said that the “atmosphere of peace” during the election campaign — marked by police crackdowns on the opposition — was “a good sign for our democracy”.

But when asked about security when election results are announced, which triggered a wave of violence at the last vote in 2016, he responded: “I’m not God”.

Sassou Nguesso also confirmed that a medical plane had arrived in capital Brazzaville that could bring his opponent Kolelas to Paris for treatment on election day, wishing him “get well soon”. Kolelas had posted a video message on Saturday from his sickbed, declaring he was “battling against death” after taking off a respiratory mask.

— AFP

Germany mulls fresh virus curbs amid growing Europe protests

BERLIN: Europe grappled with resurgent coronavirus infections on Sunday, prompting Germany to consider extending restrictions into April despite street protests and EU leaders to abandon plans to attend a summit on the pandemic.

Thousands of protesters angry at Covid-19 restrictions rallied in cities across Europe over the weekend, even as several nations reimposed partial lockdowns to fight new surges in infections.

A memo from several of Germany’s regions, Chancellor Angela Merkel wanted to extend the country’s partial lockdown into April because of rising infection rates driven by Covid variants.

Travel needs to be cut to a minimum, with quarantines and negative tests required for those re-entering Germany, the memo warned.

The prospect of further curbs will infuriate the thousands of protesters who marched against existing restrictions in the Germany city of Kassel on Saturday.

Police there used water cannon, batons and pepper spray to disperse the crowds, which they estimated to number up to 20,000.

The march was organised by activists from both the far-left and the far-right, as well as peddlers of baseless conspiracy theories about the pandemic and vaccines.

Protesters also marched in Amsterdam, Vienna, the Bulgarian capital Sofia, and Switzerland over the weekend. Thousands also protested the coronavirus restrictions in



Tourists from Germany arrive at Palma de Mallorca Airport following Berlin's lifted quarantine requirement for travellers returning from the Balearic Islands amid the coronavirus disease pandemic, Palma de Mallorca, Spain. – Reuters

London on Saturday, many of them carrying signs promoting coronavirus conspiracy theories.

Britain on Sunday warned the EU over its threat to halt exports of AstraZeneca’s vaccines, in a row that has heightened post-Brexit tensions between London and Brussels.

“If contracts get broken, and undertakings, that is a very damaging thing to happen for a trading block that prides itself on the rule of law,” Defence Secretary Ben Wallace told Sky News.

Anglo-Swedish pharma giant AstraZeneca has delivered only 30 per cent of the 90 million doses it promised the EU for the first quarter, infuriating European leaders and complicating the continent’s already struggling

Chancellor Merkel wants to extend the country’s partial lockdown into April because of rising infection rates

rollout.

Brussels has accused London of operating its own de facto export ban to achieve its vaccine success, a claim furiously denied by the British government.

The coronavirus, which has killed more than 2.7 million people, has been spreading faster recently, with new infections up globally by 14 per cent in the last week, according to data.

In Europe, residents in Poland,

parts of France, and Ukraine’s capital Kiev were the latest to face fresh curbs from Saturday.

But restrictions were also returning in parts of Asia.

US authorities have meanwhile imposed a state of emergency and a curfew in Miami Beach, Florida, to deal with uncontrollable crowds partying during spring break.

With approximately 13 per cent of US residents vaccinated, many seemed convinced against all the evidence that the pandemic is now under control in the world’s worst-hit nation.

“Just go get your vaccine y’all so that you could come out here and have a good time like us because we vaccinated, baby,” Jalen Rob, a student from Texas, said. — AFP

Large asteroid to safely zip past Earth as Nasa says no collision threat

PARIS: The largest asteroid to pass by Earth this year will swing closest on Sunday, giving astronomers a rare chance for a good look at a space rock that formed at the dawn of our solar system.

While in astronomical terms this marks a close encounter with the asteroid — called 2001 FO32 — Nasa says there is no threat of a collision with our planet “now or for centuries to come”.

The nearest it will get will be two million kilometres away, according to the US space agency.

That is roughly 5.25 times the distance of the Earth from the

“
The asteroid will be brightest while it moves through southern skies

PAUL CHODAS,
Director, Centre for Near Earth Object Studies

Moon but still close enough for 2001 FO32 to be classified as a “potentially hazardous asteroid.”

“We know the orbital path of 2001 FO32 around the Sun very



Large asteroid to (safely) zip past the Earth.

accurately,” said Paul Chodas, director of the Centre for Near Earth Object Studies.

Nasa says 2001 FO32 will pass by at about 124,000 kilometres per hour faster than the speed at which most asteroids encounter Earth.

The asteroid is estimated to be about 3,000 feet in diameter and was discovered 20 years ago.

Astronomers are hoping to get a better understanding of the asteroid’s size and a rough idea of its composition by studying light reflecting off its surface.

“When sunlight hits an asteroid’s surface, minerals in the rock absorb some wavelengths

while reflecting others,” Nasa said.

“By studying the spectrum of light reflecting off the surface, astronomers can measure the chemical ‘fingerprints’ of the minerals on the surface of the asteroid.”

The asteroid will be at its closest to Earth at around 16:00 GMT on Sunday, according to the Paris Observatory, France’s largest astronomy research centre.

Amateur astronomers in some parts of the globe should be able to conduct their own observations.

The asteroid will be brightest while it moves through southern skies, Chodas said. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

LA PAZ

Bolivia ex-president’s detention extended

Former Bolivian interim president Jeanine Anez’s pre-trial detention was extended by two months on Saturday, as a prison official announced the ex-leader will receive medical care at the La Paz penitentiary where she is being held.

Authorities arrested and detained Anez, 53, last weekend on charges — deemed trumped-up by opposition politicians — of leading a coup d’etat against her socialist predecessor, Evo Morales.



Anez was transferred on Saturday to the Miraflores Women’s Penitentiary from another detention centre in the Bolivian capital, following what the ex-president said was a “hypertension crisis.” — Reuters

LONDON

British royals eye diversity chief

Buckingham Palace is to consider appointing a diversity chief as “more needs to be done” to address the issue, a royal source has said. The proposals, which have the “full support” of the royal family, aim to seek independent views to help assess and improve representation across the royal household.

It comes after the duke and duchess of Sussex claimed in an explosive interview with Oprah Winfrey that a member of the family — not the queen or the



duke of Edinburgh — had made a racist comment about their son Archie. While the work being undertaken around diversity pre-dates the couple’s interview, their comments will be taken on board as part of the process, it is understood. — dpa

MOSCOW

Launch postponed for Russian rocket

The launch of a Russian Soyuz rocket with 38 foreign satellites on board has been postponed until Monday, the Russian space agency Roscosmos said. The launch of satellites from more than half a dozen Asian, Arab and European countries, as well as Canada and Brazil, was originally scheduled for 06:07 GMT on Saturday.

It was initially postponed until Sunday, but Roscosmos later said it would take place on Monday. Space agency chief Dmitry Rogozin said the launch



was delayed after a surge in voltage was detected. “Having heard reports from the work managers, the State Commission decided to conduct the launch on the morning of March 22, 2021,” Roscosmos said in a later statement. — AFP

Be always blessed all mothers!

A mother is the first teacher for children, learning the rules of race, laws, moral codes, the manner of men and principles too. She is responsible for maintaining the ultimate discipline in the family.

As a mother, she is a family health officer who gets worried and concerned about the physical welfare of every family member! As the word, “mother” cannot be termed in a single phrase; it personifies all love that human being could possibly offer.

A mother is not just someone who gives birth to a child as we all know. However, a mother represents the combination of feelings, behaviours and sacrifices offered while bringing up a child. Whether that child is biologically hers or not, all mothers generally share the same feelings.

Kahlil Gibran had better described a mother as the most beautiful word on the lips of mankind. May the Almighty Allah bless all mothers.

A mother’s love is peace for all, so it needs not to be acquired, but to be deserved. Generally, motherhood is where love begins and ends. Therefore, it might be impossible to count the ways by which a mother expresses her love. Where loving warmth meets a teachable moment is where you will find a mother, who is confidently



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AS THE WORD,
“MOTHER”
CANNOT BE
TERMED IN A
SINGLE PHRASE;
IT PERSONIFIES
ALL LOVE THAT
HUMAN BEING
COULD POSSIBLY
OFFER

applying her exceptional ability to be everything that a person will ever need.

With her capability for adapting, a mother goes from being a teacher to a comforter to a selfless giver in just a matter of minutes. She is the only woman in the world who will constantly forgive your lies, no matter how big they are. Your mother will still give you that warm smile just minutes after you misbehaved and made her angry. A mother will tolerate the pain caused when you reject her. She will be the only one supporting and lifting your spirit up whenever you are feeling down. A mother’s sacrifices are countless indeed!

A mother would always leave her personal desires behind, so her children can have everything they need. A mother will protect her children at the price of her own life. for instance, she won’t sleep or eat until you come back home and make sure you are safe and sound. With unconditional love, she does all these things and won’t stop just because you are 40 years old and live in a different place or home.

In Islam, mothers have been praised highly and accorded great honour. In different verses, the Holy Quran stressed a mother’s burden and the respect she deserves. Some verses

addressed mothers’ difficulties of pregnancy, labour and breastfeeding and so the need to respect one’s mother. The verses say: “And We have enjoined upon man, to his parents, good treatment. His mother carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship and his gestation and weaning period is thirty months.”

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) underlined a mother’s value, saying, “A man came to the Prophet and said, ‘O Messenger of God! Who among the people is the most worthy of my good companionship? The Prophet (PBUH) said: Your mother. The man said, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man further asked, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your mother. The man asked again, ‘Then who?’ The Prophet said: Then your father”. There are many instances where the Prophet commanded Muslims to respect their mothers.

Dear mothers, although motherhood is a challenging mission, it is a great honour too. Mothers are every day called upon to selflessly meet the needs of their families. Whether they are awake at night nursing a baby, spending their time and money on their teenagers or preparing meals, mothers constantly put others before themselves.

WRITE FOR US

Oman Daily Observer welcomes original contributions for publication in its opinion page. The newspaper reserves the right to publish or edit the article accordingly. The article’s length must not exceed 550 words. Please send the articles to opinion@omanobserver.om

DIGITAL LAGGARD

Pandemic leaves Italy scrambling to catch up

VALENTINA ZA AND ELVIRA POLLINA

Small Italian car filter supplier Ecofiltri took out a state-backed loan last year, just like thousands of other businesses fighting to keep afloat during the pandemic.

But instead of burning through the cash to pay overdue rent and bills, Ecofiltri is investing the money on a technological revamp of its business. Already facing a longer-term switch to electric transport, the company was spurred to act after the virus crisis cut the number of drivers on the road.

“We’ve expanded our facilities, bought high-tech equipment and even created an R&D department where we are working on three projects we hope we can patent to provide more intelligent products and services,” Ecofiltri co-founder Simone Scafetta said over a video call.

Italy ranked fourth to last in the EU for digital competitiveness in 2019, according to the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI). By forcing a huge technological acceleration on the country, the pandemic is offering Italy a one-off chance to boost its feeble productivity and economic growth.

Faster economic expansion is essential for Rome to sustain the world’s third-largest public debt which the pandemic has inflated to 1.6 times gross domestic product (GDP). Research by Milan’s Politecnico University shows Italy could add 1.9 percentage points a year on average to its GDP growth if its small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) bridged a 40 per cent gap versus Spanish peers measured by indicators ranging from e-commerce capabilities or electronic invoicing to use of big data.

“But the trick only works if businesses switch from a (crisis-driven) reactive approach to technology to a strategic one, and the environment where they operate evolves with them,” said Giorgia Sali who heads Politecnico’s research hub on SMEs and digital innovation. Italy estimates its businesses in recent years fell behind the rest of Europe in terms of digital investment by an amount roughly equal to 2 percentage points of GDP.

The pandemic has brought a welcome shift, with 86 per cent of Italian respondents in a survey of mid- to large-sized firms commissioned by Dell Technologies saying they sped up digital transformation plans in 2020, above a 75 per cent European average.

— Reuters

VOTING FOR PEACE

East Jerusalem’s Palestinians torn between two elections

HIBA ASLAN

Even if they pay their taxes to Israel, east Jerusalem’s Palestinians will be barred from voting in Tuesday’s election because the Jewish state does not consider them as citizens.

Israel, which sees the Holy City as its undivided capital, annexed east Jerusalem in 1967 and views the estimated 300,000 Palestinians who live there as mere residents.

These Palestinians have social rights, access to health care and resident’s cards, but no passports.

They can only vote for municipal councillors but not in national elections — unless they break a taboo and obtain Israeli citizenship. But by doing so they forfeit the right to vote in Palestinian polls.

With Israel’s fourth election in under two years due on March 23 and the first Palestinian polls in 15 years planned for later this year, the focus is again on the complex situation faced by these Palestinians.

Jerusalem’s status is one of the thorniest issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the international community insisting that it must be negotiated by the two sides. Israel views the whole city as its capital while the Palestinians want east Jerusalem to be the capital of their own future state.

In recent years thousands of east Jerusalem Palestinians, hoping to improve their lives, have taken up Israeli citizenship. The trend gathered pace after former US President Donald Trump unilaterally recognised Jerusalem as Israel’s capital in December 2017. The following year, 1,064 East Jerusalem Palestinians



Palestinian, Israeli, and foreign activists lift banners and placards during a demonstration against Israeli occupation in Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, last Friday. — AFP

JERUSALEM’S STATUS IS ONE OF THE THORNIEST ISSUES OF THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT, WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY INSISTING THAT IT MUST BE NEGOTIATED BY THE TWO SIDES

applied for Israeli citizenship. Applications rose to 1,633 in 2020, according to Israeli authorities, who say that more than 1,800 were granted Israeli citizenship last year.

Palestinian teacher Nour Dwayyat, who received Israeli citizenship five years ago, voted in Israel’s last three elections and plans to cast her ballot again this time.

“I live in this country, I am part of it. It is my right to vote,” said the 34-year-old. “Every vote counts and I vote for candidates who act for the good of the Arab community.”

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hopes to clinch a new term after a successful coronavirus vaccination drive and establishing

diplomatic ties with several Arab countries.

East Jerusalem lawyer Amer Nasser — who also became an Israeli citizen a few years ago but insists he remains Palestinian through and through — said he had not been swayed by Netanyahu.

“I will vote for the Arab Joint List,” Nasser said of the alliance supported by many Arab Israelis, who make up a fifth of the population.

“Netanyahu is very interested in foreign relations with Arab countries and is not very interested in making peace with the Palestinians, despite the fact that they are originally the people of this region and live in it,” he said.

— AFP

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Manchester City's Ilkay Gundogan scores their first goal. – Reuters

Man City see off Everton with late show

LONDON: Manchester City's quest for an unprecedented quadruple of trophies remains intact after seeing off Everton 2-0 to reach the FA Cup semifinals on Saturday as Southampton also booked their place in the last four.

City were far from their flowing best at Goodison Park, but goals in the final six minutes from Ilkay Gundogan and Kevin De Bruyne booked City's place in the semifinals for the fourth time in five seasons.

Pep Guardiola described the clash as the toughest his side have had since November as they recorded a 25th win in 26 matches in all competitions.

"It was the toughest game since the last international break we had. We have been incredible in terms of results and performances

(over that period)," said Guardiola.

"Tonight was so difficult, they have experienced players behind the ball with two up for the counter-attack.

"It was incredible commitment from my players. An incredible victory."

City won the domestic treble of Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup for the first time in English football history two seasons ago and are firm favourites to repeat that feat.

Guardiola's men are 14 points clear at the top of the Premier League, face struggling Tottenham in the League Cup final next month and were drawn against Borussia Dortmund in the quarter-finals of the Champions League on Friday.

Oleksandr Zinchenko cleared Everton defender Yerry Mina's header off the line with the best effort either side mustered before half-time.

Joao Virginia started in goal for The Toffees for just the second time due to injuries to regular goalkeepers Jordan Pickford and Robin Olsen.

However, the 21-year-old Portuguese stopper produced a brilliant save early in the second-half to prevent Raheem Sterling converting Fernandinho's pinpoint low cross.

Guardiola was forced to introduce Riyad Mahrez and De Bruyne off the bench in the final quarter.

But it was Aymeric Laporte who opened Everton up as he broke forward from centre-back

ENGLISH FA CUP RESULTS ON SATURDAY:
QUARTERFINALS
Bournemouth 0 Southampton 3 (Djenepo 37, Redmond 45+2, 59)
Everton 0 Manchester City 2 (Gundogan 84, De Bruyne 90)

before Virginia brilliantly turned the Frenchman's initial effort onto the crossbar.

Gundogan was following up, though, to head into an empty net and end the resistance from Carlo Ancelotti's men.

De Bruyne then wrapped up the tie with a thundering finish in stoppage time as Everton appealed

in vain for a high boot by Mahrez on Mina.

CHANCE TO 'WRITE HISTORY'

Southampton cast aside their Premier League struggles to ease past Bournemouth 3-0 to reach the semifinals.

Ralph Hasenhuttl's side have slumped into the Premier League relegation battle after losing 10 of their last 12 top-flight matches.

But the Saints have been immune to those woes in the FA Cup and booked a place in the Wembley semifinals thanks to Nathan Redmond's double after Moussa Djenepo's opener.

While Premier League survival is the priority, Hasenhuttl insisted the FA Cup was a "big target" and he made just two changes against

a Bournemouth team who sat seventh in the Championship.

"I'm definitely happy, not only for coming to the next round but also for seeing a performance from my team that was very lively and by far one of the better ones in the (recent) past," said Hasenhuttl.

"I said in January that now is the time to take this chance because it's always a good chance for a smaller club like we are to write history."

In Sunday's two quarterfinals, Manchester United travel to Leicester in a clash between the teams second and third in the Premier League, while Chelsea aim to continue Thomas Tuchel's unbeaten start in charge at Stamford Bridge against manager-less Sheffield United. — AFP

Oman clinch four medals in Tunisia Para Athletics

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

The Sultanate paralympic delegation ended its participation at the 2021 World Para Athletics Grand Prix — 13th Tunis International Meeting on successful note with a haul of four medals. The event was held in Tunisia from March 15 to 20 and featured participation of more than 479 athletes representing 59 countries.

Oman's paralympic heroes bagged four medals including one gold, one silver and two bronze medals. Oman's top paralympic athlete Taha al Harrasi, claimed gold medal in 100 metres sprint after finishing in 12.93 seconds. Taha added bronze medal for the

Sultanate in the 200 metres sprint after completing the race in 26.97 seconds. His teammates, Qusai al Rawahi, managed to grab silver medal as he completed 200 metres in 24.22 seconds which is a new personal record.

Oman's Mohammed al Qasbi won bronze in sledge throwing.

Iman al Shamsi qualified to Tokyo Olympics 2020 after clearing the mark of 5.20 metres in shot put.

In the other competitions, Shiekha al Hammadi finished sixth in javelin with 10.15 points while Qusai al Rawahi was eighth in long jump with a clearance of 5.50 metres.

The World Para Athletics Grand Prix series are scheduled

for six events which will take place across the world from February to June ahead of the Tokyo Paralympic Games. Dubai had hosted the first series of Grand Prix' which was held from February 10 to 13. The Tunisia meet was the second series and featured participation of 700 Paralympic athletes representing 63 countries. The next series will be held in Jesolo 2021 GP — Italian Open Championships during April 16 to 18 while Paris will host Handisport Open Paris in May 5 to 7. Nottwil will be the next city to organise Para Athletics from May 14 to 16 while Beijing will host the 8th China Open Athletics Championships for which the dates will be announced later.



ARTT stun Zawawi to claim A Division title

MUSCAT: ARTT stormed past Zawawi Powertech in their final league match to emerge champions of Oman Cricket League 'A' Division on Friday.

ARTT won the toss and elected to bowl first.

Left-arm spinner VS Shiju, debutant for Team ARTT, helped prove the decision right by running through the entire top order and finishing with figures of 10 overs — 2 maiden — 5 wickets for 17 runs. Shiju was well helped by Moshin who got only one wicket, but bowled tight lines to not let Powertech get off the shackles. Struggling at 32 for 6 in 15 overs, Ibn Eameen and Aqil Khan wiped the tail with the scoreboard just reading 66.

Chasing just 67 for Championship, ARTT young



openers ferocious Adeel Abbas (13 runs in 11 balls) and cool headed Bilal Asim started positively against a strong bowling line-up of Powertech. At 18/1 in 3 overs,

Shehbaz Nasir came in with all guns blazing with 32 runs of just 27 deliveries to finish the game. Bilal held one side with a solid 10 not out. ARTT chased the score in just

11.5 overs only.

ARTT finished as champions and Sarco finished as runners-up. Zawawi Powertech finished on number three on net run rate. All



Left-arm spinner VS Shiju, debutant for Team ARTT, ran through the entire top order of Zawawi

In addition, we had Moshin and Ibn Eameen as our pacers who swing both ways. We also had a leg-spinner in Zeeshan Siddiqui and two off-spinners in Adeel Abbas and me. With too many options, we were confident that we wouldn't leak a lot of runs. And no matter what ever would be the score to chase, we were confident of chasing it as all our 11 players have a 40+ score in professional cricket."

Fiza, Payal and Priyanka walk away with top prizes at OC awards ceremony



Fiza Javed, best batswoman (PSM Women).



Payal Kanojia, best bowler (ISC Women).



Priyanka Mendonca, best all-rounder (ISC Women).

MUSCAT: Oman star Fiza Javed of PSM Women and Payal Kanojia of ISC Women were adjudged the best batswoman and best bowler of the recently concluded Oman Women's League T20 during a prize ceremony at OC Turf 1 in Al Amerat.

Asma'a al Maraghi, Managing Director, TM Done, was the chief guest and distributed prizes in the presence of senior Oman Cricket officials, players and parents.

Fiza played only three group games, scoring heavily including 102 not out against Wadi Kabir Women and 50 not out against Muscat Women, leading her side to emphatic victories. Amanda Dcosta of Muscat Women received a consolation prize for batting.

Danger woman Payal played a leading role in ISC reaching the final without losing a game, picking up 11 wickets in just 4 matches before taking another two in the final to emerge as the highest wicket-taker, along with Shreya Dhuri of OWCA, with a tally of 13 each. Shreya played a game more than Payal's five.

Nobody came close to the twin exploits of Priyanka Mendonca of ISC Women as she was adjudged the best all-rounder for scoring 176 runs in five games and taking 8 wickets too.

Tournament's super bat Nayan Anil also received a prize for scoring a brilliant hundred while Priyanka, Payal and Shreya all won prizes for taking five wickets in an innings.

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Kohli, Rohit star as India clinch series in decider

AHMEDABAD, India: Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma powered India to their best ever Twenty20 score against England as they clinched the series 3-2 with a convincing 36-run win on Saturday.

India captain Kohli hit an unbeaten 80 and shared an opening stand of 94 with Sharma, who made a blistering 64, as India reached 224 for two in an empty stadium in Ahmedabad.

After losing Jason Roy on the second ball of the innings, Dawid Malan made 68 and Jos Buttler 52 off 34 deliveries. But England could not keep up the chase and finished on 188 for eight.

The win was an important confidence boost for India before they host the T20 World Cup in October. They have won or drawn their last eight series.

Kohli said the result showed what India, just behind top-ranked England in the world T20 international rankings, can do when they are “firing”.

“India outplayed us in the big moments of the game,” England captain Eoin Morgan admitted.

For the second straight match, Morgan won the toss and saw India’s batters surge ahead.

SCOREBOARD

India	
R Sharma b Stokes	64
V Kohli (not out)	80
S Yadav c Roy b Rashid	32
H Pandya (not out)	39
Extras (LB-3, W-6)	9
Total (for 2 wks, 20 overs)	224
Fall of wickets: 1-94, 2-143	
Bowling: Rashid 4-0-31-1, Archer 4-0-43-0, Wood 4-0-53-0, Jordan 4-0-57-0, Curran 1-0-11-0, Stokes 3-0-26-1	
England	
J Roy b Kumar	0
J Buttler c Pandya b Kumar	52
D Malan b Thakur	68
J Bairstow c Yadav b Thakur	7
E Morgan c sub (Rahul) b Pandya	1
B Stokes c Pant b Natarajan	14
C Jordan c Yadav b Thakur	11
J Archer (run out)	1
S Curran (not out)	14
A Rashid (not out)	0
Extras (LB-9, W-11)	20
Total (for 8 wks, 20 overs)	188
Fall of wickets: 0-1, 2-130, 3-140, 4-142, 5-142, 6-165, 7-168, 8-174	
Bowling: Kumar 4-0-15-2, Pandya 4-0-34-1, Sundar 1-0-13-0, Thakur 4-0-45-3, Natarajan 4-0-39-1, Chahar 2-0-33-0	

Kohli promoted himself to the opening slot with Sharma and the pair took advantage of a good batting wicket to help India past their previous best of 218 against England at the 2007 World Twenty20 in Durban.

Sharma hit five sixes in his 34-ball blitz before he dragged a slower leg-cutter from Ben Stokes onto his stumps.



India celebrate winning the series with the trophy. — Reuters

Suryakumar Yadav kept up the attack with a flurry of sixes and fours in his 32 off 17 balls, but a stunning fielding manoeuvre by Chris Jordan cut short his innings.

Yadav hit an Adil Rashid ball towards the boundary for a likely six and Jordan sprinted from long-on to attempt a one-handed catch. He flicked the ball to Jason Roy who completed the relay catch with a laugh.

Kohli stood firm to complete his third fifty of the series and then combined with Hardik Pandya.

Kohli, who hit seven fours and two sixes in his 52-ball knock,

and Pandya, who smashed 39, put on 81 for the third wicket.

England kept up the chase as long as Malan was in.

He passed his first fifty of the series and became the fastest player to reach 1,000 T20I runs, in 24 matches, prompting Kohli to rotate his bowling options.

Indian seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar, who returned magnificent figures of 2-15, sent back Buttler and Thakur struck twice in an over to dismiss Jonny Bairstow, for seven, and Malan as England wilted.

The teams will next play three one-day internationals in Pune on March 23, 26 and 28. — AFP

Kohli to stay as T20 opener with World Cup in mind

AHMEDABAD: Virat Kohli plans to reinvent himself as a Twenty20 opener with an eye on the 20-overs World Cup at home later this year, the India captain said after the team’s series victory against England.

Kohli joined deputy Rohit

partner Rohit at the top.”

“If we have a partnership and we both are set, then you know that one of us is going to cause some serious damage. That’s exactly what we want.”

It also would allow India’s middle-order batsmen to play with much more freedom, said Kohli, who made 80 not out and was adjudged player of the series. “It augurs well for the team

Sharma at the top in Saturday’s decider. Their 94-run opening stand helped India amass 224-2, their highest total against England.

It was only the eighth time in 84 innings that Kohli opened the batting, but what worked against the world’s top-ranked team should succeed in the format’s showcase tournament as well, said the 32-year-old.

“I am going to open in the IPL as well,” Kohli, who leads Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League, said at the presentation ceremony after India clinched the decider by 36 runs.

“I’ve batted at different positions in the past, but I feel we have a very solid middle order, and now it’s about your two best players getting the maximum number of balls in T20 cricket.

“So I would definitely like to

and I would like this to continue, and hopefully continue that form through to the World Cup.”

EFFECTIVE COMBINATION Former India player VVS Laxman said Sunday’s performance should be the “template for the T20 World Cup”.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan felt the Kohli-Rohit combination could be as effective as the prolific Indian opening pair of Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag in the past.

“Can’t be a better opening combo on the eye than @imVkohli & @ImRo45! Could easily match @virendersehwag & @sachin_rt if they stick with this combo,” tweeted Vaughan. — Reuters

India captain Kohli hit an unbeaten 80 and shared an opening stand of 94 with Sharma, who made a blistering 64, as India reached 224 for two in an empty stadium in Ahmedabad



India’s Virat Kohli celebrates winning the series with the trophy. — Reuters

Oman key to PTTEP's regional growth strategy

SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers in the following Tender

N	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SPSP 21-001	Expansion Joints Openings Repairing at Vale Jetty	RO 25/-
2	SIPC 21-046	Repair of Leakage in Expansion Joints of Sohar Aluminium's RC Ducts for Power Cables (220KV) at Port of Sohar	RO 25/-
3	SIPC 21-051	Material Sampling and Testing Works for OKCT berths and Jindal Berths	RO 25/-
4	SIPC 21-045	Concrete Enhancement Around Bollards	RO 100/-
5	SIPC 21-036	Supply, Installation and Commissioning of the Water Quality Monitoring System Across the Sea Water Return Canal at Port of Sohar	RO 100/-
6	SIPC 21-012	Repairing of Sea Water Return Canal at Sohar Port	RO 250/-
7	SIPC 21-014	General Cleaning	RO 250/-
8	SIPC 21-048	Linesmen Services (Mooring and Un-Mooring)	RO 1000/-

Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Sunday, 21/03/2021 until 4:00 pm on Thursday, 8/04/2021.

Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRXXXX

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted

Step 2: Tenderers to send the following documents:
 A request for the electronic tender documents
 Scanned bank transfer
 The firm's commercial registration documents
 All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.om

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic tender documents
 Due to the COVID-19 situation, the below procedure is still valid as of today for the submission of the bids. If the current situation remains until the date of submission, tenderers will receive a circular with clear steps and procedures on the submission protocol.

The Technical and Commercial proposals must be in separate, sealed envelopes marked "Technical and Commercial" addressed to:
 SOHAR Port and Freezone
 Secretary of Tender committee
 Tender Reference No:
 Tender Name:

- SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons
- All SMES are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents
- The Deadline of the submission date of the proposals was clarified in the tender's RFP
- For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to:

sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.om
soharportandfreezone.om

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Joint pact to Omanise project turnaround activities

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

Four major oil and gas entities in the Sultanate have joined hands to boost the level of Omanisation in key turnaround and maintenance work on their facilities. Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), Oman LNG, OQ and OPAL signed a remote agreement on turnaround and maintenance activities to build on an earlier signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the same parties to explore the local market needs of skilled workforce and the feasibility of this project.

The agreement was signed by Raoul Restucci, PDO Managing Director; Hamed al



Numani, CEO of Oman LNG, and Ahmed al Azkawi, OQ

Head of Procurement. OPAL was represented by its CEO,

Abdulrahman al Yahyai.

This signing comes as an

initiative to maximise ICV in turnaround activities which are usually dominated by short term expatriate workforce.

The three oil and gas operators, which undertake various maintenance work throughout the year, foresee this as a significant milestone in providing the necessary impetus to the sector's on-demand local skilled capabilities which would ultimately replace short term expatriate workforce.

The operators, in collaboration with OPAL, established an integrated turnaround and maintenance execution programme which aims to develop and nurture local capabilities in turnaround execution, as well as upskill the

Omani workforce and create jobs for the local Omani cadre in this field.

A turnaround is the shutdown of a plant for a period of time for maintenance, refitting and inspection purposes before it is brought back into operation.

Turnarounds are important to ensure the safety and efficiency of operation installation.

However, due to the irregular nature of the requests for such services, companies in Oman currently carry them out through the support of local, regional or international contractors. At present, the majority of this contractor workforce consists of skilled expatriates with Omanis only participating in semi-skilled or unskilled roles.

Mideast banks must minimise NPL consequences

Pandemic impact: Non-Performing Loans are set to peak in 2021 and effects can be mitigated through a Workout Unit, according to Arthur D Little

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 21

The ongoing pandemic has resulted in Middle Eastern economies confronting severe repercussions, with banking institutions widely expected to experience companies defaulting on loans and cashflow problems.

In times of economic crisis, commercial banks with issues surrounding Non-Performing Loans (NPLs) must, however difficult, minimise such impacts and secure NPL portfolio value, according to a new report by Arthur D Little (ADL).

The report, titled 'Non-Performing Loan Management: The case of setting up a Workout



Unit,' provides insights into how banks can mitigate NPL issues and offers a detailed overview of how to establish a dedicated Workout Unit.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated economic activity across the globe and GCC countries have not been shielded from these effects," said Philippe DeBacker, Managing Partner, Global Practice Leader Financial Services, at Arthur D Little.

"Major disruptions to the hospitality, retail, F&B, and travel and tourism sectors will severely impact both companies' financials

and overall employment levels in the GCC countries. This will, in turn, hinder the ability of GCC banks' corporate and retail customers to repay loans and honour other commitments."

As per the report's findings, the current crisis will impact banks with a significant degree of strain. While banking sector problems in the 2007 financial crisis resulted in liquidity problems in the overall economy, the current dilemma has already been unequivocally defined as a 'real' economic crisis.

The severe GDP declines following pandemic-induced

lockdowns will have a devastating effect on companies and retail customers' creditworthiness, something that directly affects players in countries across the Middle East.

"Looking ahead, it's inevitable that NPL figures will rise quite substantially in the next year or two," explained Nima Obbohah, Partner, Global Head of Banking, Arthur D Little. "Given the implications of rising NPLs on profitability and capital position of banks it's crucial to be well prepared and make the necessary adjustments ahead of time."

The turbulent financial climate from a regional perspective has been reaffirmed by S&P Global's 2021 Banking Outlook, which details why current events and those that will transpire in the near future represent the most challenging test for banks in over a decade.

In terms of the UAE, a slowing economy will weaken banks' asset quality and profitability. With the national economy expected to contract by

approximately 8.5 per cent in 2020, a mild recovery in 2021 is the most likely outcome.

Although regulatory forbearance measures delay the recognition of problems, assets-quality indicators will be affected by a less resilient macroeconomic environment and continued correction in the real estate sector.

Moreover, the relaxation of certain prudential requirements carries risks for the national banking sector.

"So far, we do see a rather small uptake in NPL numbers at major financial institutions and the national level for all GCC countries," revealed De Backer. "We believe GCC banks became much more adept in handling NPL situations after the previous crisis, improving their capital position considerably. However, we are also of the view that a major uptake of the NPL levels across the region is not preventable. GCC banks should, with this in mind, have a strategy ready to go as soon as possible to manage their balance sheets through 2023."



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PRESS RELEASE

LULU WOOS ONLINE SHOPPERS WITH FREE DELIVERY OFFER, LAUNCHES ONLINE DELIVERY IN SALALAH

In a bid to branch out its online delivery services across Oman, Lulu Hypermarket has launched its online delivery services in Salalah. This initiative comes after the successful online delivery services in Muscat, Nizwa and Suhar.

Lulu's online service enables customers to order anything from grocery and household items, fresh produce, meat, seafood, deli and bakery products, to quick and easy meals, healthy natural and organic food products, and so much more — all at a great value delivered right at their doorsteps. Customers can also avail home delivery services free of cost till March 31, 2021 by ordering products worth RO 20 and above from the online stores.

Speaking on the launch of Salalah online delivery services, Ananth A V, Director of Lulu Hypermarkets Oman, India & Sri Lanka said "This strategic move will further strengthen our distribution footprint in Oman due to a growth in online retailing, allowing better delivery of products to our customers swiftly and efficiently. Our goal is to deliver excellent service to all our customers and, most importantly, to support the communities in which we

operate. We are aware of the importance of speedy delivery of essential items to our customers, and we have a team of highly efficient Omani staff to achieve this."

Shabeer K A, Regional Director of Lulu Oman, remarked "There is an upsurge in demand for online services, as more people switch to a mixture of shopping online and in stores. The online delivery service in Salalah was launched to ensure that we reach out to the customers

of the digital world across the country. We regularly follow public health guidelines with safety regulations and encourage and facilitate online services to suit this critical period the world is going through."

Lulu's state-of-the-art, temperature-controlled fulfilment centre in Muscat is fully operational and stocked up at all times. It is purpose-built for online fulfilment, complete with long aisles stocking up dozens of products. The centre, with its cutting edge technology, enables the handling of exceptional volumes of goods at high speed and distribution to the customers. In each location, including Salalah, there is a locally based fleet of vehicles and efficient Omani drivers to ensure timely delivery.



OMAN ARAB BANK ORGANISES FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT WORKSHOPS FOR SME'S

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) recently organised a financial management workshop for 20 female entrepreneurs, who are members of the Omani Women Association in Muscat. The workshop was conducted as part of the bank's strategy to encourage financial inclusion, support local enterprises and provide them with the necessary guidance and counselling, to enhance their capabilities in managing their businesses and finances effectively.

Commenting on the workshop, Jamal al Wahaibi, Head of Corporate and Institutional Banking Group, said, "The SME sector is one of the most important segments that contribute to both economic growth and employment. Therefore, it is vital that support be provided to them in every way possible.

The workshop is designed to enhance the abilities of these business owners and to make sure they are effectively optimising and utilising their resources. This way, they can ensure business continuity by controlling cash flows, which is a critical factor for long-term stability. Through the workshop, we seek to address the challenges faced by SMEs and enable them to grow sustainably by

capitalising on available tools to achieve further success and development."

The workshop was held on March 18 at the OAB headquarters in Ghubrah and saw an attendance of over 20 female entrepreneurs, who are members of the Omani Women Association in Muscat.

They were given insight into the latest methods of financial management, including working capital, managing cash flows, methods to control them

and the ability to measure it over the stages of project growth. The workshop was conducted by Mohammed al Zadjali from the Capital Market Authority and overseen by the bank's SME team.

"As the government continues to act on and develop the country's economic diversification strategy, SMEs will continue to play a key part in its implementation. With OAB being one of the oldest banking institutions in the country, we have vast expertise when it comes to best practices related to financial management. Moreover, it is our responsibility to enlighten startups with this knowledge to support them in their journey towards growth and expansion," he added.



China central bank head says policy needs to support growth and curb risks



A man wearing a mask walks past China's central bank in Beijing. — Reuters

BEIJING: China's monetary policy needs to focus on supporting economic growth in a targeted way while also reducing financial risks, the central bank head said.

"Monetary policy needs to strike a balance between supporting economic growth and preventing risks," People's Bank of China (PBOC) Governor Yi Gang said in a speech made at a closed-door session at the China Development Forum on Saturday.

"China's macro leverage ratio is basically stable. We should provide positive incentives for economic entities and restrain the breeding and accumulation of financial risks."

The comments were published by the PBOC on Sunday.

Yi said China's monetary policy should focus on targeted support for key areas and weak links in the economy.

Policymakers have pledged to support job-creating small firms that have been hit harder by the coronavirus pandemic.

China's broad money supply growth of about 10 per cent at present basically matches nominal economic growth, Yi said.

— Reuters

Investors got the stimulus boost, but now face tax worries in US

NEW YORK: Investors are turning their attention to prospects that higher taxes could threaten the rally in US stocks as President Joe Biden's administration moves forward with its agenda and seeks ways to pay for its spending plans. In recent days, investors have focused on a rise in bond yields that has pressured share prices, though indexes remain close to their record highs.

Nevertheless, some worry that at least a partial rollback of the corporate tax cuts that fuelled stock gains during the Trump era could eventually drag on equities, whose valuations have already grown rich by some measures.

"It is an issue," said Quincy Krosby, chief market strategist at Prudential Financial. "It's going to be talked about as it becomes a reality. But the market's focus right now is clearly on getting to the other side of this pandemic."

The S&P 500 has gained more than 4 per cent this year, with Biden's newly passed \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan providing the latest fuel for the economy and the stock market. The pace of the economic recovery and Covid-19 vaccinations will remain in investors' focus next week, along with the rise in US bond yields that has pressured



The Fearless Girl statue stands in front of the New York Stock Exchange in Wall Street, New York. — Reuters

tech and growth shares and further supported bank and other value stocks.

During his presidential campaign, Biden pledged to raise the corporate tax rate to 28 per cent from 21 per cent, a proposal supported by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

Investment strategists anticipate fierce opposition from Republican

lawmakers to any such plan. While Biden's administration is working closely with members of Congress on how to fund an ambitious infrastructure package, plans have not been finalised, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said on Monday.

An increase in corporate taxes could bite into company profits, which are expected to soar this

year as business rebounds from the pandemic.

A corporate tax rate rising from 21 per cent to 25 per cent could shave overall S&P 500 company earnings by between 4 per cent to 5 per cent, while an increase to 28 per cent could cut them by 6 per cent to 7 per cent, according to Tobias Levkovich, strategist at Citi.

— Reuters

Oman Post's new fulfilment centre to drive e-commerce

FROM PAGE 13

As per the index report released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Oman has been able to secure its place among Top 10 most prepared developing economies for B2C eCommerce.

The Sultanate has climbed six positions in the UN's Business-to-Consumer (B2C) eCommerce Index 2020, securing the 54th ranking globally and 4th among Arab countries.

Providing end-to-end visibility, the centre utilises one of the world's most sophisticated logistics management systems (LMS) that allows Oman Post Asyad Express to optimise all processes from creating an order, up to delivering it to their customers' door. In addition, it is a fully secured facility with 24-hour on-site security and CCTV, along with the assurance of the highest health and safety standards.

IMF sees signs of global recovery, but significant risks remain

WASHINGTON: The No 2 official at the International Monetary Fund on Saturday pointed to emerging signs of a stronger global economic recovery, but warned that significant risks remained, including the emergence of mutations of the coronavirus.

IMF First Deputy Managing Director Geoffrey Okamoto said that in early April the Fund would update its January forecast for global growth of 5.5 per cent to reflect additional fiscal stimulus spending in the United States, but gave no details.

In a speech to the China Development Forum, Okamoto raised concerns about the growing divergence between advanced economies and emerging markets,



Workers stand at the port of Qingdao, Shandong province, China. — Reuters

with some 90 million people seen falling below the extreme poverty threshold since the pandemic

began.

Okamoto said China had already recovered to pre-

China had already recovered to pre-pandemic growth levels ahead of all large economies, although private consumption was still lagging investment there

GEOFFREY OKAMOTO

IMF First Deputy Managing Director

pandemic growth levels ahead of all large economies, although private consumption was still

lagging investment there.

Outside of China, he said, there were worrying signs of a widening gap between advanced economies and emerging markets. The IMF projects that cumulative income per capita in emerging and developing countries, excluding China, between 2020 and 2022 will be 22 per cent lower than it would have been without the pandemic, which will push more people into poverty, he said.

The overall outlook remained uncertain, Okamoto said, adding that it was unclear how long the pandemic would last and access to vaccines remained very uneven, across both advanced and emerging economies.

— Reuters

Saudi Aramco to scale back spending after 2020 profit slump



A man is seen at Saudi Aramco's oil facility in Abqaiq, Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

DUBAI: Saudi Arabian state oil giant Aramco is betting on an

Asian-led rebound in energy demand this year after it reported

a steep slide in net profit for 2020 on Sunday and scaled back its spending plans.

The Covid-19 pandemic took a heavy toll on the company and its global peers in 2020, but oil prices have rallied this year as economies recover from last year's downturn and after oil producers extended output cuts.

"We are pleased that there are signs of a recovery," Aramco CEO Amin Nasser told an earnings call. "China is also very close to pre-pandemic levels. So in Asia, East Asia in particular, there is strong pickup in demand."

He said demand in Europe and United States would improve with more deployment of vaccines. Global oil demand is expected to reach 99 million barrels per day by the end of this year, he said.

Aramco lowered its guidance for capital expenditure in 2021 to around \$35 billion from a range of \$40 billion to \$45 billion previously, according to a disclosure to the kingdom's Tadawul bourse. Capital spending in 2020 was \$27 billion.

The world's largest oil exporter said net profit fell 44.4 per cent to 183.76 billion riyals (\$49 billion) for the year ended December 31, from 330.69 billion riyals a year earlier.

Analysts had expected a 2020 net profit of 186.1 billion riyals, according to the mean estimate of analysts in Refinitiv's Eikon.

Aramco declared a dividend of \$75 billion for 2020, but Nasser said there was no intention to increase the dividend this year from what's been pledged.

"The dividend is in line with expectations, which is what holders of Aramco will care about most, but lower capex implies the company does not expect high oil prices to last for the long-term," said Hasnain Malik, head of equity research at Tellimer.

Aramco's shares were marginally down 0.6 per cent after its results. Through most of last year, Aramco's shares held up well against global oil companies in emerging and developed markets, but underperformed against the company's peers when oil prices recovered.

"Looking ahead, our long-term strategy to optimise our oil and gas portfolio is on track," Nasser said. Aramco's 44.4 per cent drop in 2020 profit compares with a 30.7 per cent decline in oil revenues

last year for the Saudi government, with the steady dividends paid to the state despite lower oil prices contributing to Aramco bearing the brunt of the crisis more than the treasury, said Monica Malik, chief economist at Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank.

Oil prices lost just over a fifth of their value in 2020. Brent crude last traded at \$64.53 a barrel on Friday compared with around \$51 in December.

Earnings of top western oil companies were hammered in 2020, with Royal Dutch Shell's profit dropping to its lowest in at least two decades and Exxon Mobil, the largest US energy company, posting its first-ever annual loss. Aramco said free cash flow fell to \$49 billion last year from \$78.3 billion in 2019. — Reuters

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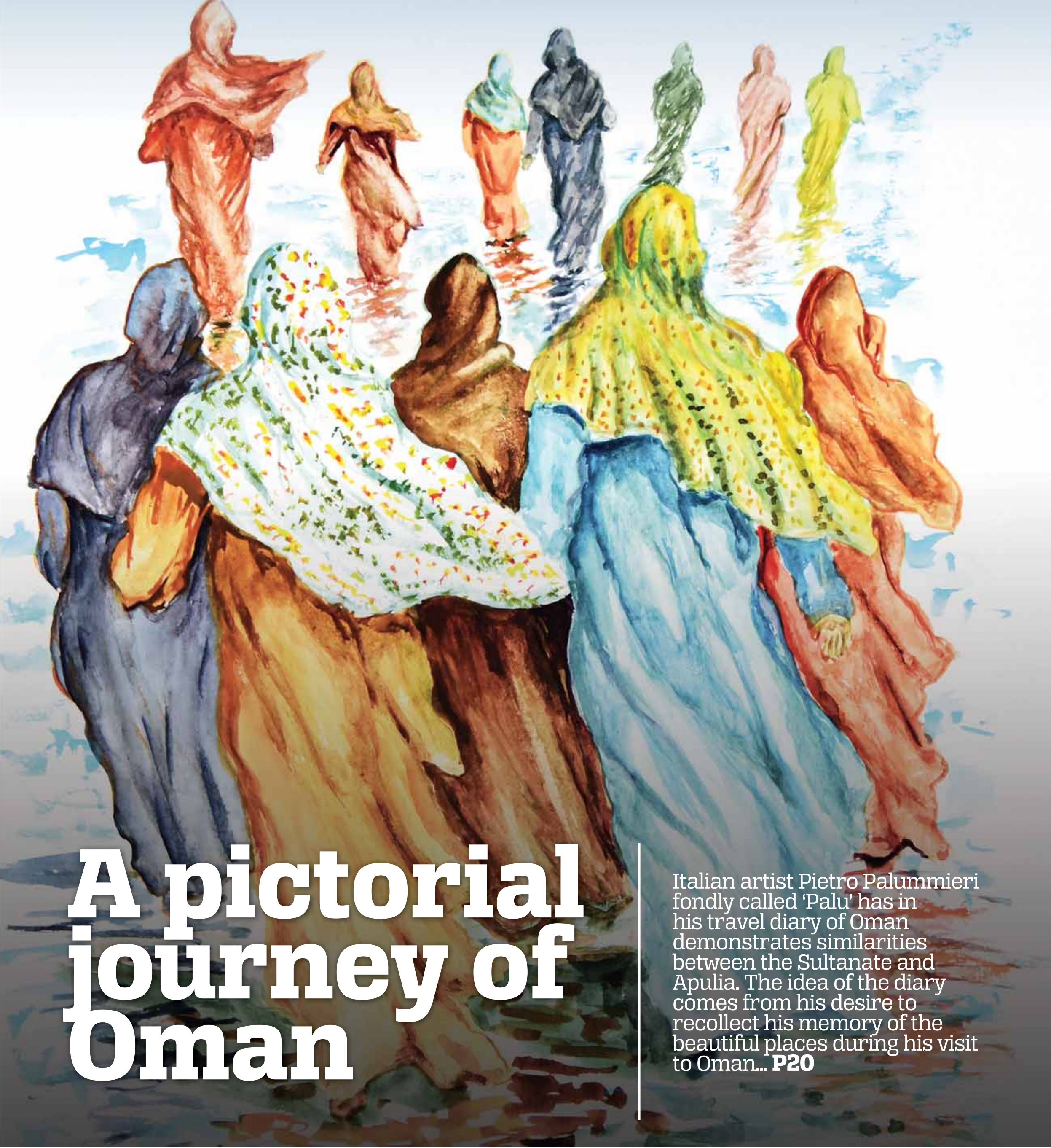
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features



A pictorial journey of Oman

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Artist JR shows off Italy ‘museum opening’ in latest work

WITH ITALY’S museums once again closed, French street artist JR has provided an art-starved public in Florence with a museum opening literally.

“La Ferita” (The Wound), the artist’s latest work, is a black and white mural depicting a gaping hole cut into the side of Florence’s Palazzo Strozzi, known for its contemporary art exhibits.

Beyond the rubble, the viewer glimpses some of the Renaissance city’s best-known works inside the exposed galleries Botticelli’s “The Birth of Venus” and the twisting marble bodies of Giambologna’s “Rape of the Sabine Women”.

“It’s a message that’s coming at a moment when we need an opening to the museums,” JR said on Friday as the work was unveiled, adding that the public art might bring some relief “before the real museums open.”

The artist is known for plastering huge, black-and-white photographs usually faces of unknown people in close-up on the sides of buildings and walls in locales as diverse as the West Bank, the favelas of Rio de Janeiro or the border between Mexico and the United States.

The strict restrictions imposed across much of the world one year ago to deal with coronavirus did not sap JR’s creativity, although he acknowledged that “no one can be inspired by the quarantine, that’s for sure.”

“Every constraint for an artist is good in that it pushes us to think, to invent and rethink, and if that’s not the role of the artist than what is?” he said, adding that he views the pandemic as “an extra challenge”.

With his latest work, which is free of people, he hoped to “involve people in the creative process”.

The best position for viewing the work, which was commissioned by the Palazzo Strozzi Foundation and takes up half of one side of the 15th-16th century palace, is not straight on but from across the street, JR said, inviting viewers to find it spontaneously by meandering around the plaza.

BRINGING ART OUTSIDE

The foundation’s general director, Arturo Galansino, warned of the “social wound” to communities deprived of culture under the lingering Covid-19 health emergency.

“In a moment where access to culture is impossible, it was up to us to go to the streets, to the plazas, to bring culture outside of the museum because the museum is closed,” Galansino said.

The obvious choice for such a work, he said, was JR, “the king of street art.”

Travel both within Italy and into the country from overseas is currently tightly restricted due to coronavirus rules, but the artwork will be on show until August 22 — and for now, at least, the locals are enjoying it.

In the plaza at the opening were two art students, Oliver Giusti and Leonardo Gensini, both 19, animatedly discussing perspectives, the choice of artwork inside the mural and the depiction of the gash across the museum’s walls.

The students were enthused about having public art on the street, although Gensini was not convinced by the depiction of the smashed stone wall, calling the rocks “something from a video game from the ‘80s.”

Regardless, he said, “Whether you like it or not, for sure it’s something you pay attention to.”—**AFP**

London woman turns lockdown loaves into bakery success



WHEN BRITAIN first entered lockdown in March last year, Sophia Sutton-Jones decided to try making sourdough bread.

A year later, she is running her own popular bakery.

“I’d always thought about it, but I never had the courage to do it,” she said.

Now Sutton-Jones, 29, and her husband Jesse, 28, work alongside half a dozen staff members pulling hot loaves out of the oven, putting out flaky pastries and cutting slices of cakes topped with cream.

It all started when Sutton-Jones, whose father was also a baker, made a loaf of bread for a neighbour who was sheltering during the first national lockdown in March 2020.

“He talked to his friends about it,” she says. “Very quickly, we had 12

major trend of lockdown, with enthusiastic amateurs posting pictures of their efforts in pursuit of the perfect golden crust.

The surge of interest led to shortages of yeast and people “understood that actually, there is another way to make bread and it’s actually much better, much healthier,” says Sutton-Jones.

Sourdough bread is made using a fermented starter instead of yeast and its enthusiasts believe it is more beneficial than ordinary bread, causing blood sugar to rise more gradually and helping gut health.

It takes longer to rise but — thanks to stay-at-home protocols — people were finally not in a rush.

“It’s the oldest way of making bread,” says Sutton-Jones.



people waiting in front of our house.”

The couple, who sold kitchenware online before the pandemic, began to deliver orders by bicycle in their north London neighbourhood.

Producing the loaves from home soon became impractical as everything got coated in flour, Sutton-Jones recalls.

“Our dining room was the bakery and our guestroom the storage space. So you could come as a guest and sleep on flour bags.”

Fired by their initial success, the couple turned to crowdfunding to launch their business.

They were hoping for £25,000 (\$35,000, 30,000 euros) but ended up raising £33,000.

SOURDOUGH SUCCESS

The distinctive pink-painted bakery — “Sourdough Sophia” — opened in January.

Their pains au chocolat, croissants and cruffins — a cross between croissant and muffin — sell like hotcakes. But their biggest hit is sourdough bread, which the British have embraced enthusiastically.

Home-baked bread became a

Three women awarded scholarships for ‘doing nothing’ in Germany

Three women have been awarded 1,600-euro(1,900-dollar) scholarships for “doing nothing,” according to the University of Fine Arts Hamburg (HFBK).

Hilistina Banze, Mia Hofner and Kimberley Vehoff were selected by a jury, which considered applications from 2,864 applicants from 70 countries.

Banze’s application said that she would take off her headscarf for a week to reveal her buzz cut in an effort to counter stereotypes about women.

Hofner, a student from Cologne, said she would not generate any usable personal data about herself online for a period of two weeks.

Vehoff, a food technology specialist, said she would stop working because her social relationships were suffering as a result of the timing of her shifts.

The award is part of “School of No Consequences: Exercises for a New Life,” an artistic and discursive project by Friedrich von Borries at the Museum for Art and Trade (MKG) in Hamburg.



Greek archaeologists unearth bronze bull idol in ancient Olympia

Greek archaeologists have unearthed by chance a more than 2,500-year-old bronze bull idol at the archaeological site of Olympia, the culture ministry said on Friday.

An observant archaeologist came across the mini-statue during work at the site, one of the most celebrated sanctuaries in ancient Greece, the ministry said in a statement.

With one of its horns sticking out of the ground after heavy rainfall, the statuette was found intact, close to the temple of the ancient Greek god Zeus at Olympia, the birthplace of the ancient Olympic Games.

It was transferred to a laboratory for conservation.

Archaeologists believe that it was part of thousands of gifts offered to Zeus in the 1,050-700 B.C. period. Bulls and horses played an important role in the lives of ancient Greeks and so were frequently dedicated to the gods. — **Reuters**



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LOCAL SCENE

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Shrout Rock in Al Mazyouna, a shelter and a historical landmark



Shrout Rock, located 6 km from the centre of the wilayat, is an important historic monument in the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna in Dhofar Governorate, where it was a comfortable haven and a popular destination for people and passers-by. Today, this massive boulder has become a great destination for tourists and visitors visiting Dhofar.

This historical landmark tells an important chapter in the progress that is taking hold in the area. It has inspired a generation of movers and shakers and has kept the people's secret over the years including playing an important role in various social and cultural events that are practised in

Al Mazyouna.

Shrout Rock has witnessed many social celebrations such as weddings, and residents' meetings. This landmark remained, throughout the ages, a club for the people of the wilayat to gather in to consult and discuss their affairs and public and private issues. The shadow of this massive rock has comforted the numerous meetings held under its shade.

Issam Zabnout, a resident, said that the Shrout Rock is one of the main landmarks and tourist destinations in Al Mazyouna, and the large round rock is a unique natural and geological landmark and a place for visitors to the wilayat.

He explained that this

place has historical and customary connotations for the people in the past as they and their livestock used to shelter under its shadow. He also shared that in the past, travelling for water has been customary in the day to day lives of the citizens. Thanks to its shade, it has been a resting

site that gives them relief.

Zabnout said, "It has been a venue for numerous affairs — different celebrations that have transformed lives of people living here. Because of its strategic location, it has become an endearing location for many of us, one that we always go back to."

EARTH HOUR

ESO teams up with Talabat, Authority for Public Services Regulation for 2021 Global Earth Hour movement



THE ENVIRONMENT SOCIETY of Oman (ESO) is marking the global Earth Hour movement with a series of events to raise awareness on important environmental issues. ESO has been celebrating the worldwide movement of Earth Hour with a month-long social media campaign, the 30-Day Challenge, posting daily challenges to encourage us all to make more sustainable choices as consumers.

Held on Saturday, March 27 at 8:30 pm local time, Earth Hour is the largest global grassroots movements for the environment, bringing together millions of people, businesses and leaders from around the world to shine a spotlight on the urgent need to address nature loss and climate change.

Suaad al Harthi, Executive Director of ESO, said, "The goal is to encourage us all to go beyond Earth Hour and reflect on how our day-to-day actions can negatively impact the environment. We have a shared responsibility to protect the world around us. We would like to encourage everybody to challenge themselves to think about the decisions they make as consumers, in particular, saying no to single-use plastic, avoiding littering and looking for opportunities to recycle".

In addition to the 30-Day Earth Hour Challenge, ESO is also teaming up with the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) and food delivery app talabat, to join ESO in making a difference. Over the next 2 weeks, Talabat customers will find themed stickers on their order with a special environmentally-focused kids activity pack available for children with any orders placed on Saturday, March 27.

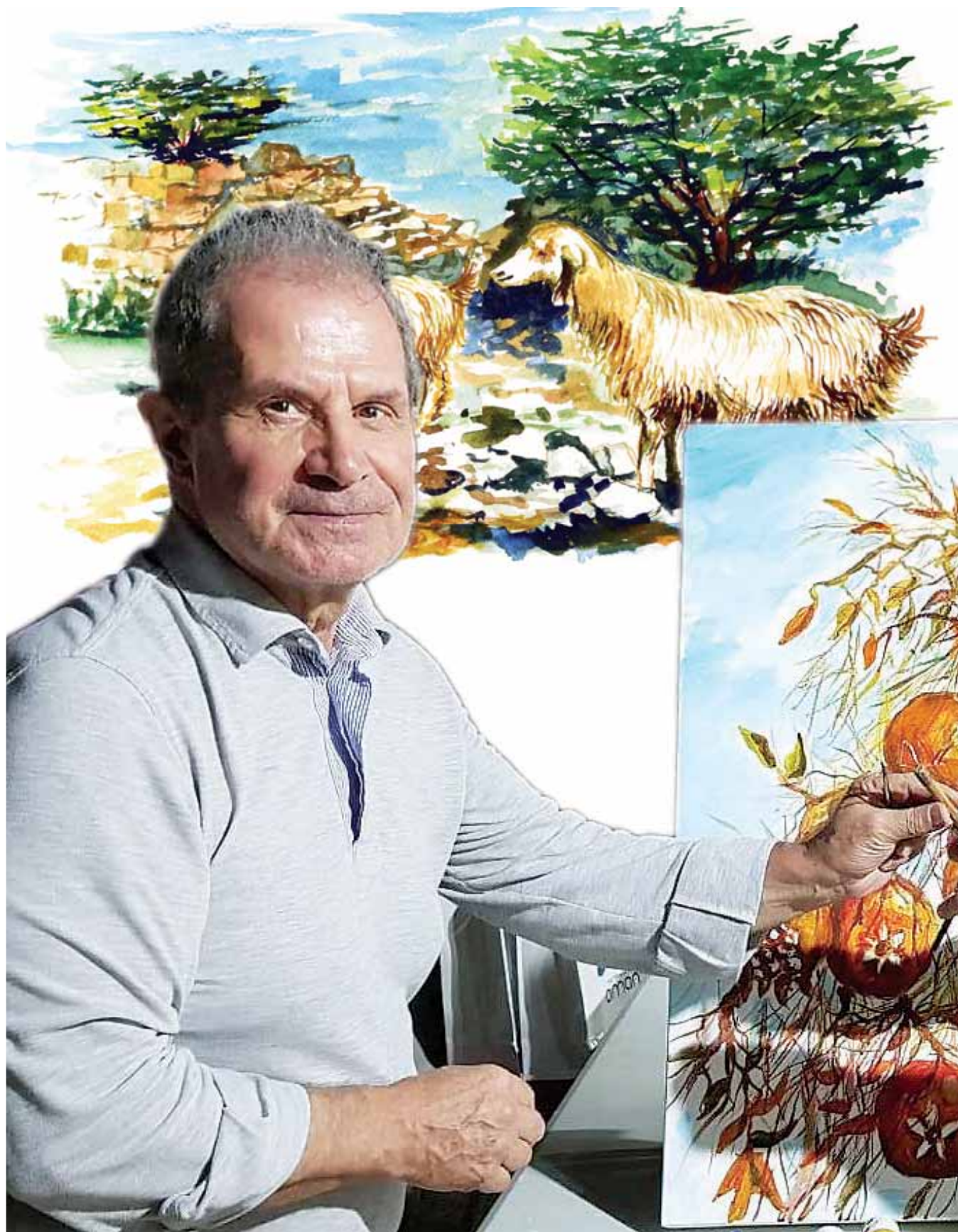
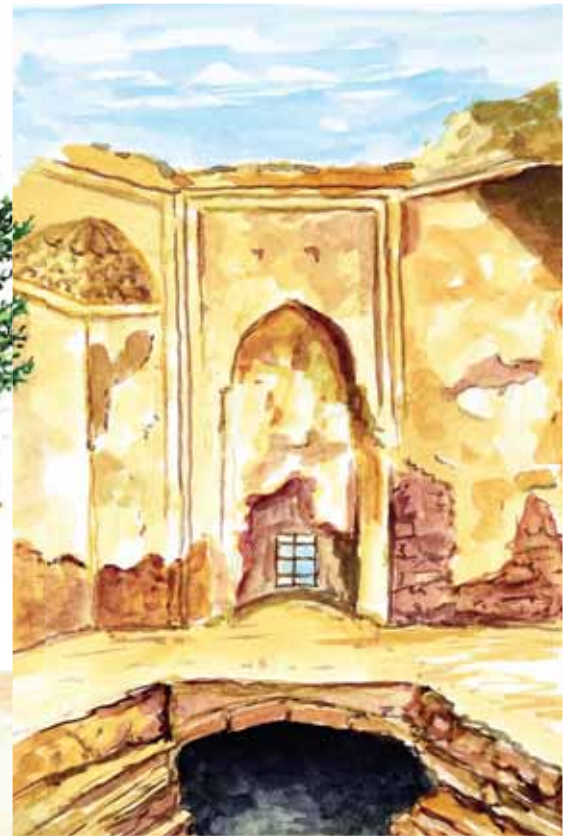
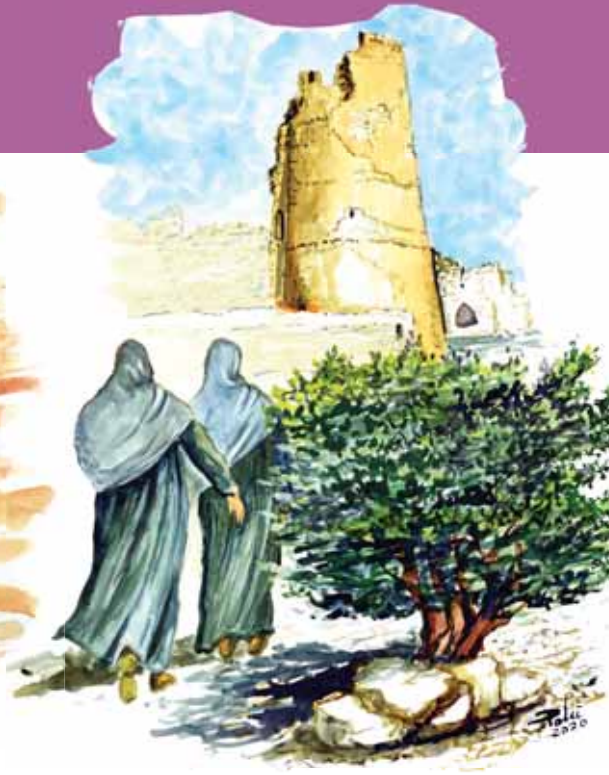
"Earth Hour is something we celebrate in Oman every

year, but it's especially pertinent this year when the Covid-19 outbreak has proved that preventing nature loss is imperative for safeguarding our future. We need to put nature at the centre of our recovery efforts for the benefit of all people and the planet, and Earth Hour is an opportunity for us to add our voice to the movement, to have a positive environmental impact, and drive change", said Amal al Zadajali, Communication and Media Manager at the Authority for Public Services Regulation.

"We are proud to stand in solidarity with ESO and all those who are striving to raise awareness about the importance of marking Earth Hour. We call on others to join us and think about how they can go beyond the hour in 2021. Even a small gesture like turning lights off can make a difference", added Tatiana Rahal, Managing Director at Talabat.

For the past decade, Earth Hour has inspired global participation in critical nature, climate and environmental initiatives, helping drive awareness and, in turn, action and policy change. Earth Hour 2021 specifically draws on the catastrophic events — wildfires, extreme weather, locust plagues and the Covid-19 pandemic, that have shaken the world in the last year, and which have caused unprecedented, tragic socio-economic, health and humanitarian consequences.

In the lead up to and on the night of Earth Hour, the organisers are asking people around the world to switch off their lights between 8:30 and 9:30 pm and speak up for nature — to stand in solidarity to show they care about the future of our planet, our one shared home.



A pictorial journey of Oman

BY LIJU CHERIAN

PIETRO Palummieri is a sculptor and painter of Apulian origin from southern Italy. A resident of Maruggio in the province of Taranto, he captures his primary inspiration from the local territory to create his art pieces.

Palu, as he is artistically known, returned to Italy in August last after a memorable six-month stay in the Sultanate.

A prolific artist, his love for the Sultanate made him come up with works of nature, culture connecting with the rural life in Apulia.

He uses graphical and pictorial techniques diverse from one another. His works are on water-based colours, oil, and red lead pencil tip. For sculptures he utilises a special type of concrete using terracotta as a starting point.

His journey to the Sultanate opened the doors to an enchanting and mysterious world that he decided to immortalise his works of art to exhibit them.

Stationed in Muscat during the pandemic, two of his works were inspired during Covid-19. The first one had a frightened mother hugging her daughter to defend her just like a mask hugs the face defending from the pandemic. The second one had a pregnant woman representing a metaphor of human life born after sorrow.

Palu in his travel diary of Oman demonstrates similarities between the Sultanate and Apulia. "Apulia in the south of Italy is a barren region and until a few years ago life was extremely difficult and strewn with obstacles of every type."

The idea of the diary came up from his desire to recollect his memory of the beautiful places during his visit to Oman.

Palu is pleased to have the opportunity to create a diary of his travels. Every brush stroke tells a story and his 30 watercolours depict the hard times which the people overcome with determination.

He recollects: "I didn't want to forget anything about those small villages and their suggestive landscapes. I chose to seize those images with my brushstrokes, guided only by the silence of that warm atmosphere."

He explains the locations and narrates a

familiar atmosphere. For the first time he saw the respect people have towards women, so elegant in their black veils and his mind immediately took him back to the Apulian women in their long black dresses.

He says the Sultanate reminds him of Puglia mainly for its atmosphere: "The first time I saw the elegance of women with black veils, I immediately remembered Apulian women I met as a child. And then the summer silences of our southern areas similar to those of Oman," he recollects.

Another familiar instant were the summer silences that one gets to experience in the South of Italy which are similar to Oman.

He studied the ancient and forgotten towns of Izki, Al Hamra, Manah, Ibra where buildings are composed of brick and clay together with palm wood and hay.

In his private studio in Maruggio, figures of men hugging under the incessant rain and small decorative trellis adorn the room.

Federica Favi, Italian Ambassador to the Sultanate, and an admirer of Palu's art says his creations stem directly from the heart with no interference from the mind, "a force of life flows through his works untamed and unconstrained."

His art style is the way in which he expresses himself.

Defined as an expressionist artist, Palu dwells on the representation of the emotional side of things. "My creative process is an intimate and private moment. I always create with a free spirit both in the choice of subjects and the technique used to make them come alive."

His works are scattered all over from Vatican City to parliamentary buildings in Rome while several others can be found in Florence, Naples, Messina, Bologna, Taranto, Maruggio and also the Sultanate.

As an artist he feels that Oman is a country to be known, appreciated and valued.

He prefers sculpting, as he sees himself as some sort of a wall built from different stones, with each stone representing a different technique, namely drawings in ink, pencil, watercolours, oil colours and clay.

For him, style is a way to express himself and he cannot explain his style because it is legible in his works.

As a parting shot, he says his best work is yet to come. Having won laurels at various global exhibitions and contests, Palu is eager to hold a solo exhibition in Muscat this winter if the pandemic situation improves.