

Syrians agree on drafting new constitution

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria said on Sunday the government and opposition co-chairs of the Syrian Constitutional Committee had agreed to start the process of drafting a new constitution. The committee, comprising 45 representatives of Syria's government, opposition and civil society, has a mandate to draw up a new basic law leading to UN-supervised elections. Special Envoy Geir Pedersen said its Syrian co-chairs, who he met together for the first time ahead of week-long talks, had agreed to "prepare and start drafting constitutional reform." – AFP



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OMAN OBSERVER

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FIVE NEW INTEGRATED HOUSING PROJECTS TO CREATE 4,800 HOMES IN OMAN



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WORLD'S TALLEST WOMAN SAYS IT'S OK TO STAND OUT



MUSCAT

RESTORATION WORKS ALMOST COMPLETED

The process of recovery in the wilayats affected by the tropical cyclone Shaheen is nearly complete. The relief and sheltering sector is still activated until the National Centre for Emergency Management announces the return to normalcy in North Al Batinah Governorate, said Ahmed bin Abdullah al Riyami, operation assistant coordinator at the Relief and Sheltering Sector. Al Riyami said that the Relief and Sheltering Sector is one of eight sectors that have been activated to deal with the impact of the tropical cyclone Shaheen.

DETAILS ON P2

ICV SHARE OF OIL AND GAS CONTRACTS RISE

The value of contracts retained in-country in line with the government's In-Country Value (ICV) development programme has climbed to 28.7 per cent of total contracts in 2020, up from 18 per cent in 2018 value retained in-country of projects. The target is to raise the ICV component to 36 per cent in the next phase of its implementation, according to the CEO of Oman Society for Petroleum Services (Opal).

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Can Biden escape the trap? ELIZABETH DREW

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HH the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi

Honourable Lady greets women on Omani Women's Day

MUSCAT: Her Highness the Honourable Lady Assayida Ahd Abdullah Hamed al Busaidi, Spouse of the Sultan of Oman, has addressed a message of greetings on the occasion of Omani Women's Day, which falls on October 17 every year.

The message reads as follows: "On the occasion of Omani Women's Day, the 17th of October, we would like to express thanks and appreciation for every woman who advocates good deeds and elevates the values of tolerance, amity and benevolence.

Our greetings go to every woman who contributes to building this dear country from her position as an active participant delivering her social, national and humanitarian duties in all fields and under all normal and unfavourable circumstances undergone by the country.

"I pray to the Almighty Allah to grant every woman in this dear homeland success and efficient participation in building this country and safeguarding its gains and accomplishments." — ONA

Women's Sports, Cultural Innovation Club formed

MUSCAT: On the occasion of Omani Women's Day, the 17th of October, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, has issued a ministerial decision announcing "Omani Women's Sports and Cultural Innovation Club".

The decision comes in affirmation of essentials endorsed by the Sultanate of Oman in the field of women's empowerment across different sectors. DETAILS ON P3

Oman launches T20 World Cup in style

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
Muscat, Oct 17

Oman announced itself to the cricketing world at one of its biggest stages, the ICC T20 World Cup 2021, with an opening ceremony that showcased the Sultanate's culture, customs and traditions in all its glory.

The country's cricket team made a statement of its own with a resounding victory against debutants Papua New Guinea (PNG) that launched their World Cup campaign in style. The opening ceremony was presided over by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Some of the biggest names in World cricket's administrative circles were in attendance with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) President Sourav Ganguly and its treasurer Jay Shah gracing the occasion.

The procession of women riders on horseback holding the flags of all the participating nations of



PHOTO BY FAISAL AL BALUSHI

the T20 World Cup was one of the most enduring sights of the day.

Oman's cricket loving fans thronged the Al Amerat Stadium with a lot of gusto to add colour and noise to the occasion as the venue resembled a celebratory carnival.

Oman's victory was the icing on the cake for the local fans

cheering for the home team after the wonderful start to the proceedings that set the tone for the day.

IN ALL ITS POMP

As the live telecast for the Oman and Papua New Guinea match started rolling, television screens around the world beamed videos

of stunning Al Amerat Stadium mesmerising viewers in all its pomp.

Al Amerat Stadium has been garnering some rave reviews with its picturesque and scenic views with the grandeur of the Hajjar mountains in the background.

Acclaimed cricket commentator and presenter Alan Wilkins tweeted a video of the

stadium on his Twitter handle that elicited appreciation and admiration from cricket lovers from all over the world.

There are some stunning cricketing venues in the world from the table-top Newlands stadium in Cape Town to the HPCA stadium in Dharamsala, India. SEE PAGES 10 & 11

Partners in nation-building

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Omani women have been conquering greater heights over the past few decades, and they are partners in the nation-building process, according to Her Excellency Dr Laila bint Ahmed al Najar, Minister of Social Development.

In her message on the Omani Women's Day (OWD) 2021, the minister said the nation is seeking to have a more effective role for women's associations in the country to help women contribute better to the Renewed Renaissance march.

"It requires women to be highly

It requires women to be highly educated and knowledgeable, and with their insight, they can scale more heights

HE DR LAILA AL NAJAR

Minister of Social Development

educated and knowledgeable, and with their insight, they can scale more heights. We believe empowering them can come only from within so that they keep pace with the changes and boast of

development", she added.

The minister said the focus of the future national plans would be to build a society with strong grit, conscious, creative, educated and innovative women generation, capable of overcoming difficulties and taking advantage of the available opportunities.

"The key element in building this society is family cohesion where the familial bonds are strongly knit together by overcoming many negative social phenomena, and only such families can cultivate a highly proactive generation." "The very idea that Omani women are partners to their men counterpart and not competitors creates balance in the society." TURN TO P5

GRAND MOSQUE IN MECCA DROPS SOCIAL DISTANCING



MECCA: The Grand Mosque in the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia operated at full capacity on Sunday, with worshippers praying shoulder-to-shoulder for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic began. Workers removed floor markings that guide people to social distance in and around the Grand Mosque, which is built around the Kaaba. "This is in line with the decision to ease precautionary measures and to allow pilgrims and visitors to the Grand Mosque at full capacity", reported the official Saudi Press Agency. Pictures and footage on Sunday morning showed people praying side by side, making straight rows of worshippers that are formations revered in performing prayers, for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic took hold last year. – AFP



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Coins are pieces of history

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 17

The National Museum, the Smithsonian Institution of the United States of America and the US Embassy in the Sultanate hosted a lecture on museum management in the twenty-first century for Omani museums specialists and students.

The lecture titled “Exhibition Development: A Case on Money as Material Culture” was presented by Douglas Mudd, Curator/Director of the American Numismatic Association’s Edward C Rochette Money Museum in Colorado Springs, Colorado, last week on Zoom platform.

Douglas Mudd said: “ When you are holding an ancient coin from 2,000 years ago, that is literally history in your hands. You can study and learn from it in a way not possible with larger objects — especially since coins are much more common (in general) than many other artefact.”

“Coins are pieces of history that, when understood, have a tremendous amount of information to offer — anything from the technical capabilities of a culture (they could smelt metals, part them and shape them into coins) to their history — what they thought was important (images of gods, rulers, battles, bridges, etc.) to dates for rulers and historical events — coins are especially important to archaeologists because many are dated or can



The lecture targeted employees from several institutions including; the National Museum, public and private museums, the National Records and Archives Authority, the Central Bank of Oman, Oman Across Ages Museum, the Scientific Research Council and the Sultan’s Armed Forces Museum.

be dated and their origin can be identified easily,” said Douglas.

He also mentioned the challenges that museums are facing in preserving money today, which are space and knowledge about how to identify, handle, conserve and interpret money. Most museums have no idea how to care for and use coins in their exhibits and educational programming — and it is not easy to find individuals that have the necessary knowledge. Coins and medals in particular require specialised storage and conservation that is quite different from that for most metal objects.

The lecture targeted employees from several institutions including; the National Museum, public and private museums, the National Records and Archives Authority, the Central Bank of Oman, Oman Across Ages Museum, the Scientific Research

Council, the Sultan’s Armed Forces Museum.

The lecture included several topics, the most prominent of which was an introduction on the origin of currency, as well as the collection management through dealing with various currencies in the stages of storage, restoration and preservation, furthermore the methods of displaying, installation and interpretation development were discussed.

Support for this series of lectures comes from the US Embassy in the Sultanate. The Embassy has provided similar training opportunities by sending specialists from the National Museum, the Archives and Documentation Authority, and the Ministry of Heritage and Culture (formerly) to the United States of America for the International Visiting Leader Programme for several weeks.

■ HH SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES UK AMBASSADOR



HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received William Murray, Ambassador of the United Kingdom appointed to the Sultanate of Oman, in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Sunday. Sayyid Shihab wished the ambassador success in his tour of duty in Oman. They exchanged cordial talks and reviewed the relations between Oman and the UK.

Restoration in North Al Batinah nears completion

OUHOOD AL JAILANIYAH
MUSCAT, OCT 17

The restoration of services in the wilayats that were affected by the tropical condition Shaheen is nearly complete. The relief and shelter sector will continue to work until the National Centre for Emergency Management announces the return to normalcy in North Al Batinah Governorate, said Ahmed bin Abdullah al Riyami, operation assistant coordinator at the Relief and Sheltering Sector.

In comments to *Oman Arabic*, sister publication of the *Observer*, Al Riyami said that the Relief and Sheltering Sector is one of eight sectors that have swung into action to deal with the impact of the tropical condition Shaheen. The sector is currently working on the third phase which handles the process of reconstruction.

He added that all those who were accommodated in evacuation centres were sent back to their homes after they were cleaned up and they were provided with essentials and electrical



appliances. The sector rented 21 flats for 18 families whose houses were badly damaged and they were also provided with all the essential equipment and materials.

The Ministry of Social Development will pay out the rent of flats for a whole year during which the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning will repair the damaged houses. Besides, an amount of RO 1,000 was paid to each of the affected families to help them manage the situation,

the official said.

The Relief and Sheltering Sector dedicated stores to receive aid materials donated by the charitable societies in the wilayats of Al Suwaiq, Al Musannah, Al Khabourah and Saham. These include drinking water, canned food, blankets, flour, rice and electrical appliances. The distribution of these materials was distributed based on a field survey conducted by the Royal Army of Oman (RAO), he said.



GROWTH THROUGH TOURISM

Notice

Online Registration

Call for SMEs to Register in OMRAN Group

In recognition of the importance of SMEs empowerment through enhancing their competitive capabilities to play their active role in supporting the economic development, OMRAN Group is committed to collaborate with different companies to tap into various business opportunities and participate in the industry's growth journey across the tourism supply chain.

To further enhance this collaborative approach, OMRAN Group invites local SMEs to register through the “Online Registration System”, which serves as a one-stop-shop for vendor registration.

For Registration	www.omran.om/tenders
	
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Theyazin sets up Omani Women's Sports and Cultural Innovation Club

MUSCAT: On the occasion of Omani Women's Day, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, on Sunday issued a ministerial decision announcing "Omani Women's Sports and Cultural Innovation Club".

The decision comes in affirmation of essentials endorsed by the Sultanate of Oman in the field of women's empowerment across different sectors.

By announcing the club, the ministry seeks to upgrade women's role in sports and cultural fields in a manner that responds to the actual requirements of women. The club will organise competitions, championships and events of relevance.

The announcement has been made in celebration of the potential of women, who proved capable of enriching the sports and cultural arena, and highlighting their accomplishments. The aim is also to spread awareness about women's status and future aspirations. — ONA

Ahd reaches out to women, kids

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Ahd Foundation and volunteers from Omani Women Association marked Oman Women's Day by offering relief to Shaheen stricken people of North and South Al Batinah.

Believing firmly in the importance of social and humanitarian work, the Ahd Foundation's aid convoy distributed essential supplies to women and children, reflecting the Foundations' concern for society.

Her Highness, the honourable lady, is keen to activate the role of Omani women's associations throughout the Sultanate by participating in the 'Ahd Al Khair' convoy. She affirmed that every hand is needed in times of crisis where the efforts of all sectors are essential.

The objective of the aid convoy was to provide women and children in the cyclone Shaheen affected areas to meet the basic requirements.

With an aim to cover all the affected wilayats, the convoy departed from Muscat Governorate on Sunday morning and continued through Wilayat Al Musannah in South Al Batinah, Wilayat Al Suwaiq, Al Khabourah and Saham in North Al Batinah



Governorate. It also covered Wilayat Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate.

The convoy had marked gathering points through which the staff of Ahd Foundation's women representatives from Omani Women's Associations, volunteers from different units of the Royal Court Affairs and civil associations,

distributed items and supplies to the targeted groups of women and children in the affected wilayats.

Cyclone Shaheen had an immense impact across North Al Batinah as it made landfall in early October and brought a tropical cyclone in the region after more than 100 years.

Successful business women hailed



DUBAI: The Omani pavilion at Expo 2020 Dubai organised a discussion panel on the occasion of Omani Women's Day.

The session was attended by a number of Omani Women from various sectors. It dealt with inspiring stories of successful business women and their contributions towards an innovative and economically sustainable future.

During this event, Lujaina bint Mohsen al Za'abi, Member of State Council, unveiled four stamps highlighting the traditional women's attire in Omani, Suri, Dhofari, and Baluchi styles. These attires represent the nobility and authenticity of the Omani society, which is characterised by the beauty of its colours, shapes and elegance. The stamps were designed by Omani designer Nora Karim.

She also launched the trademark "Taleed" in the Omani pavilion's shop.

Al Za'abi noted that this occasion underscores the role of the Omani women in march of development along with their scientific and professional achievements. — ONA



SAFE SHELTER

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
[@zainabalnassri](#)

With its long coastline and dry interior regions, Oman is a magnet to tropical cyclones of Arabian Sea. Loss of life can be minimised and damage limited if buildings are designed to mitigate the impact of extreme weather events like storms and floods.

After cyclone Shaheen, which hit the Sultanate recently, some engineers suggested making use of the terrace space or top of the house as a safe shelter in the time of cyclones or other natural disasters.

In the event of rising water, one can sit on the terrace while the water recedes or wait for evacuation.

Badr bin Nasser al Hadabi, an architect, said, “After listening to the stories of the Shaheen stricken people, I would suggest building a medium sized room with a pantry on the terrace as an alternative living space during the period of emergency.” Al Hadabi added that a generator may be set up to supply power in case of outage.

TERRACE CAN BE A SHELTER AGAINST
NATURAL DISASTERS. IT CAN ALSO
BE A COMFY PLACE TO HOST BARBECUE
PARTIES OR PLAY AREA FOR CHILDREN

If the design of the roof is completely or partially covered with various triangular or rectangular shapes, it can be converted into a room instead of an attic or just leaving it empty.

The terrace can also be converted into a play area for children or a space for hosting family get-together or a barbecue corner. A few furniture like sofas and folding chairs will make it a comfortable corner to relax or enjoy the evenings in winter.

It can also be converted into a place for pets like birds or small animals. A small garden to grow vegetables or flowers is another option. One can relax while watering plants or tending the flower beds.

Civil engineers suggest that roof terrace must meet safety requirements to prevent accidents. Guardrails must be installed to prevent falls or unauthorized access to certain areas. Good lighting is necessary to ensure the safety of people. Besides providing the required protection from the scorching sun during the day, or windy conditions at night, the roof structure should be robust enough to withstand all kinds of extreme weather.

ROYAL OFFICE MINISTER RECEIVES UAE AMBASSADOR



Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received Mohammed Sultan al Suwaidi, Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to the Sultanate of Oman, in Muscat on Sunday. Gen Al Numani welcomed the ambassador, who expressed his thanks and appreciation for the Sultanate's efforts in the region. He praised the strong relations binding Oman and the UAE. During the meeting, they discussed means of enhancing joint cooperation on regional and international issues of mutual interest. — ONA

FAO Oman marks World Food Day

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 17

This year's #WorldFoodDay is celebrated for the second time during the Covid-19 pandemic, which repercussions triggered an unprecedented global economic recession. This has resulted in a dramatic loss of livelihoods and incomes and increased food insecurity and inequality. It has disrupted agri-food systems. In that context, this year's theme, Better Production, Better Nutrition, a Better Environment, and a Better Life, known as the four betters, will raise awareness of the need for supporting the transformation to more efficient and sustainable agri-food systems. Furthermore, it calls for action across sectors to ensure that our agri-food systems deliver enough affordable, nutritious and safe food for all.

Nora Ourabah Haddad, FAO Representative to the Sultanate of Oman says, "Agri-food systems lie at the heart of sustainable development. A sustainable food

FAO Oman in collaboration with MAFWR and other partner organisations is launching a series of events to celebrate WFD2021

system is one that delivers food for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food and nutrition security for future the generations is not compromised."

She also added " We can all participate in the transformation of agri-food systems by shifting from old consumption patterns to diets that promote all dimensions of individuals' health and wellbeing, have low environmental pressure and impact and are accessible, affordable, safe and equitable. "

The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR), has emphasised the importance of working

together to transform the way the world produces, consumes and thinks about food. A series of national dialogues organised in preparation to UN Food Systems summit, came up with the development of a technical road map outlining its approach to food systems transformation.

Furthermore, the Sultanate stated its commitment to bold new actions, solutions and strategies, and to an action plan which will deliver progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the year 2030, each of which relies on healthier, more sustainable and more equitable food systems.

To commemorate this year's World Food Day, FAO Oman in collaboration with MoAFWR and other partner organisations from both the public and private sector as well academia is launching a series of events to celebrate WFD2021 and raise awareness about food systems for a better production, better environment, better nutrition and better life.

Oman, Lebanon eye trade, investment ties

MUSCAT: The Omani-Lebanese Business Forum, organised by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) on Sunday, explored the available opportunities to promote investment and trade exchange between the Sultanate of Oman and Lebanon.

It also discussed the best ways to build and enhance partnerships between the Omani and Lebanese businesspeople.

The forum, which was held on the sidelines of an official visit by a Lebanese business delegation to Oman, started with a speech given by Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, OCCI Chairman. During his speech, he stated that the private sector plays a great role in developing the commercial and economic relations between the two countries. He explained that there is a mutual ambition to promote and develop such relations to reflect positively on the volume of trade exchange and investment between the Sultanate and Lebanon.

"Although the volume of trade exchange between Oman and Lebanon amounted to RO 17,021,684 in 2020, this figure does not reflect the ambitions of the Omani and Lebanese business people. There are many promising areas of cooperation between the two parties generated by Oman Vision 2040 with its objectives, pillars and executive framework," Ridha said.

"The forum was held at a time when the mutual relations between Oman and Lebanon are growing in many fields as manifested by the exchange of visits by business delegations from the two parties. This prompts the private sector companies at



There are many promising areas of cooperation between the two parties generated by Oman Vision 2040...the forum was held at a time when the mutual relations between Oman and Lebanon are growing in many fields as manifested by the exchange of visits by business delegations from the two parties

RIDHA BIN JUMA AL SALEH
OCCI Chairman

the two countries to work on sustaining their cooperation and partnerships while focusing on the productive sectors including

industry, agriculture, tourism, brands and franchise," Chairman of the OCCI said.

On his turn, Mohamed Choucair, Head of Economic Organizations and Chairman of the Federations of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, gave a speech in which he thanked the OCCI on its invitation to the Lebanese business delegation. He stated that this invitation demonstrates a strong will and determination to move forward in establishing the best economic relations between the two sisterly countries particularly between the private sector establishments in Lebanon and Oman.

During the forum, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion presented a paper "Invest in Oman" which explored the competitive business environment in Oman that promotes growth and economic diversification and empowers the private sector. The presentation highlighted the investment potentials of the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Registration opens for Asyad hackthon

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Asyad Group is inviting Omani data analysts and entrepreneurs to pitch for a place in the Asyad Global Logistics Challenge to be held at Dubai Exhibition Centre (DEC) from November 2 to 4 as part of Expo 2020 Dubai events. Candidates can register at www.asyad.om till October 20. The best pioneering projects and inspiring ideas for the logistics sector will then be selected to compete alongside international contestants next month.

Women are partners in nation-building process

FROM P1

Dr Manal al Zadjali, Dean, Higher Institute of Health Specialities, feels that Omani women have always been empowered with the right knowledge and skills to move together with their brothers and partners towards nation's development.

"Due to the special role that every Omani woman is playing in the society, the government in its Oman Vision 2040 has emphasised to provide suitable environment for women to contribute in different aspects of economic, social and political growth in a way that enables her to actively support and enhance efforts of sustainable development," added Dr Manal.

Omani Women's Day is a day when the entire nation celebrates the outstanding achievements of the Omani women and contributions in building the nation with the Renewed Renaissance. It is an incentive for them to keep moving and contributing to developing and building a new Oman.



MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY

Advertisement No. 42/2021

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tenders:

Serial No.	Tender No.	Tender Description	Document Fee	Deadline for Inquires Submission	Deadline for Obtaining Tender Docs.	Deadline for Submission
1	49/2021/MM/PA-10 - Recall-1	Supply of Garbage Bags	25/- OMR	06/11/2021	23/11/2021	28/11/2021
2	59/2021/MM/PA-16	Maintenance of Fire Extinguishers, Fire Hoses, Sensors and Water Pumps.	25/- OMR	06/11/2021	23/11/2021	28/11/2021

Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.

Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through the link shown above accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. The details of bond (amount & validity) must be as per tender's terms and conditions in the tendering Website starting from the date of bids submission. The original copy of the bond shall be submitted **at First floor at The Directorate General of Quantity Surveying & Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait.**

Tender not accompanied by a tender bond will be rejected.

Note:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please contact us through e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- For technical support of e-tendering system, please send an email to (etenderhd@mtc.gov.om) or call (+968 24402200).

Website: www.mm.gov.om



ROYAL OMAN POLICE
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF MEDICAL SERVICES

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Tender Number	Tender Name	Tender Fee (R.O)	Last Date For Collection	Last Date For Submission
ROP/DGMS/PR/44/2021 Dated 17 th October 2021	Medicines	350/-	28-10-2021	2-12-2021

- Only Registered Manufacturer/Approved Suppliers can participate in the Tender.
- The Tender documents may be obtained from the office of Director General of Medical Services, Royal Oman Police, Qurum, upon receipt of non-refundable payment of respective amount.
- Bid bond certificate of 1% of the total bid amount valid for a total period of 90 calendar days must be attached.
- The response received from bidders must be submitted in 2 hard copies and 1 electronic soft copy on a CD or memory stick (flash drive), all in a sealed envelope showing the Tender Name and Number. No company names or hints of any sort should be shown on the envelope.
- Submissions received after the designated closing time (12:00pm) on the due date may not be considered regardless of the circumstances.
- The DGMS reserves the right to reject any or any part of, or all tenders and also reserves the right to award to a bidder other than the bidder submitting the lowest total acquisition cost.

PATRIARCH SAYS JUDICIARY SHOULD NOT BE SUBJECT TO INTERFERENCE

Call for non-interference in Lebanese judiciary

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Al Rai, the top Christian cleric, said on Sunday the country’s judiciary should be free of political interference and sectarian “activism” amid tensions over a probe into last year’s blast at Beirut port.

Rai also said that it was unacceptable for any party to resort to threats or violence after last week’s deadly unrest around the investigation — which was Lebanon’s worst street bloodshed in more than a decade and stirred memories of the ruinous 1975-1990 civil war.

“We must free the judiciary from political interference, sectarian and partisan political activism and respect its independence according to the principle of separation of powers,” he said in his sermon.

Rai, head of the Maronite church, has an influential role as religious leader of the biggest Christian community in Lebanon. The inquiry into the August 4, 2020 explosion, which killed more than 200 people and devastated swathes of Beirut, has made little headway amid pushback from powerful political factions. Hizbullah chief Hassan Nasrallah has called Judge Tarek Bitar — the lead investigator — biased and politicised.

“The rise in doubts over the (integrity of the) judiciary that has been going for a while has not only undermined the judiciary but also the reputation of Lebanon,” said Rai.

Seven people were killed on Thursday as crowds were on their way to a protest against Bitar in a demonstration called by the



Bechara Boutros Al Rai

Hizbullah group and its ally Amal. The violence added to concerns over the stability of a country that is awash with weapons and grappling

with an economic meltdown.

“The democratic system has afforded us peaceful means for freedom of expression whether in

support or opposition so it’s not acceptable that any party should resort to threats or violence and setting up party checkpoints or tribal ones to get what they want through force,” said Rai.

Hizbullah blamed the Christian Lebanese Forces party for the deaths on Thursday, an accusation the head of that party, Samir Geagea, denied. The perpetrators should be held to account, the Al-Mayadeen TV quoted a Hizbullah representative in the Lebanese parliament as saying on Sunday.

“What the criminals... did is a massacre and it will have important ramifications,” MP Hassan Fadallah said, according to the Beirut-based channel. “Those who incited, planned ... and opened fire should be held to account all the way up to the top.”

On Thursday, the army initially

said rounds were fired on at protesters as they passed through the Teyouneh traffic circle dividing the neighbourhoods. It later said there had been an “altercation and exchange of fire” as protesters were on their way to the demonstration.

Defence Minister Maurice Selim said on Saturday that a stampede and a clash in Teyouneh led to gunfire by both sides, adding that the exchange of fire had preceded the sniper fire.

Families of the victims of the port blast expressed their support for judge Bitar on Saturday after a spokesman for one of their groups surprisingly changed tack on Friday night by saying he should leave.

His sudden change of stance prompted a flurry of speculation on social media that he had been threatened. — **Reuters**

Erdogan says talks under way with US to buy F-16s

ISTANBUL: President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday said Turkey was in talks with the United States to buy F-16 fighters after it was kicked off the F-35 programme for purchasing a Russian missile defence system.

Washington excluded Ankara from Nato’s F-35 stealth fighter jet programme in 2019 after Turkey purchased Russian S-400 defence air systems in defiance of warnings from its Western allies.

The acquisition has imperilled Turkish-US relations and blocked Turkey’s plans to purchase about 100 of the F-35 fighters.

Turkey is now seeking compensation for its ouster from the US-led programme, including for a \$1.4 billion payment it had made before its removal.

Turkey’s purchase of F-16 jets from America is “of course linked to the F-35s issue”, Erdogan told reporters at an Istanbul airport before embarking on an Africa tour.

He said the US had offered Turkey in return to sell F-16s to upgrade its air force fleet.

“We have said we’ll take whatever step is needed to meet our country’s defence needs,” Erdogan said, adding that Turkey was working to modernise its warplane fleet.

Any such sale by the Americans however would need



President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

to be approved by Congress — where anti-Turkey sentiments are on the rise.

Last month, Erdogan said Turkey still planned to buy a second batch of S-400 missile defence systems from Russia.

The US warned Turkey of further risks to bilateral ties if it bought more weapons from Russia.

Erdogan on Sunday said Washington needed to compensate Turkey for its \$1.4 billion payment.

“We raised this issue in our talks. We attach importance to dialogue for a solution to this problem,” he said.

“We are working to further develop our fleet from the modernisation of the F-16s in our possession to new additional F-16 purchases,” the Turkish leader said. — **AFP**

Shekel surplus weighs down Palestinian economy

RAMALLAH: Palestinian businesses flush with too much Israeli cash: it may not be the most talked about aspect of the occupation, but experts warn it is a growing concern for the Palestinian economy.

Palestinians in the West Bank use the Israeli shekel but, beyond that commonality, the two financial systems are dramatically different. In Israel, as in many advanced economies, digital payments are rapidly growing, taking the place of transactions once done with bills and coins.

But in the West Bank, a territory under Israeli military occupation since 1967, cash is still king.

Tasir Freij, who owns a hardware store in Ramallah, said he now has to pay a two per cent commission to deposit paper money because his bank is reluctant to receive it. “This is a crisis... and we are feeling its effects,” Freij said.

Much of the paper money is brought in by the tens of thousands of Palestinians who work inside Israel or Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and who get their wages in cash. Experts and business people say the buildup of hard currency risks stifling the Palestinian financial system.

Freij fretted that buying goods from abroad typically requires converting shekels into foreign currencies, especially dollars or euros, but the abundance of shekels



A Palestinian man counts a stack of Israeli Shekels in the West Bank city of Ramallah. — **AFP**

in the market has forced him to accept painfully unfavourable rates.

The Palestinian Monetary Authority, which functions as the central bank in the West Bank, has warned that paper shekels are building up because it has no way to return the hard currency to Israel.

PMA governor Firas Melhem said that the cash buildup was “a very worrying problem,” causing headaches for banks and businesses.

“If the problem is not resolved quickly, the Palestinian market will turn into a dumping ground for the shekel,” he added.

The shekel was established as the official currency in the Palestinian territories as a result of economic protocols known as the Paris agreements that followed the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Much has changed since those 1994 agreements.

As they lean more on digital transactions, Israel’s banks no

longer want to reabsorb paper cash that accumulates in the West Bank but does not circulate rapidly through the Israeli economy. The Bank of Israel cited security as another reason.

“We stress that uncontrolled cash transfers could be misused, especially for money laundering and terror funding, and would not be in compliance with international standards on the prohibition of money laundering and terror funding,” the bank said in a statement. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

BAGHDAD

Hundreds rally in Iraq decrying vote results

Hundreds of protesters on Sunday took to the streets in some parts of Iraq, condemning the results of recent parliamentary elections in which some groups suffered significant losses, witnesses said.

Preliminary results of the October 10 polls showed that a bloc led by Iraq’s influential cleric Moqtada al Sadr won 73 seats so remains the largest group in the 329-strong parliament. However, the Fatah bloc won only 15 seats, a major decline from the 47 seats it held in the previous parliament.



An alliance of nine groups have rejected the results, claiming the election was marred by “major irregularities.” On Sunday, supporters of those groups rallied in the capital Baghdad and the southern province of Basra and set tyres on fire in protest against the results, witnesses added.

KHARTOUM

Pro-army protesters rally again in tense Sudan

Hundreds of pro-military Sudanese protesters rallied for a second day on Sunday, aggravating what Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok called the “worst and most dangerous crisis” of the country’s precarious transition.

The protesters rallying in Khartoum are demanding the dissolution of Sudan’s post-dictatorship interim government, saying it has “failed” them politically and economically.

“The sit-in continues, we will



not leave until the government is dismissed,” Ali Askouri, one of the organisers, said.

“We have officially asked the Sovereign Council,” the military-civilian body that oversees the transition, “not to interact with this government anymore,” he added.

STOCKHOLM

Swedish foreign minister to visit Israel, Palestine

Sweden’s foreign minister will make the first official visit to Israel in a decade, the government said on Sunday, following seven years of rocky ties after Stockholm recognised Palestine.

“Foreign Minister Ann Linde will visit Israel and Palestine on October 18 and 19,” the government said in a press release.

Since its recognition of the “State of Palestine” in 2014, Sweden has had a difficult relationship with Israel.



Linde will on Monday meet with her counterpart Yair Lapid as well as Israeli President Isaac Herzog. She will also visit Yad Vashem and participate in the opening of an exhibition celebrating 70 years of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

In brief

NEW DELHI



21 KILLED, SEVERAL MISSING AS HEAVY RAINS LASH KERALA

The death toll in landslides and flooding following heavy rains in India's southern state of Kerala climbed to 21 on Sunday, officials said.

Torrential rains since Saturday led state authorities to request the help of the Indian military for rescue and relief operations. Thirteen people died in Kotayyam while eight more rain-related fatalities were reported from Idukki, according to the state information department. A dozen people, some of them children, were missing in Idukki, media reports said. The intensity of the rain had reduced in most parts of Kerala by Sunday morning after continuous rain overnight.

MANILA



DEATH TOLL FROM LANDSLIDES, FLOODS HIT 40 IN PHILIPPINES

The death toll from landslides and floods caused by storm Kompasu in the Philippines has risen to 40, with 18 still missing, the national disaster agency said on Sunday. More than 43,000 people were displaced by Kompasu's onslaught last week, while at least 7,399 houses were damaged, the agency said. The northern province of Ilocos Sur reported the highest number of dead at 14, most from flash floods, while five were still missing there. Nine were killed in the nearby province of Benguet, mostly in landslides, while seven died from landslides, electrocution and drowning in the province of Pangasinan.

KANDAHAR



AFGHANS BURY DEAD AS KANDAHAR ATTACK TOLL MOUNTS

Afghanistan's minority buried their dead for the second Saturday in a row after another suicide bomb attack on a mosque claimed by the IS group. Religious authorities in the southern city of Kandahar said the toll from Friday's assault had reached 60, as hundreds of diggers opened row after row of graves in the dusty soil.

The latest massacre came just a week after another IS-claimed attack on worshippers at a mosque in Kunduz that killed more than 60 people. In a statement, the group said two IS-Khorasan bombers carried out separate attacks on different parts of the mosque.



Flags are seen outside the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) secretariat building in Jakarta, Indonesia. — Reuters file photo

Myanmar junta excluded from Asean summit

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN: Southeast Asian countries will invite a non-political representative from Myanmar to a regional summit this month, delivering an unprecedented snub to the military leader who led a coup against an elected civilian government in February.

The decision taken by foreign ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) at an emergency meeting was an unusually bold step for the consensus-driven bloc, which traditionally favours a policy of engagement and non-interference.

Brunei, Asean's current chair, issued a statement citing a lack of progress made on a roadmap that the junta had agreed to with Asean in April to restore peace in Myanmar.

Singapore's foreign ministry said on Saturday the move to exclude junta chief Min Aung Hlaing was a "difficult, but necessary, decision to uphold Asean's credibility".

A spokesman for Myanmar's military government blamed "foreign intervention" for the decision.

Junta spokesman Zaw Min Tun told the BBC Burmese news service that the United States and representatives of the European

Decision went against its longtime central principle of consensus: Myanmar

Union had pressured other Asean member states.

"The foreign interventions can also be seen here", he said. "We learned that some envoys from some countries met with US foreign affairs and received pressure from EU."

An official junta statement on Sunday morning said Asean's decision went against its longtime central principle of consensus.

"Myanmar is extremely disappointed and strongly objected the outcomes of the Emergency Foreign Ministers' Meeting as the discussions and decision on Myanmar's representation issue was done without consensus and was against the objectives of the Asean, the Asean Charter and its principles", it said.

More than 1,000 civilians have been killed by Myanmar security forces with thousands of others arrested, according to the United Nations, amid a crackdown on strikes and protests which has derailed the country's tentative democracy and prompted

international condemnation.

The junta says those estimates of the death toll are exaggerated.

Asean chair Brunei said a non-political figure from Myanmar would be invited to the October 26-28 summit, after no consensus was reached for a political representative to attend.

"As there had been insufficient progress... as well as concerns over Myanmar's commitment, in particular on establishing constructive dialogue among all concerned parties, some Asean Member States recommended that Asean give space to Myanmar to restore its internal affairs and return to normalcy", Brunei said in a statement.

It did not mention Min Aung Hlaing or name who would be invited in his stead. Brunei said some member states had received requests from Myanmar's National Unity Government, formed by opponents of the junta, to attend the summit. Asean has faced increasing international pressure to take a tougher stand against Myanmar, having been criticised in the past for its ineffectiveness in dealing with leaders accused of rights abuses, subverting democracy and intimidating political opponents. — Reuters

New Japan PM sends offering to controversial Yasukuni shrine

TOKYO: Japan's new prime minister on Sunday sent a ritual offering to the controversial Yasukuni shrine that honours the war dead but is seen by neighbouring countries as a symbol of Tokyo's past militarism. Fumio Kishida sent the "masakaki" tree offering under his name as prime minister to celebrate the shrine's biannual festival held in the spring and autumn, a spokeswoman for the shrine said. Two of Kishida's ministers also offered sacred trees.

Yasukuni honours 2.5 million war dead, mostly Japanese, who have perished since the late 19th century.

But the central Tokyo shrine also honours senior military and political figures convicted of war crimes by an international tribunal.

Earlier this year, three top ministers paid their respects at the shrine on the anniversary of Japan's World War II surrender.

But a Japanese prime minister has not appeared there since 2013, when Shinzo Abe sparked fury in Beijing and Seoul and earned a rare diplomatic rebuke from close ally the United States.

Kishida's predecessor Yoshihide Suga made a pilgrimage to the shrine on Sunday, the spokeswoman said,

while public broadcaster NHK showed footage of his visit.

Suga had avoided visiting the shrine after 2012, when he became the Abe government's spokesman, and only sent ritual offerings when he became prime minister.

Visits to the shrine by government officials have long angered countries that suffered at the hands of the Japanese military prior to and during World War II, particularly South Korea and China.

Kishida, who became Japan's prime minister on October 4, does not plan to visit the shrine during the two-day autumn festival that runs through Monday, Kyodo News reported, citing unnamed people close to him.

But Seoul's foreign ministry on Sunday expressed "deep disappointment" at his decision to send an offering.

"The government expresses and regrets that Japanese leaders again sent the offering or repeated their visits to the Yasukuni shrine", it said in a statement, according to South Korea's Yonhap News Agency.

Seoul urged Tokyo's leaders to "squarely face history and show by action their humble introspection on and genuine self-reflection for the past history". — AFP



Prime Minister Fumio Kishida

Why can't we study?... Afghan girls still barred

KABUL: Afghan teenager Amena saw dozens of classmates killed when her girls' school was targeted by an IS bomb attack in May, but she was determined to continue her education.

Now, like most secondary school girls in the country, she is banned from lessons altogether after the Taliban's government excluded them from returning to class one month ago.

"I wanted to study, see my friends and have a bright future, but now I am not allowed", 16-year-old Amena said at her home in western Kabul. "This situation makes me feel awful. Since the Taliban arrived, I am very sad and angry."

On September 18, Afghanistan's new rulers ordered male teachers and boys aged 13 and over back to secondary schools, picking up an academic year already cut short by violence and the Covid-19 pandemic. However, there was no

mention of women teachers or girl pupils.

The Taliban later said older girls can return to secondary schools, which were already mostly split by gender, but only once security and stricter segregation under their interpretation of religious law could be ensured.

Reports have emerged of girls going back to a few high schools — such as in Kunduz province where the Taliban promoted the return with a stage-managed rally. The de facto Taliban education minister told the UN children's body that a framework to allow all girls to go to secondary school will be announced soon, a senior Unicef executive said on Friday.

But for now, the vast majority are barred from lessons across the country of about 39 million people, including in the capital Kabul. Primary schools, meanwhile, have reopened for all children and women can go to private



Schoolteacher Nasrin Hasani during an interview in Kabul. — AFP

universities, though with tough restrictions on their clothes and movement.

Amena lives just a short walk from her Sayed Al-Shuhada High School, where 85 people — mainly young girls — perished in the

May bomb attack. "Innocent girls were killed", Amena said, her eyes welling up.

"I saw with my own eyes the dying and wounded girls. However, I still wanted to go to school again."

Amena would be in Grade 10 studying her favourite subjects such as biology, but instead is stuck inside with a handful of books doing "nothing special".

The teenager said she dreamt of becoming a journalist, but now has "no hope in Afghanistan".

Her siblings help her at home, and occasionally she gets lessons from a psychologist who comes to see her younger sister, still traumatised by the school attack.

"They say: 'Study if you cannot go to school — study at home so that you may become someone in the future.'"

"My brother brings home storybooks and I read them", Amena said. "And I always watch

the news." But she does not understand why boys are allowed to study and girls are not.

"Half of the society is made up of girls and the other half is made up of boys. There is no difference between them", she said.

"Why can't we study? Are we not part of society? Why should only boys have a future?"

After US-led forces ousted the Taliban in 2001, progress was made in girls' education.

The number of schools tripled and female literacy nearly doubled to 30 per cent, but the change was largely limited to the cities.

"Afghan women have made great achievements in the past 20 years", said Nasrin Hasani, a 21-year-old teacher at a Kabul secondary school who now helps out with primary pupils.

But the current situation has "lowered both our and the students' morale", she said, questioning the Taliban's reasoning. — AFP

UK says will beef up MPs’ security after MP killed

LEIGH-ON-SEA: Britain’s interior minister on Sunday said MPs’ security would be beefed up, after a lawmaker was stabbed to death as he held a public meeting with constituents, in the second such attack in five years.

Veteran Conservative MP David Amess, 69, was talking with voters at a church in the small town of Leigh-on-Sea, east of London, when he was killed on Friday.

The attack has spread fear among MPs, coming just over five years after the similar killing of Labour MP Jo Cox in the febrile run-up to the Brexit referendum.

Police have said they are investigating “a potential motivation linked to Islamist extremism”. The investigation is being led by Scotland Yard’s Counter Terrorism Command.

Home Secretary Priti Patel has ordered a review of security measures for lawmakers and told Sky News that “we need to close any gaps” in security provision for MPs, whose work includes regular meetings with constituents, called “surgeries”.

She said that police and parliamentary authorities were implementing “immediate changes and measures that are actively being put in place, and discussed with MPs”.

This includes MPs sharing



British MP Mark Francois lays flowers at the scene where MP David Amess was stabbed to death during a meeting with constituents at Belfairs Methodist Church, in Leigh-on-Sea. — Reuters

information on their whereabouts with police. Close protection at surgeries was also “in consideration right now”, she added.

The Sunday Telegraph reported that uniformed police were guarding some surgeries following

the attack, which prompted calls from some MPs for a pause in face-to-face meetings.

Police said late on Saturday that detectives had until Friday to question the suspected attacker after he was detained under the

Terrorism Act, which allowed them to extend his detention. He has not been charged.

British media, citing unnamed official sources, identified the suspect as Ali Harbi Ali. Reports said he was a British national of

Somali descent who had been referred to Prevent, the UK’s official counter-terrorist scheme for those thought to be at risk of radicalisation. Ali is believed not have spent long on the programme, which is voluntary, and was never

formally a “subject of interest” to MI5, the domestic security agency, said the BBC.

The Prevent programme is currently under independent review. “We want to ensure it (the Prevent programme) is fit for purpose, robust, doing the right thing, but importantly, learning lessons,” Patel told Sky News.

Detectives said they have been carrying out searches at three addresses in the London area in a “fast-paced investigation”.

Police and security services believe the suspected attacker acted alone and was “self-radicalised”, The Sunday Times reported, while adding he may have been inspired by Al Shabaab, Al Qaeda-linked fighters in Somalia.

Ali’s father, named as Harbi Ali Kullane and said to be a former adviser to the prime minister of Somalia, confirmed to The Sunday Times that his son was in custody, adding: “I’m feeling very traumatised.” Patel nevertheless stressed to the BBC that, “We have the best security and intelligence agencies in the world.”

The government stepped up security for MPs following the 2016 murder of Labour MP Jo Cox, 41, who was shot and stabbed meeting outside her constituency meeting near Leeds, northern England.

— AFP

Germany’s Greens vote on proceeding with coalition talks

BERLIN: Germany’s Greens met on Sunday to vote on the formal start of coalition talks with the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) and pro-business Free Democrats (FDP) after last month’s election led to a reordering of the political landscape.

The summit comes three weeks after the September 26 elections saw a sharp fall in support for outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel’s conservative bloc.

The SPD came out on top and are now in talks with the Greens and the FDP. In the last government the SPD was in a grand coalition with Merkel’s Christian Democrats (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU).

While all three have already come out in favour of formal talks to forge a coalition, Sunday’s Green Party convention would see delegates officially confirm the move.



Germany’s Greens party co-leader Robert Habeck speaks during a party meeting to discuss the results of the exploratory talks and the start of negotiations for a possible new government coalition in Berlin. — Reuters

On Sunday, 99 Green Party delegates have the right to vote on the question but it remains unclear how many will take part. They met in a convention building in Berlin at 1 pm and a decision is expected soon.

Sunday’s meeting is known as a small party conference, or state council, which is the Green Party’s top decision-making body between party conferences. — dpa

Russians return to Earth after filming first movie in space

MOSCOW: A Russian actress and a film director returned to Earth Sunday after spending 12 days on the International Space Station (ISS) shooting scenes for the first movie in orbit. Yulia Peresild, 37, and Klim Shipenko, 38, landed as scheduled on Kazakhstan’s steppe at 0436 GMT, according to footage broadcast live by Russia’s Roscosmos space agency.

Shipenko appeared distressed but smiling as he exited the capsule, waving his hand to cameras before being carried off by medical workers for an examination. Peresild, who plays the film’s starring role and was selected from some 3,000 applicants, was extracted from the capsule to applause and a bouquet of flowers.

The actress said she is “sad” to have left the ISS. “It seemed that 12 days was a lot, but when it was all over, I didn’t want to leave,” she told Russian television. “This is a one-time experience.”

The team was ferried back to



The ISS crew member Russian actress Yulia Peresild rests after the landing of the Soyuz MS-18 space capsule in a remote area outside Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan. — Reuters

terra firma by cosmonaut Oleg Novitsky, who had been on the space station for the past six months. The filmmakers had blasted off from the Russia-leased Baikonur Cosmodrome in ex-Soviet Kazakhstan earlier this month, travelling to the ISS with veteran cosmonaut Anton

Shkaplerov to film scenes for “The Challenge”.

If the project stays on track, the Russian crew will beat a Hollywood project announced last year by “Mission Impossible” star Tom Cruise together with NASA and Elon Musk’s SpaceX. The Russian movie’s plot, which has been

mostly kept under wraps along with its budget, centres around a surgeon who is dispatched to the ISS to save a cosmonaut.

Shkaplerov, 49, along with the two Russian cosmonauts who were already aboard the ISS are said to have cameo roles in the film.

The mission was not without small hitches.

As the film crew docked at the ISS earlier this month, Shkaplerov had to switch to manual control.

And when Russian flight controllers on Friday conducted a test on the Soyuz MS-18 spacecraft the ship’s thruster fired unexpectedly and destabilised the ISS for 30 minutes, a Nasa spokesman told the Russian news agency TASS.

The team’s landing, which was documented by a film crew, will also feature in the movie, Konstantin Ernst, the head of the Kremlin-friendly Channel One TV network and a co-producer of “The Challenge”, said.

— AFP

SHORT TAKES

LA PALMA

No end in sight to volcanic eruption on La Palma

An Algerian court on Sunday sentenced to three years in jail a member of the “Hirak” protest movement that forced longtime President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to resign last year, a rights group said.

The group, CNLD, lists prisoners of conscience in Algeria. It said earlier this month that 61 people were still behind bars for acts related to “Hirak”.

It described the three-year sentence handed down to Brahim Laalami as “incredible and



unacceptable”.

Khaled Tazaghart, a former deputy and anti-regime activist, was also sentenced to one year in a separate trial, the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH) added.

PORT-AU-PRINCE

US missionaries and family kidnapped in Haiti

About 15 American missionaries and family members were kidnapped on Saturday by a gang outside the Haitian capital, a local security source said.

The group of between 15 and 17 people, including children, were being held by an armed gang which for months has been engaged in theft and kidnappings in the area between Port-au-Prince and the border with the Dominican Republic, the source said.

A spokesman for the US



government declined to provide any information.

“The welfare and safety of US citizens abroad is one of the highest priorities of the Department of State,” the official said. — AFP

ROME

Rome holds run-off election for new mayor

Romans began casting ballots in a runoff mayoral election, with a close race expected in an Eternal City plagued by garbage, transport and wild boar troubles.

The two-day vote was being held in the capital a day after a large anti-fascist demonstration and amid allegations of anti-Semitic and pro-fascist behaviour from the centre-right’s candidate.

The centre-left’s Roberto Gualtieri, a former economy minister, was favourite to beat



right-wing Enrico Michetti, a lawyer and radio host, according to polls. Michetti, 55, was last week hit by accusations over an article he wrote last year that was unearthed by a left-wing newspaper. — AFP

US Congress stares down for bringing Trump to book

FRANKIE TAGGART

It was supposed to be a critical week in the congressional investigation into the January 6 Capitol insurrection, focusing on the role of Donald Trump in the riot that threatened US democracy. The former president's key ally Steve Bannon and loyalist staffer Kash Patel were to appear on Thursday while his White House chief Mark Meadows and social media guru Dan Scavino were on the docket for Friday. But none turned up after Trump claimed “executive privilege” barring their participation — highlighting the limits of Congress’s authority to investigate leaders who just don’t want to be held to account.

The House January 6 select committee has repeatedly vowed to take tough action over subpoena holdouts, and kept its word by announcing members were moving to hold Bannon in criminal contempt for his no-show.

Meadows and Patel bought themselves more time with the committee, US media reported on Thursday, agreeing to short postponements. Scavino’s deadline was also delayed.

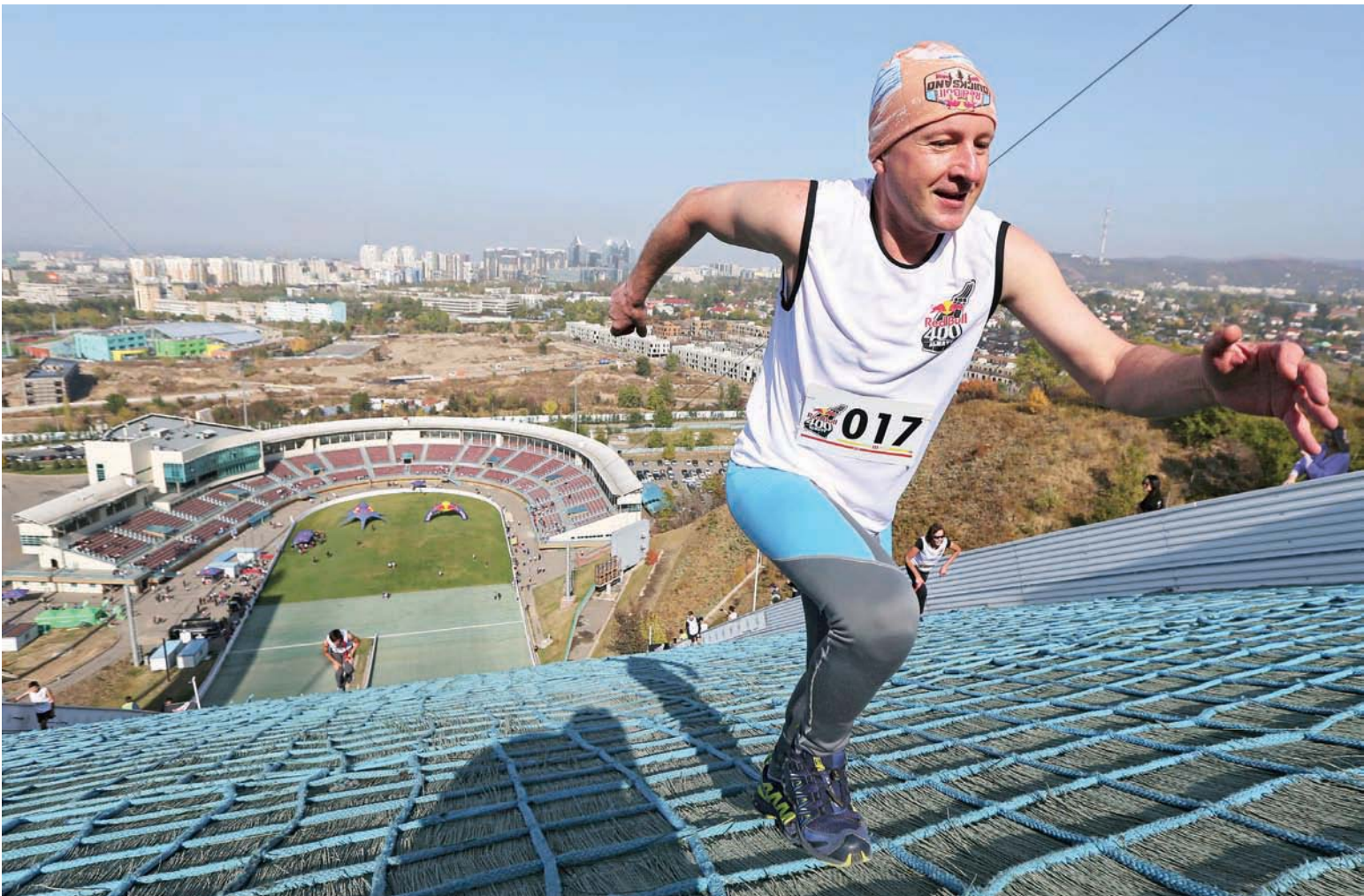
The panel has enjoyed moderate successes, with former acting attorney general Jeffrey Rosen testifying this week about pressure from Trump to involve the Justice Department in the former president’s election fraud misinformation campaign.

Meanwhile, House Democrats have introduced legislation to speed up the enforcement of subpoenas. But for now, say critics, Congress has proved powerless to stop the twice-impeached and twice-acquitted Trump from stonewalling every attempt to investigate the many allegations of malfeasance he has faced.

Fiona Hill, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a one-time deputy assistant to Trump, said in an interview on Wednesday that his defiance of Congress and election fraud lies were part of “a slow motion coup.” Congress has a few legal avenues it can follow in a bid to outmanoeuvre Trump. But the former reality TV star will be dipping into his own bag of tricks honed over two impeachment probes. — AFP

Trump’s defiance of Congress and election fraud lies were part of a slow motion coup. Congress has a few legal avenues it can follow in a bid to outmanoeuvre Trump

FIONA HILL
A senior fellow



AN UPHILL SPRINT

An athlete competes during the Red Bull 400 uphill sprint at the Sunkar International Ski Jumping Complex in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on Sunday. — Reuters

Yes, she can make it!



Abdulaziz Al Jahdhami
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WOMEN IN OMAN HAVE ACHIEVED WHAT WOMEN IN OTHER COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD COULD NOT ACHIEVE

Generally, a woman is the key to quality of life and sustainable development in society and family. A woman is shouldering a common mix of responsibilities including maternity, education and family building; just to name a few! This combination of chores is actually the main factor that makes humanity realise the significant role of a woman in building society. In fact, a woman can play different roles at a time in a family, acting as a mother, a wife, a sister, a daughter, an administrator, a leader and a manager of family.

The mother marks the first educator of children and has always accompanied them since birth, unlike the man who devotes himself to work. As it is her attachment to the child, she becomes the one who gives him affection, nurtures him and establishes him properly to become a scientist, a writer or a doctor and other roles that serve building nations and societies. As the saying goes, “Educate a boy, and you educate an individual. Educate a girl, you educate a community.”

If truth to be told, woman stands as the real architect of a society; she is the companion of men, gifted with equal mental capacity. Overall, woman plays a remarkable role in social, cultural and political life around the world, from the

very early days. Today, woman present various outstanding achievements in all spheres of life; she became countries’ presidents, ministers, ambassadors and business leaders. The importance of woman in society is beyond any doubt and suspicion.

As a mother, she does the biggest part of a child rearing and bearing in the family. She is mainly responsible for the child’s habit of self-control, standing as the first teacher of the child. Mostly, it is from a mother that the child learns the rules of race, laws, manners of men and ethics. Being a wife, she is a companion, partner and an assistant, sacrificing her personal happiness, pleasure and ambitions. Further, she relieves stress and tension of her husband, and sets standards of morality and maintains peace and order at home.

At the local front, women in Oman have achieved what women in other countries around the world could not achieve. She contributed so much to the well-being and lifestyle of their family, community and country. The confidence on Omani women had been built since the onset of the Omani Blessed Renaissance, over five decades ago, led by father of the nation, late Sultan Qaboos, may Allah rest his

soul in peace. Since then, the government has made great efforts to involve Omani women in the government and share responsibility with men.

Oman has always believed in every Omani women and regarded them a successful partner along with men in contributing to serve the nation. In fact, women in Oman proved it right that they are a cornerstone in road mapping Oman’s development march. Hence, designating the annual Omani Women’s Day acknowledges women’s contribution to the country’s social, political and economic progress. As well, this day commemorates the Royal directives to tribute Omani women and appreciate her great efforts in building the man and nation.

The occasion is a memorable day to remind not only the nation, but the entire world of the competences of Omani women as an integral partner in the nation-building march in the Sultanate. Getting recognised on the day are not only employed women, but all including housewives, who should be accredited for what they have been doing on every single day for their families at home. They are bringing up kids from their first day in life, serving the whole family and establishing a well-educated and brought up society.

Can Biden escape the trap formed by narrow margins!



ELIZABETH DREW
Elizabeth Drew is a Washington-based journalist and the author, most recently, of Washington Journal: Reporting Watergate and Richard Nixon’s Downfall.

When the election gods handed Joe Biden the presidency in 2020, they set a trap that he walked right into. The question — one that could define his presidency and affect the 2024 presidential election — is whether he can escape the trap formed by the narrow margins the Democratic Party has in both chambers of Congress. Along with the presidency, Biden was handed a 50-50 vote in the Senate, with the deciding vote to be cast by Vice-President Kamala Harris, and an eight-vote margin in the House of Representatives. Thus, one Democratic Senator or four Democratic Representatives can block any Biden initiative.

At least 15 million people today are stateless, and millions more are threatened with national exclusion. The issue of

statelessness thus demands urgent attention, as do works of history that shed light on the problem.

Notwithstanding this, Biden proposed the expansion or initiation of numerous domestic programmes, with improvements to the “social safety net” and environmental efforts.

Most of these programmes are popular. Combatting climate change has more Democratic than Republican support, and the White House wants it badly because Biden will attend the UN climate-change summit (COP26) in Glasgow on October 31. This may have been what led House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to set the October 31 deadline for Congress to pass the “human infrastructure/climate” bill.

The \$3.5 trillion cost of programmes on the scale Biden envisaged appeared to

be high. Spread over ten years, it amounted to \$350 billion annually, a less alarming amount (though the White House failed to communicate this effectively). Earlier estimated costs of the package had placed it at between \$6 and \$10 trillion, largely because Senator Bernie Sanders, the most left-leaning senator, is chairman of the Senate Budget Committee. Still, \$3.5 trillion had the appearance of being a negotiable number.

But in settling on such an apparently high overall number, did Biden and his aides overlook the fact that, of the 50 Democratic senators, at least two couldn’t be counted upon to go along with such a sum? Joe Manchin, the Democratic senator from West Virginia, which has been turning Republican, is believed to be the

only Democrat who can carry the state. He won it in 2018 by 3.3 percentage points. By contrast, Donald Trump won West Virginia in the 2016 presidential election by 42 points. Though Manchin is the most conservative Senate Democrat, his party has a strong interest in him winning re-election in 2024 if it is to maintain control of the Senate.

The other unreliable vote is that of Kyrsten Sinema, a Democrat from Arizona and a mystery to her Senate colleagues. Once a radical leftist, she’s now right of centre. So far as is known, Sinema has resisted telling almost anyone how she wants the human infrastructure/climate provisions changed — though she says she’s told the president, who has met with Manchin and Sinema several times. Further vexing the

Democrats’ leaders, the two rebels are understood to want different things. White House impatience with Sinema is growing.

Though Biden served as president Barack Obama’s vice-president, he apparently failed to learn the lesson of Obama’s healthcare initiative. Obama and his aides did a poor job of explaining what was in their proposal, which gave the Republicans an opportunity to speak of “socialised medicine” and “death panels.” Similarly, most of what the public now understands of Biden’s package is that it was to cost \$3.5 trillion.

The president maintains that the package can be paid for by raising taxes on the super-wealthy and businesses, but not everyone is convinced.

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Bright start for Oman

SULTANATE THRASH PNG BY 10 WICKETS IN GROUP B OPENER

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Oman hammered PNG by 10 wickets in the opening match of the Twenty20 World Cup 2021 at the Oman Cricket Academy Grounds at Al Amerat on Sunday.

A brief ceremony opened the global showdown, being held in the Sultanate for the first time.

The inauguration was presided over by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

Women riders on horseback at the boundary line and the Royal Cavalry's women band's performance added colour to the function marking the Omani Women's Day on October 17.

Oman captain Zeeshan Maqsood won the toss and elected to bowl first in the afternoon match.

Chasing a modest total of 130 to win, Oman raced to the target in 13.4 overs to collect the two full points from the first match of Group B.

Jatinder Singh (73) and Aqib Ilyas (50) remained unbeaten.

Oman began in nice fashion after reaching 36 in 5 overs without loss.

In 10 overs, Oman were 88 for no loss with Jatinder and Aqib belting the PNG bowlers around the park.

Oman completed their 100 runs in 11.3 overs.

JATINDER HITS FORM

Jatinder, who was off-colour during the practice matches against Sri Lanka last week, brought his fifty with a huge six in 33 balls and followed it up with a boundary to

the off-side in the over of Damien Ravu.

After 12 overs, Oman required only 17 runs to win the match.

In the afternoon, after a brief opening session which saw Opener Aqib Ilyas

Oman were off to a cracking start by claiming two wickets in the first two overs with PNG putting nothing on the board.

Oman left-arm pacer Bilal Khan struck in the first over itself with an

Chasing a modest total of 130 to win, Oman raced to the target in 13.4 overs to collect the two full points from the first match of Group B

SCOREBOARD	
PAPUA NEW GUINEA	
T Ura b Bilal	0
L Siaka b Kaleemullah	0
A Vala c Singh b Kaleemullah	56
C Amini (run out)	37
S Bau c Singh b Maqsood	13
N Vanua b Maqsood	1
S Atai c Ayaan b Bila	13
K Doriga c Goud b Maqsood	0
D Ravu c Nadeem b Maqsood	1
K Morea (not out)	6
N Pokana (not out)	5
Extras (LB-6, W-1)	7
Total (For 9 wks, 20 overs)	129
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-0, 3-81, 4-102, 5-112, 6-113, 7-113, 8-117, 9-118	
Bowling: Bilal 4-1-16-2, Kaleemullah 3-0-19-2, Ilyas 4-0-28-0, Nadeem 3-0-23-0, Ali 2-0-17-0, Maqsood 4-0-20-4	
OMAN	
A Ilyas (not out)	50
J Singh (not out)	73
Extras (LB-2, NB-3, W-3)	8
Total (for no wicket, 13.4 overs)	131
Bowling: Morea 2-0-18-0, Ravu 3-0-28-0, Pokana 2-0-15-0, Atai 1-0-9-0, Amini 2-4-0-31-0, Vala 1-0-11-0, Siaka 2-0-17-0	

in-swinging delivery when he had Tony Ura's inside-edge rocking the stumps.

Right-arm pacer Kaleemullah dealt another blow for PNG when he had Lega Siaka bottom-edging to his wickets with PNG yet to open their account.

PNG then recovered to 23 runs for 2 wickets in the fourth over.

Captain Assad Vala and Charles Amni combined well to take PNG to 80 runs without any further loss of wicket after 11 overs. Vala hit Oman spinner Aqib Ilyas for a six in his last ball of the 11th over to reach a personal score of 40.

The partnership was broken when Mohammed Nadeem's brilliant direct hit on his own bowling ended the innings of Amini at 37 (24 balls).

Vala tried to turn the back of length delivery on leg stump but hit back down the pitch. Amini set off for a run from the non-striker's end but was sent back by Vala. Nadeem stopped the ball in his follow through and his accurate throw shattered the stumps.

The PNG captain departed when the score was at 102 leaving two well-set batsmen in the pavilion.

Oman captain Zeeshan used his full experience to wreck the PNG middle order to claim four wickets for 20 runs in his four overs.

First he bowled Norman Vanua in the first ball of the 16th over with PNG at 112-5.

Then after PNG collapsed like nine pins and lost four more wickets, adding only seven runs.

Zeeshan accounted for Sese Bau, Kiplin Doriga and Damien Ravu, while Bilal Khan claimed the wicket of Simon Atai.



Oman's Jatinder Singh (R) and Aqib Ilyas celebrate their win in the ICC T20 World Cup 2021 match against Papua New Guinea at the Oman Cricket Academy Ground in Muscat. – AFP

Jatinder's form good for Oman prospects: Zeeshan

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Star Oman opener Jatinder Singh cracked a 42-ball 73 runs with seven boundaries and four sixes to return to form to fashion a comprehensive 10-wicket win against PNG in the World Cup T20 2021 opener in Muscat on Sunday.

The right-handed batter enjoyed perfect company from in-form fellow opener Aqib Ilyas (50 runs from 43 balls – 5x4, 1x6).

Earlier, Oman captain Zeeshan Maqsood destroyed the PNG innings with his four-wicket haul for 20 runs. PNG middle order had no clue on handling Zeeshan's

slow left-arm spin and they collapsed to 129 for 9 in 20 overs after 102 for 2 at one stage.

Man of the match Zeeshan said the form of the openers is good for Oman in the prospect of qualifying to the next round.

"It is heartening to see Jatinder storming back to his real class. Aqib is also continuing his good performances. We are happy with the crucial opening win in the World Cup."

On his own performance with the ball, Zeeshan said after his impressive first over, he was told by the team-mates to continue with the spell.

"I got advice from the teammates and the dressing room to continue my slow bowling,



Oman's Jatinder Singh plays a shot during the match. – AFP

which helped in restricting PNG to a low target."

AMINI RUN-OUT

Zeeshan and the PNG captain both agreed that the run-out of Charles Amini by Mohammed Nadeem was the turning point of the match.

On a query on the behaviour of the Al Amerat pitch, Zeeshan agreed that it will be difficult for the new-coming batters after the wickets of well-set batsmen.

"The batter has to spend some time in the middle before playing big shots. It will be difficult for the new batters who have little time to adjust to the pitch."

PNG skipper Asad Vala said they lost the momentum after the

run-out of Amini.

"We lost the wicket at a crucial time and our partnership was bringing us back to the game. Then I lost my wicket and our middle order couldn't cope with the pressure."

Vala promised a better display in the upcoming matches by debutants PNG against Scotland and Bangladesh.

Oman also boosted their run-rate to 3.135 with the win inside 14 overs.

This was the third-highest chase without a wicket lost in all men's T20Is, and also the biggest partnership for Oman for any wicket in men's T20Is.

Oman next face Bangladesh on Tuesday.

Scotland stun Bangladesh

GROUP B FAVOURITES FALL SHORT BY SIX RUNS IN THEIR OPENING MATCH



Scotland’s Chris Greaves (L) and Mark Watt cheer during the ICC T20 World Cup match against Bangladesh. – AFP

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Minnows Scotland registered the first upset of the T20 World Cup 2021 when they edged Group B favourites Bangladesh by six runs at the Al Amerat Stadium on Sunday.

In a thrilling match, Bangladesh needed 18 runs from the last three balls after needing 24 from 6.

Mahedi Hasan hit 6, 4 and 1 to end short at 134 for 7 in 20 overs.

Brad Wheal took 3-24 and Chris Greaves claimed 2-19 for Scotland.

Chasing a decent target of 141 to win, Bangladesh lost their first wicket in the second over when a lofted shot by opener Soumya Sarkar (5) went straight to George Munsey near the boundary off the bowling of Josh Davey.

Liton Das later departed after his mis-timed shot was taken nicely by Munsey at the mid-off in the bowling of Brad Wheal as Bangladesh fell to 18-2 in 3.3 overs.

New batter Mushfiquar Rahim then survived two lbw appeals after both the DRS reviews taken by Scotland were rejected.

Mushfiquar later hit the first six of Bangladesh innings when he swept spinner Michael Leask and repeated the same in the next ball to cheer up the Bangladeshi expatriates present in the stands.

Bangladesh picked up 18 runs from the over to spur up their run-rate and score to 52-2 after nine overs. After 10 overs, Bangladesh were 59 for two and needed 82 runs to win in the next 10 overs.

Shakib al Hasan survived a run-

out when Coetzer failed to hit the stumps at his score on 20.

Scotland skipper Coetzer then brought in Chris Greaves and the leg spinner struck in the first ball when Shakib’s tired shot to midwicket boundary ended in the hands of Calum MacLeod. Bangladesh were 65-3 at that stage in 11.1 overs.

Greaves then dealt another blow to Bangladesh when he clean bowled Mushfiquar with a googly for 38 runs when the Tigers needed 67 runs from 41 balls.

After 16 overs, Bangladesh were 92-4, needing 49 from 24 balls.

Last three overs, they needed 37 runs.

Bangladesh lost Afif Hussain for 18 when he holed out to Davey off the bowling of Mark Watt in the 18th over with the score at 106-5.

Nurul Hassan (2) departed in the 19th over when his attempt for six was thwarted by a brilliant on the rope effort by Wheal who threw the ball back to claim the catch.

Captain Mohammad Mahmudullah’s innings ended at 23 when his effort for a straight six ended short with MacLeod taking the catch leaving the team at 7-116.

Earlier, the Bangladesh captain chose to bowl first after winning the toss in the night match.

Scotland made a slow start and lost their first wicket for 5 runs in the third over. Skipper Kyle Coetzer was first to go for naught when he was brilliantly bowled by an inswinging delivery by Bangladesh pacer Mohammad Saifuddin.

Mathew Cross was next to go for 11 runs in the eighth over after lbw

to Mehdi Hasan with the score at 45 for two wickets.

Adding another run, Scotland lost their third wicket as a well-set George Munsey was bowled by Mehdi for 29 (23 balls).

SHAKIB RECORD

Star all-rounder Shakib al Hasan got into the act by taking the wicket of new batter Richie Berrington (2) in the 11th over.

The Scots then had a mini collapse when they lost two more wickets before adding a run. At that stage, Scotland were reeling at 53 for 6 wickets in 11.3 overs.

Michael Leask didn’t trouble the scorers while Calum MacLeod was out for 5. Shakib and Mehdi were the wicket-takers respectively.

Chris Greaves (45) and Mark Watt (22) then made a 51-run partnership in 34 balls to steady the Scottish ship.

Scotland were 104 for 7 wickets after 17 overs.

In the end, Josh Davey and Safyaan Sherif added valuable runs as Scotland scored 140 for nine in their allotted 20 overs.

Earlier, Shakib became the highest wicket-taker in T20Is when he dismissed Leask. The leading all-rounder in T20Is overtook Lasith Malinga’s tally of 107 wickets and ended the match with 108 wickets in 89 T20Is.

Mahedi Hasan was the top bowler for Bangladesh taking 3-19, while Shakib (2-17) and Mustafizur Rahman (2-32) also chipped in well.

Al Amerat Stadium mesmerises the world with its charm

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, OCT 17

As the live telecast for the Oman and Papua New Guinea match started rolling, television screens around the world beamed videos of Oman’s stunning Al Amerat Stadium mesmerising viewers in all its pomp.

The opening ceremony showcasing Oman’s traditional culture and customs played out before the match started and enthralled the spectators present at the venue.

Al Amerat Stadium has been garnering some rave reviews with its picturesque and scenic views with the grandeur of the Hajar Mountains in the background.

Acclaimed cricket commentator and presenter Alan Wilkins tweeted a video of the stadium on his Twitter handle that elicited appreciation and

admiration from cricket lovers from all over the world.

There are some gorgeous and stunning cricketing venues in the world from the table-top Newlands stadium in Cape Town to the HPCA stadium in Dharamsala, India.

The Gwadar Cricket Stadium in Balochistan has also been in the news for a while now with some dubbing it as the world’s most beautiful cricket venue.

Oman’s very own Al Amerat Stadium is no less than any of the above mentioned venues when it comes to the breathtaking landscape that cricket is played under.

The ICC T20 World Cup 2021 has provided Oman a perfect platform to showcase not just it’s cricketing prowess but their stunning home venue that is on its way to become the pride of Oman cricket.



A general view shows the Al Amerat Cricket Stadium in Muscat. – AFP



Chelsea's Edouard Mendy in action with Brentford's Kai Havertz. – Reuters

CHELSEA

STRUGGLE TO CLINCH WIN OVER BRENTFORD

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, OCT 17

Brilliant goalkeeping by man-of-the-match Edouard Mendy ensured Chelsea's narrow 1-0 win over Brentford and kept them at the top of the Premier League table.

Despite their late incessant attack, Brentford were unable to find a way past the superb Chelsea keeper who was voted the best keeper in the last Champions League.

Brentford manager, Thomas Frank said: "First, I'm very proud of our performance for the 90 minutes. There can only be one deserved winner and that should be us, from the chances we created. We kept the European champions to five shots, that's very impressive. The last 20 to 25 minutes, we truly dominated them."

He added: "In the end we were all over them and that's very

First, I'm very proud of our performance for the 90 minutes. There can only be one deserved winner and that should be us, from the chances we created. We kept the European champions to five shots, that's very impressive. The last 20 to 25 minutes, we truly dominated them

THOMAS FRANK
Brentford manager

impressive. I'm really proud of the performance. It was crazy when you look at the stats after the game in terms of the chances we had.



Chelsea's Romelu Lukaku in action with Brentford's Pontus Jansson. – Reuters

Nine out of 10 times we would have won. Mendy was absolutely world-class. He has been crazily good for Chelsea. I said to him that he had been a little bit annoying. I praised him."

Chelsea were without several players who were rested or injured

after the international break but with the depth in the squad they are always able to field a strong reshuffled side.

Brentford missed a chance of taking the lead in the 21st minute when a shot by Bryan Mbeumo hit a post after a fine cross from the right by Sergi Canos. Chelsea too could have scored in the 37th minute but Timo Werner shot over the bar from a cross Ben Chilwell.

Chelsea certainly had the better of the first half with the goal coming in the last minute before half-time when Chilwell smashed a left-footed volley with precision and technique into the net. It was his third goal in the last three matches for club and country.

Brentford were strong after the break and pressed hard into the visitor's half. Chelsea had a goal from Romelu Lukaku disallowed for offside in the 70th minute and eight minutes later Brentford

missed a chance when Mbeumo once again was unlucky to see his shot hit the bottom of a post.

Chelsea substituted Lukaku with Kai Havertz in the 76th minute but as the game approached the closing stages, Mendy made important saves under intense pressure, including a shot, in the 83rd minute, from close range with the follow-up effort being cleared off the goalline by Trevor Chalobah.

But the most magnificent save came in added time. An acrobatic overhead kick by Norgaard, heading for the equaliser, was superbly tipped over the bar by Mendy who also took a shot bravely in the face to block another attempt at goal and needed treatment for his effort. Norgaard said: "I found myself in the box a few times and the overhead kick would have been the icing on the cake, but it was a great save by the keeper."

Dhofar power past Muscat in Omantel League

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, OCT 17

Goals from Omar al Malki and Mohd al Aseem powered Dhofar to a 2-0 victory against Muscat in the Omantel League match on Sunday.

In another match, Al Ittihad and Rustaq played out a 2-2 draw. Abdul Majid Shaman and Younis al Mushafri scored the goals for Al Ittihad while Mohammad al Ghavri and Ahmed al Adawi netted for Rustaq.

AL NAHDHA WIN

Meanwhile, Al Nahdha commenced their campaign with a 3-1 win over Al Musannah on Friday at the former's home in Al Buraimi Sports Complex.

The triumph meant clinching of Buraimi's representative for the first winning points in this season.

Al Nasr snatched a crucial victory as they edged the hosts Nizwa 1-0 at the Nizwa Sports Complex to register a positive start. League title holders, Seeb were held to a 1-1 draw by Saham at Sohar Sports Complex.

Also, the top fixture of the first week between Al Suwaiq and Saham ended on a 1-1 draw at Sohar Sports Complex.

Coached by the former coach of Oman Olympic team, Hamed al Azani sent a strong message to all the participating teams in the top-tier league with a 3-1 win over Al Musannah.

Ali al Rushaidi was the star of the match as he netted two goals for the hosts beside a goal from Manssor al Naimi. The only goal scored from Al Musannah was by Khalid al Hadabi.

The professional player Diego



Berboza netted all the important goal to deliver a significant victory for his team Al Nasr. Salalah powerhouse club managed to



clinch crucial three points from an away game and this will encourage the team players for top show in the forthcoming rounds.

The national football team player, Salah al Yahyaei, put his team Seeb ahead as he scored the opening goal in the 37th

minute. The equaliser from the hosts Saham came by Faisal al Buraiki in the dying minutes of the first half.

The second week of the league will take place on Thursday as Al Musannah will play against Sohar at Al Rustaq Sports Complex while Al Nahdha will host Saham at Al Buraimi Sports Complex.

Salalah giants, Dhofar, will face Nizwa at Al Saada Stadium and Muscat will take on defending champion Seeb at Seeb Stadium.

Al Rustaq Sports Complex venue will host two matches, the first is between Al Suwaiq and Al Ittihad while Al Rustaq will clash with Bahla.

The concluding match of the week is between Al Nasr and Oman club at the former's home at Al Saada Stadium.



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TOTAL NATIONAL DAY PRIZES OMR 55,000 (5 WINNERS PER YEAR)	TOTAL PRIZES FOR LADIES OMR 11,000 (5 WINNERS PER YEAR)	TOTAL MEGA PRIZES OMR 112,000 PRIZES FOR KIDS, STANDARD & PRIORITY CUSTOMERS

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FIVE NEW INTEGRATED HOUSING PROJECTS TO CREATE 4,800 HOMES IN OMAN

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES: Ministry of Housing & Urban Planning expands Al Souroh Initiative based on PPP model

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Buoyed by the success of its maiden Integrated Housing Development Project at Barka based on the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model, Oman's Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning has unveiled plans for five new developments offering an aggregate of 4,800 housing units catering to an estimated 24,000 people.

Integrated housing schemes under the government's 'Al Souroh Initiative' are proposed to be established on parcels of government land covering a total area of 1.9 million sq metres at Al Amerat (two locations), Al Seeb, Bidbid and Nakhl.

"The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning wishes to present new opportunities for companies and institutions specialised in the real estate development sector (local and international) who have experience, competence, financial and administrative capability in the real estate development, and for those who wish to compete, file a request of "Expression of Interest" to develop one of the locations on the maps shown above," the Ministry said in an announcement late on Saturday.

It described 'Al Souroh' as a national initiative centring on the developments of "integrated



residential neighbourhood projects in support of the existing housing policies in the Sultanate, to provide suitable alternatives of suitable housing for citizens eligible for granting residential lands, in partnership between the public and private sectors".

The five new developments will be broadly modelled on the Hay Al Naseem project — the first of a series of integrated housing schemes planned across the Sultanate under the Al Souroh Initiative. Coming up on a 350,000 sq metre plot of government



land at Barka, Hay Al Naseem is a mixed-use development offering a wide array of residential units surrounded by integrated facilities, while also incorporating commercial facilities, recreational services, public parks and community amenities. Residential options on offer include 132 semi-detached villas (3-5 BHK),

320 apartments (3-4 BHK), 120 detached villas (3-5 BHK), and 479 townhouses (3-4 BHK).

It serves as a model for integrated development with optimal population density that is affordable to Omanis. The model also champions the establishment of sustainable communities within integrated neighbourhoods with

all of the requisite utilities and services set in place.

FIVE NEW SCHEMES

a) Al Amerat 1: Covering an area of around 300,000 sq metres, Plot Number 9197 in Al Amerat in Muscat Governorate will feature an integrated housing project with around 750 assorted residential units distributed across residential apartments, villas, attached villas, semi-attached villas and detached villas, along with a full array of support infrastructure. As many as 3,750 people can be hosted

within this development.

b) Al Amerat 2: Also in Muscat Governorate, Plot Number 9199 is about 445K sq metres in area and will accommodate about 1,100 residential units that will house an estimated 5,500 people.

c) Bidbid: Interested developers are invited to invest in an integrated housing scheme on a 287K sq metre plot in Bidbid (Al Dakhiliyah Governorate) featuring about 750 residential units serving around 3,750 people.

d) Al Seeb: The Ministry is offering about 231K sq metres of land at Hellat Al Fateh in Seeb Wilayat (Muscat Governorate) for the construction of about 600 residential units serving about 3,000 people.

e) Nakhl: The largest of the five developments is proposed to come up at Halban (Wilayat of Nakhl) in South Al Batinah Governorate. The ministry is making available around 637K sq metres of land for the construction of 1,600 residential units catering to about 8,000 people. When eventually implemented and operational, the five new schemes will help offset the backlog of Omanis waiting for their entitlement of residential plots under long-standing government law. In the three governorates of Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah and South Al Batinah, where the five new schemes are planned, the total size of the waiting list of eligible applicants is about 212,000, according to the Ministry. Interested developers have until November 16, 2021 to submit their 'Expressions of Interests' to register their desire to participate in the competitive tender.

ICV share of Oil & Gas contracts to be increased to 36pc

SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION: Since the launch of the ICV programme in 2013, more than RO 2 billion in value has accrued to the local economy, while over 18,000 jobs have been created for Omani nationals

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, OCT 17

The value of contracts retained in-country in line with the government's In-Country Value (ICV) development programme has climbed to 28.7 per cent of total contracts in 2020, up from 18 per cent in 2018. Value retained in-country of projects. The target

is to raise the ICV component to 36 per cent in the next phase of its implementation, according to the CEO of Oman Society for Petroleum Services (OPAL).

Abdulrahman al Yahyai was speaking at the launch of a new book documenting the ICV contribution of companies operating in the energy and minerals sectors in the Sultanate. The launch was held at the Grand Millennium Muscat Hotel under the auspices of Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance. Also in attendance Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

"Foreign investments inflows into the oil and gas sector are a clear demonstration of our industry's ability to adapt to changes, while also underscoring investor confidence in the attractiveness



and stability of the business environment surrounding the oil and gas sector in Oman," said Al Yahyai.

"The oil and gas sector continues its efforts to enhance in-country value creation while continuing to achieve its operational

and financial objectives and maintain its competitiveness, flexibility and business continuity notwithstanding the perils posed

by the coronavirus pandemic. These efforts are in line with Oman's Vision 2040 to promote the growth of the national economy through local value-added programmes," he further noted.

In 2013, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals launched Oman's first ICV programme, which seeks to ensure that a sizable portion of all contracts — procurement or services — are retained within the country. A special ICV committee was also set up at the Ministry to oversee this strategy," the CEO said.

Since the launch of this programme, more than RO 2 billion in value has accrued to the local economy, while over 18,000 jobs have been created for Omani nationals.

A copy of the book on ICV was unveiled by Al Jashmi at the event. (With inputs from ONA)

Bank Muscat honours achievements of Omani women and their contribution

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has expressed its deepest appreciation to all Omani women, including the bank's female employees in particular for their continuous efforts and achievements. It has to be noted that the wholehearted participation and the strong role of women has been playing a great role in the stability, progress and long term development of the Sultanate.

As one of the achievements of Omani Renaissance, Bank Muscat is proud of the opportunities that have been provided to women employees who now make up more than 48 per cent of the over 3,800 employees at the bank.

As a result of its excellent HR practices, women employees work across different departments and at all levels including the bank's senior management. The bank provides a professional work environment based on a fair and equal opportunity to all, state-of-the-art technology and global best practices in the financial services sector. Bank Muscat has affirmed that the bank will continue to provide more educational opportunities and 'on the job training' to Omani women to reach the highest levels in their career in the coming years.

Ilham bint Murtadha al Hamaid, Deputy General



Ilham al Hamaid



Rabab al Ajmi



Sumaya al Hasni



Ola al Talie

Manager — Large Corporates, Bank Muscat, said: "Bank Muscat is particularly proud of the role that Omani women play in various sectors, especially in the banking sector and their contributions to the progress of the bank. Omani women have proven their abilities and leadership skills and this is reflected in the new organisational structure of the bank, which will come into effect from January 1, 2022. The bank is keen to continue supporting Omani women and give them more opportunities to grow and rise to the top-most levels as well as contribute to achieving the goals of the landmark Oman Vision 2040. I extend my sincere appreciation, thanks and greetings to each and every Omani woman as we work together for the further advancement of our beloved country.

A number of Bank Muscat

female employees also expressed their happiness regarding the fact that a day has been dedicated to Omani women and to celebrate their successes and achievements in various sectors.

Speaking on the occasion, Ola bint Rashid al Talei, Manager, Safalat Ibra Branch, North Al Sharqiyah, said: "The bank has led to more women actively contributing to the nation's progress and development. My own journey at Bank Muscat is an excellent example of how the bank encourages and promotes its women employees to do well in their careers. I was able to gain good experience over the years and reach the position of branch manager. Our experiences over the years have taught us to absorb the art of management and overcome various challenges. I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to Bank Muscat, especially the Executive Management, for the

support and attention accorded to Omani women. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate all Omani women, especially my colleagues."

Speaking about the importance of the day for Omani women, Rabab bint Abdullah al Ajmi, Manager, Saham Corniche Branch, North Al Batinah, said: "We are proud to be honoured on this day which have motivated Omani women to exert more efforts in nation-building and contribute more to the success of the Sultanate in different sectors. The strong participation of Omani women will be an engine of strong growth that helps achieve the ambitious goals of Oman Vision 2040."

Sumaya bint Khalifa al Hasni, Manager, Al Kamil Branch, South Al Sharqiyah, said: "I am thankful to Bank Muscat for giving me and my women colleagues many opportunities to develop our skills and grow in our careers at the bank. Bank Muscat has always provided the best possible opportunities to its women employees and this support is a crucial part of why we have done very well. I am proud of all my sisters at the bank and across the country who are working daily to strengthen Oman and its economy in line with the goals of the landmark Oman Vision 2040."



Khedmah launches mobile tap machines

MUSCAT: Seeking to expand its digital platforms and committed to diversify its unique services and expand its reach, Oman Investment & Finance Co (Khedmah), recently released Mobile Tap Machines. This will be their new addition to a wide array of digital payment methods.

These portable machines will be placed in selected areas across the Sultanate based on customers' needs.

The new machines are easy to transfer from one place to another providing greater flexibility to attend for customers' needs in their suited areas. Through these machines, Khedmah can be present in various events and activities to serve its valued customers.

With the addition of the new machines, Khedmah network now boasts 68 branches and 56 kiosks across the Sultanate. Through these channels and other digital platforms such as the website and Khedmah mobile app, clients can easily pay their electricity, water and telecommunications bills, recharge phone and electricity prepaid meter.

"The launch of Mobile Tap Machines resonates with the company's vision of providing high-end and easily accessible services to community members. The placement of these machine across the Sultanate is based on several factors, such as population density, changing competition factors, and urban development. Due to its relocation flexibility, the company can meet the changing requirements of the market. Khedmah constantly seeks to leverage innovation and uplift its digital network in particular to contribute to the national priorities that aims to achieve digital transformation and financial inclusion, ultimately creating a sustainable and digital economy,"

THESE PORTABLE MACHINES WILL BE PLACED IN SELECTED AREAS ACROSS THE SULTANATE BASED ON CUSTOMERS' NEEDS

said Adil bin Abbas al Balushi, senior Manager of Infrastructure at OIFC.

Over the past period, Khedmah's branches and digital channels saw a strategic development in terms of expansion and new innovative services. These achievements came as a result of extensive studies conducted by the company on the locations of branches, market developments, and the level of customer satisfaction with the services delivered.

This allowed OIFC to acquire insights and determine what is desired by consumers, and thus provide tailor-made services to them that meet their aspirations.

Khedmah mobile app also seen a huge demand as the number of downloads surpassed half a million. This is due to its smart and easy solutions that saves time, efforts and money.

OIFC is one of the leading Investment and Services Company and specialises in billing, collection & debt factoring for electricity, water and telecom services in the Sultanate.

The company's various branches and e-payment channels allow customers to easily pay their electricity, water and telecommunications bills, recharge phone, electricity prepaid meter bills, entertainment recharge as well as making payment to the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI).

Through its various branches across the Sultanate, the company also provides customer support related to these services.

Apollo Hospital Muscat and Oman Cricket sign agreement for healthcare partner

MUSCAT: Apollo Hospital Muscat signed an agreement with Oman Cricket as a healthcare partner recently. The agreement was signed officially by V T Saileshwaran, Managing Director of Apollo Hospital and Pankaj Khimji, Chairman, Oman Cricket.

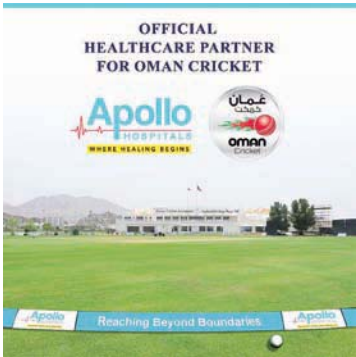
"We are extremely grateful to the management of Apollo Hospitals for collaborating with Oman Cricket as its official Healthcare Partner and supporting our efforts to promote Oman as a sporting destination," said Pankaj who signed the agreement on behalf of OC.

V T Saileshwaran said, "We have a strong team in sports medicine and we are happy to join Oman Cricket, the official governing body of the cricket sport in Oman in making the sport

reach and maintain its international standards in technical level by providing the best of medical support."

K P Shobha, Chief Operating Officer, Apollo Hospital Muscat said, "We offer approximately thirty specialty clinics and we can proudly claim that we are one of the hospitals in the Sultanate, offering regular super specialty consultation clinics under the expertise of visiting doctors from India, Germany and Jordan in the field of Spine, Orthopaedics, Urogynaecology, Urology and Neurosurgery".

"Most players are prone to what is called as on field injuries which would need primary healthcare attention — from preliminary examinations to clear the player basically if they are to fit enough to proceed with the game. In case



of a sprain or ligament tear, the players would be shifted to the hospital with immediate management of the injury. Whatever the injury is we have the facilities to manage the treatments," said Dr Raghavan, Orthopaedic Surgeon.

Dr Saseendar Shanmugasundaram, Orthopaedic and Sports surgeon, says the most common injuries comprise of ligament tears of the knee (ACL, PCL,

meniscus tears, shoulder dislocations (Bankart tear), as well as ankle ligament tears. "Injuries from cricket can range from minor to major — can be finger injuries, or sometimes can be Knee or shoulder dislocations. We manage all these injuries with a goal of getting them back to sports performance at the earliest."

While M Vijay Kaliswaran MPT (Sports) MIAP, sports physiotherapist, says "We have assigned a designated sports medicine specialty team to take care of the players when they arrive here during the matches. We also have an efficient on field medical team who will be on constant contact with the hospital team. On field injuries will be attended to on priority with our ambulance ready to pick the players and bring them to the hospital."

BankDhofar volunteer team supports relief efforts after Shaheen

MUSCAT: The 'Mujtamaie' volunteer team from BankDhofar took part in the relief efforts in the North and South Al Batinah Governorates as the bank's participation in this national call will support the efforts of speeding up the reconstruction and rebuilding efforts.

Commenting on the initiative, Ahmed bin Said al Ibrahim, CEO, says, "Through our Mujtamaie volunteer team, we aim to reinforce the aspect of being socially responsible. We have all

witnessed the devastating effects of the tropical cyclone Shaheen in the Governorates of North and South Al Batinah, and in demonstration of our solidarity with the affected families, our voluntary team supported the recovery efforts after the cyclone. The efforts exerted will contribute in returning life to normalcy, and we pray to protect Oman from all harms".

The team members were distributed among various areas of North and South Al Batinah



governorates and helped in providing a number of services including hygiene and sanitation, distributing food supplies to the affected families, among other services.

BankDhofar had announced earlier its support of the national efforts to contain the effects of Tropical Cyclone Shaheen with RO 500,000 to be distributed to impacted families. The bank has

also allocated RO 10 million as interest-free loans for affected customers, and announced deferment of loan installments for up to 5 months.

This initiative highlights BankDhofar's leading role in supporting various social and economic causes. The bank had provided support during previous cyclones that hit the Sultanate, including cyclone Gonu and cyclone Mekunu, which caused drastic damages to the infrastructure and affected

families.

Corporate Social Responsibility is an important pillar of BankDhofar's operations; environment element, community development, and social have always been among the priorities and interests of the bank. BankDhofar continues to deliver on its commitment by innovating strategic sustainable CSR programmes, initiatives, activities, and potential investment opportunities; ensuring lasting positive benefits



In brief

■ CHENNAI

INDIA'S ELECTRICITY
DEMAND PICKS UP
IN OCTOBER

India's electricity demand grew 4.9 per cent during the first half of October, with supply falling short of demand by 1.4 per cent despite a 3.2 per cent rise in coal-fired generation and 30 per cent rise in solar output, a Reuters analysis of government data showed.

Increased economic activity after the second wave of the coronavirus has driven up electricity demand, resulting in a supply deficit due to a coal shortage that has forced northern states to cut power this month for up to 14 hours a day.

The rapid surge in power demand and high global coal prices have left utilities scampering for coal. — Reuters

■ CAIRO

SAUDI ARABIA LAUNCHES
OFFSHORE PLATFORM
TOURISM PROJECT

Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund, the Public Investment Fund, announced the launch of 'THE RIG', which it said would be the world's first tourism destination on offshore platforms.

The fund, the engine of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's economic transformation plans for Saudi Arabia, manages a portfolio worth \$400 billion.

It added in a statement that the project was located in the Gulf and spanned an area of more than 150,000 square metres. It said the project would feature a number of attractions.

— Reuters

■ CALIFORNIA

MCDONALD'S TO START
TESTING MCPLANT
BURGER IN US

McDonald's will start testing its McPlant burger, which features a patty developed with Beyond Meat, in the US next month. The test will begin on November 3 in eight locations in Texas, Iowa, Louisiana and California, McDonald's has announced. The sandwich, which features a plant-based burger patty, will come with cheese and mayonnaise and be cooked on the same grill as meat-based products and eggs, and therefore will not be vegan. The McPlant has already debuted in parts of Europe, including Sweden, Denmark and the UK.

Menu items that mimic the taste and feel of meat have become more commonplace on fast-food menus, but consumer demand may be easing.

— Reuters

Oman Air scoops 3 prizes at
World Travel Awards 2021

MUSCAT: Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, has won Middle East's Leading Airline, Middle East's Leading Airline: Customer Experience and Middle East's Leading Airline: Economy Class at the prominent World Travel Awards 2021, voted for by air travellers based on their own experiences.

The awards were announced online this year and recognise Oman Air's excellence for its on board products and services, customer care and passenger experience. This year's award for Middle East's Leading Airline: Economy Class follows consecutive wins in the same category from 2014 to 2020.

Abdulaziz al Raisi, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Air, commented: "Oman Air is delighted to once again be recognized for our outstanding products, services and customer care, both in the air and on the ground."

"Our commitment to deliver a truly exceptional journey for all our valued guests has always been a priority, and these latest accolades from the World Travel Awards let us know that we're



delivering on that promise. They inspire us to keep innovating our product offering and elevating our service levels which consistently reflect the premium flying experience that Oman Air is renowned for."

Oman Air has continued to receive awards from industry bodies, consumer groups and publications around the world.

Notably in 2021, the airline has won 'Best Airline Staff in the Middle East' at the prestigious Skytrax World Airline Awards 2021, a Five-Star rating in the

Major Airline category from the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX), the Skytrax 5-Star Covid-19 Airline Safety Rating and the Skytrax 5-Star Covid-19 Lounge Safety Rating for its lounge at Muscat International Airport. The carrier and its Holidays division also earned the Safe Travels Stamp from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC).

Abdulaziz al Rashdi, Vice President Marketing, Oman Air, stated: "Winning these awards confirms once again that our

valued guests appreciate our suite of innovative products and the authentic Omani hospitality offered by all our staff. Oman Air consistently ranks high for on board comfort, luxury and service, and for the level of customer care received on the ground, whether arriving, transiting or departing. We are committed to a premium flying experience for all our guests and to maintaining service excellence throughout their entire journey — it's what Oman Air does best."

— ONA

United Airlines to ramp up transatlantic service



CHICAGO: United Airlines last week announced an expansion of its transatlantic service next year, adding five new destinations to capitalise on pent-up travel demand.

US carriers are buoyed by the Biden administration's decision to reopen to fully vaccinated air travellers from 33 countries, including most of Europe, in November.

In 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic, transatlantic routes accounted for up to 17 per cent of passenger revenues for the big three US carriers — United, Delta and American.

The airlines have said they have seen a surge in bookings since the White House announced the lifting of the travel restrictions

last month. United has said that it expects the transatlantic route to have the busiest ever summer next year.

In May, the company will start new flights from Washington to

Amman in Jordan, New York to the Azores, and New York to Bergen in Norway.

In June, it plans to start flights from New York to Spain's Balearic and Canary Islands.

Anticipating an increase in travel demand, the Chicago-based carrier is also planning to add more flights to Munich, Milan, Berlin, Rome and Dublin.

"We will be flying to more destinations across the Atlantic than ever in the company's history", said Patrick Quayle, Senior Vice President of International Network and Alliances at United. "We are confident that bookings across the transatlantic will be the best."

Other carriers are also gearing up for the reopening of the world's most important long-haul market. Delta Air Lines Inc on Wednesday said all of its flights for Europe next year will have new premium economy seats. — Reuters

Global oil market is tight, despite what producers say

LONDON: Global petroleum inventories have fallen to their lowest seasonal level for seven years as producers have failed to raise output to match the rapid rebound in consumption since last year's coronavirus-driven recession.

In contrast to shortages in coal, gas and electricity, the oil shortage is largely discretionary, as producers in the Opec+ group of major exporting countries and US shale firms have opted to limit increases in their output.

But low inventories have eroded the market's capacity to absorb faster-than-expected consumption growth or a sudden disruption of output without prices spiking higher.

The consequence has been on display since last month, when Hurricane Ida disrupted offshore

output in the Gulf of Mexico, resulting in a sharp rise in both spot prices and calendar spreads.

Low stocks have created an asymmetric risk profile in which the market is more vulnerable to unexpectedly fast growth in consumption or unanticipated supply outages than the reverse.

Major oil producers say they are not trying to raise prices but are worried about a potential future slowdown in consumption growth as a result of coronavirus flare ups.

But their actions are helping keep inventories below normal and imply they are happy with the rising trend in prices, which is also boosting revenues.

In the United States, petroleum inventories outside the strategic petroleum reserve are at their lowest seasonal level since 2014,



A worker collects a crude oil sample at an oil well operated by Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA in Morichal, Venezuela. — Reuters File

and around 50 million barrels or almost 6 per cent below the pre-pandemic five-year seasonal average.

In percentage terms, the current deficit to the pre-

pandemic five-year average is in the 87th percentile for all months since 1995, which confirms the market is fairly tight in historic terms.

Across the OECD as a whole,

US Coast Guard:
Cargo vessel 'party
of interest' in oil spill

LOS ANGELES: Investigators from the US Coast Guard boarded a cargo vessel on Saturday in Long Beach that could be tied to the rupture of a pipeline that spilled an estimated 25,000 gallons of oil off the Orange County coast, the agency said.

Braden Rostad, Chief of Investigations for Los Angeles-Long Beach, determined that the MSC DANIT, a large container ship, was involved in a January 25 anchor-dragging incident during heavy weather at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, the Coast Guard said in a statement.

The anchor-dragging occurred near a pipeline that runs from an oil platform to the Port of Long Beach. That pipeline was subsequently discovered to be the source of the Orange County oil spill on October 2, the statement said. An oil sheen was first spotted that evening by a vessel 4 1/2 miles off Huntington Beach and then detected by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The pipeline was intact in October 2020 when the company that operates it last did an inspection, and the marine growth visible around the displaced section of the pipeline indicates the anchor drag likely was not recent, said US Coast Guard Capt Jason Neubauer.

Investigators suspect an initial anchor strike displaced part of the pipeline many months before the spill, stripping away its concrete casing and causing it to be more vulnerable to other potential anchor strikes or environmental stressors.

As they attempt to determine when that first strike occurred, the investigating team is focusing on a storm that brought strong winds to the area over the course of two days in late January.

Data of vessel movements reviewed by the *Los Angeles Times* show MSC DANIT moving over the pipeline while in high winds January 25, before eventually moving out to the channel near Catalina Island. — dpa

Supply chains, inflation cloud vaccine at IMF — World Bank meetings

Supply chain woes and growing inflation concerns pushed aside a widening gap in Covid-19 vaccinations and mounting debt problems for developing countries as the top concerns for global policymakers at International Monetary Fund and World Bank annual meetings this week.

Relatively little new progress was made on increasing vaccine supplies to developing countries, although officials highlighted an increasing divergence between rich and poor countries as a growing financial and economic risk.

The focus on the normalisation pains that wealthier economies are experiencing and a World Bank data-rigging scandal that had clouded the future of IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva proved a disappointment for anti-poverty groups.

“Given how the pandemic is becoming worse in most of the world’s countries, I’m concerned by the lack of action at the meetings on vaccine distribution, debt relief and general pandemic response”, said Eric LeCompte, Executive Director of the Jubilee USA Network, a religious development group.

Communiqués issued by G20 finance leaders and the IMF’s steering committee pledged to increase vaccine supplies, but did not identify specific new goals or initiatives to expand financing or distribution.

Instead, they gave greater prominence to growing inflation pressures, calling on central banks to monitor closely whether they are transitory or could unanchor inflation expectations.

World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhananom Ghebreyesus told an IMF forum that the world is falling behind on goals to immunise 40 per cent of the world’s population by the end of this year, and criticised wealthy countries for approving third booster shots when much of the world’s population has yet to receive a single vaccine dose.

“The donations are not enough. It’s very disappointing that it’s taking so long for the world to really commit” to reaching vaccination goals, he said.

The IMF said a “great vaccine divide” was keeping developing countries mired in low growth as they struggle with high coronavirus infection rates. This, along with supply chain bottlenecks, semiconductor shortages and rising price pressures in advanced economies, prompted the IMF to trim its global growth forecast for 2021.

Some policymakers were more focused on managing the next phases of economic recovery after unprecedented fiscal support, and other multilateral issues, such as implementing a deal to revamp global corporate taxation.

“My feeling about all the meetings we had in Washington, and during these IMF meetings, is that we are beyond Covid”, French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire told reporters.

— Reuters

I’m concerned by the lack of action at the meetings on vaccine distribution, debt relief and general pandemic response

ERIC LECOMPTÉ

Executive Director,
Jubilee USA Network



NEW HUB FOR DIGITAL CURRENCY

Workers install a new row of Bitcoin mining machines at the Whinstone US Bitcoin mining facility in Rockdale, Texas. The long sheds at North America’s largest bitcoin mine look endless in the Texas sun, packed with the type of machines that have helped the US to become the new global hub for the digital currency. — AFP

Real yields a boon to tightening commodity markets



OLE HANSEN
Head of Commodity Strategy, Saxo Bank

SURGING GAS AND POWER PRICES HAVE ALSO BEEN FELT OUTSIDE EUROPE WITH HOT WEATHER-RELATED DEMAND NOT BEING MET BY A SIMILAR RESPONSE FROM PRODUCERS

After what has already been a strong year for commodities, we maintain a bullish outlook into Q4 and beyond. The strong rally seen across many key commodities this year has been driven by surging consumer spending following the Covid-led economic contraction — the biggest in living memory. As the impact of government spending and handouts from governments in Europe, China and the US begins to taper off, the market has started to cool a bit.

However, supply constraints will, in our opinion, continue to support prices despite a slower growth trajectory.

Ahead of the final quarter of 2021, the Bloomberg commodity index — which tracks a basket of major commodity futures evenly split across energy, metals and agriculture — had risen by 25 per cent, with gains seen across all sectors except precious metals.

Later in this outlook we take a look at the reasons why gold, the most interest rate and dollar-sensitive of all commodities, has struggled to rally despite what should have been strong tailwinds from near-record low negative real yields.

First though, we need to take a closer look at the European power and gas markets.

During September they surged to reach prices more than four times higher than the long-term average. At the time of writing Dutch gas — the European benchmark — was trading up 250 per cent on the year, while German power and coal prices were both up by around 150 per cent. These three markets, together with an also surging European emissions price, are not part of the mentioned index, which

otherwise would have been higher than the ten-year high reached in September.

Surging gas and power prices have also been felt outside Europe with hot weather-related demand not being met by a similar response from producers. Add to this the worst quarter for wind power generation in years, and the pressure on traditional fuels such as gas and even coal has been elevated. As a result we are heading into the northern hemisphere winter with stock levels, both in the US and especially in Europe, well below the average seen in recent years.

If not arrested by a milder than normal winter or increased flows, either from LNG or from Russia through the soon-to-open Nord Stream 2 pipeline, a bleak — and expensive — winter could await Europe’s consumers and energy-heavy industries.

ENERGY: We see the Brent crude oil price range shift higher by \$5 from the mid-60s to mid-70s that we forecast, and which prevailed throughout most of the third quarter. With crude oil settling into a range following the dramatic first half surge, the reflation trade also started to deflate, thereby reducing investor appetite for commodities.

The fading momentum and return to rangebound trading helped drive a 23 per cent reduction in the combined net long futures position held by funds in WTI and Brent.

With more optimistic Covid-19 developments expected into the year-end, the IEA sees global oil demand rebound by 1.6 million barrels/day in October and continue to grow into the year end. Add to this the loss of more than 30 million

barrels of production during the US hurricane season, along with the risk of failure to reach a nuclear deal with Iran, and the Opec+ group of producers are likely to continue to support a gradual price increase by keeping monthly production increases at a steady pace of around 400,000 barrels per day.

Just as the reflation trade deflated as oil settled into a range, the prospect for higher prices into the year end and beyond could be the trigger needed to re-establish that focus, thereby supporting reflation darlings such as copper, and potentially even gold.

Precious metals led by gold remain stuck in a range that by now has prevailed for more than a year.

Besides silver’s unsuccessful attempt to break above \$30 during Q1, both metals have been stuck in ranges, with gold currently struggling to find a way out of its \$200 wide range between \$1700 and \$1900.

During the past quarter one of the interesting developments was gold’s inability to shine despite a renewed drop in Treasury yields, not least ten-year real yields which at one point hit a record low at -1.2 per cent.

Gold’s inverse correlation with real interest rates has been well documented, and can be seen in the chart.

Along with the ebb and flow of the dollar and the general level of risk appetite, we have some of the key components which determine the direction of gold. With strong risk appetite being a constant throughout the year, at least up until August, gold’s value as a diversifier diminished.

US retailers scramble ahead of festive season



JOHN BIERS
Business Reporter, AFP

RETAILERS ARE GOING TO NEED TO RESORT TO ‘DEMAND SHAPING,’ WHERE THEY STEER CONSUMERS TO PRODUCTS THAT ARE IN STOCK

With the pandemic grimly persisting, American homes could face a meager holiday season, forced to do without some of their favourite items missing from store shelves.

Even as demand surges as the world’s largest economy reopens, US retailers are working hard to avoid putting a damper on festivities, taking unprecedented actions to try to navigate around myriad supply chain obstacles. The most dramatic steps have included moves by Walmart and other big box chains to charter their own ships and bypass messy delays at West Coast ports.

Other workarounds have included bringing imports in earlier in the season, launching holiday promotions sooner and shifting to air cargo from ships.

“A lot of companies have made the decision over the last 30 days that ‘we have to change modes’”, said Neel Jones Shah, global head of air freight at Flexport, a freight forwarding company.

“They’re having to pivot to air or they’re going to miss their sale season all-together.”

But even with these measures, Scott Case, a logistics industry veteran and founder of Chicago-based Position: Global, predicted “there are going to be noticeable gaps in what is available to people this holiday season.”

Retailers are trying to plan for that as well, working up strategies to mollify or cushion the disappointment when choice items run out.

On the positive side, consumer activity remains robust, a dynamic apparent in US retail sales data released on Friday, which showed another surprising gain in September.

“It will be a good holiday season from a demand perspective”, said Neil Saunders, Managing Director of GlobalData Retail, who expects companies to offer fewer promotions to entice buyers than they have in the past due to the tight supply.

On top of the backlog at ports, that has seen ships lining up waiting to offload their containers, retailers are contending with manufacturing outages at key plants in Asia where local governments have imposed lockdowns due to Covid-19.

They also face shortages of frontline workers, which could make it challenging to hire enough seasonal employees. These supply chain bottlenecks were a key focus of attention of finance ministers gathered last week in Washington. And at the White House President Joe Biden announced a commitment by the Los Angeles Port to work 24 hours a day.

Piggybacking on the publicity surrounding the issue, trade groups like the National Retail Federation have been urging consumers to shop early this season.

But even so “There’s going to be some monumental shortages”, said Terry Esper, a professor of logistics at Ohio State University’s Fisher College of Business.

Retailers are going to need to resort to “demand shaping”, where they steer consumers to products that are in stock, or substitution, sometimes with a higher-value option. For example, a customer who wants a wool sweater, might be offered one made of cashmere instead.

Companies are diversifying suppliers and shifting from a “just in time” to a “just in case” inventory management, said Esper, who also expects greater use of automation in light of the labour crunch.

“The projections is this is going to be a tight squeeze until 2023”, Esper said. “This is not a holiday issue. This is a transition to a different business model.”

— AFP

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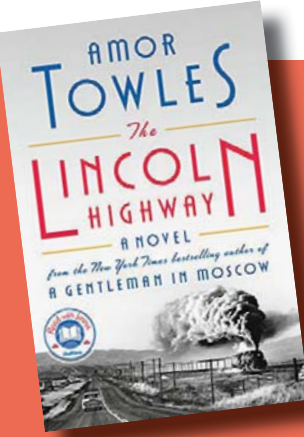
Why are handmade kummas more pricey than mass-produced ones?

Throughout Oman today, Omani women continue to safeguard some of the country's important heritage and cultural practices. One of the areas where Omani women thrive is in the production of the iconic kumma. Here's why handmade ones are more expensive than the mass-produced ones... **P20**

ART

Street art emerges in Sao Paulo from the ashes of the burning Amazon

READ



THE LINCOLN HIGHWAY
BY AMOR TOWLES

Two friends who escaped from a juvenile work farm take Emmett Watson on an unexpected journey to New York City in 1954.

FROM ASHES TO ART.
Mundano uses ash from the burned Amazon rainforest to create a street mural in Sao Paulo depicting sao paulo fire-fighter standing among deforestation, wildfires and dead animals.
"I'm using evidence of the crime", said Mundano, calling the 1,000-square-metre (10,000-square-ft) artwork on the side of a building an act of "artivism".
Mundano travelled more than 10,000 km (6,200 miles)

through Brazil in June and July, collecting ashes from the Amazon rainforest, the Pantanal wetland region, Cerrado tropical savannah, and the Atlantic Forest.
He also met with firefighters and volunteers to listen to their stories.
Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has had a difficult time meeting his promise to eliminate illegal forest clearing in the Amazon, the world's largest rainforest, with his calls for more farming and mining than

empowering illegal loggers.
Satellites detected 28,060 fires in the Brazilian Amazon in August alone, a critical bulwark against climate change because of the vast amount of carbon dioxide that its plant life absorbs and stores and deforestation rose in September from 0 year ago.
"This mural is a protest, if you will", said Mundano. "I support fire brigades and for this fire culture to end, it's leading us to self-destruction", he added. — Reuters





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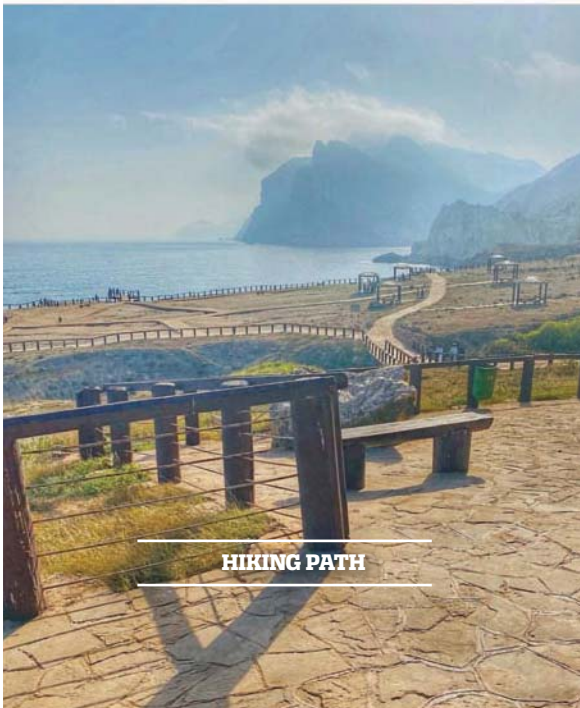
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AROUND THE WORLD

DIGITAL TRENDS

Adele releases soul-stirring comeback single 'Easy On Me'

BRITISH SOUL diva Adele on Friday released comeback single "Easy On Me", in which she shares with the world details of the traumatic six years she has endured since last releasing a record.

In that period, the 33-year-old megastar said she suffered a "year of anxiety" in which her marriage fell apart. While her voice has lost none of its power, the new single's lyrics reveal a deeper vulnerability, with every chorus opening with the soaring refrain "go easy on me, baby" sung over a simple piano riff. The multi-million selling singer has not been forgotten, despite her years out of the limelight, with fans racking up more than 18 million views of the song on her official YouTube page in the 10 hours since it was released. Her much-anticipated new album "30" will be put out on November 19, the "Hello" singer announced on Wednesday.

Recording began three years ago, she wrote on Twitter, at a time when her life was "a maze of absolute mess and inner turmoil".

Given that Adele has sold millions of albums and won a slew of awards, including an Oscar and 15 Grammys, the release is arguably the most anticipated of the year. She broke a five-year silence with an interview for *Vogue*, published last week, that spoke of living like a recluse as she battled with anxiety. "I've learned a lot of blistering home truths about myself along the way. I've shed many layers but also wrapped myself in new ones," she wrote in the Twitter post. "I've finally found my feeling again. I'd go as far as to say that I've never felt more peaceful in my life." — AFP



World's tallest woman says it's OK to stand out



AT 2.15M TALL, Ms Rumeysa Gelgi has always stood out. Now officially recognised as the world's tallest woman, she wants to use that record to celebrate differences.

The 24-year-old, who was confirmed this week as the world's tallest living female by Guinness World Records, was born with Weaver Syndrome, a rare genetic disease that causes rapid growth among other abnormalities.

"Being different is not as bad as you think. It can bring you unexpected success," Ms Gelgi told reporters as she proudly stood up with the help of her walking frame. This is her second world record, after being confirmed as the tallest living female teenager in 2014, at the age of 18. Ms Gelgi, who usually depends on a wheelchair or a frame to move around, says she hopes to use her title to raise awareness about rare genetic disorders such as Weaver syndrome.

"I personally think that differences and other features which seem like a disadvantage can be turned to advantages if you want it and make the effort for it. That is exactly what I did."

The tallest man in the world, Mr Sultan Kosen, who was measured at 2.51m in 2018, is also from Turkey. Ms Gelgi says she hopes to meet him in person one day. — Reuters

ENTERTAINMENT



'We want our stories to travel': Netflix launches Palestinian film collection

PALESTINIAN DIRECTOR

Ameen Nayfeh says he felt proud after bringing to life through film his personal struggle in crossing an Israeli military checkpoint to visit his dying grandfather. But he didn't expect his short film to have a wide audience.

That all changed for Nayfeh on Thursday, when Netflix launched a new Palestinian film collection, the first of its kind by a major streaming service, that includes his award-winning short *The Crossing*.

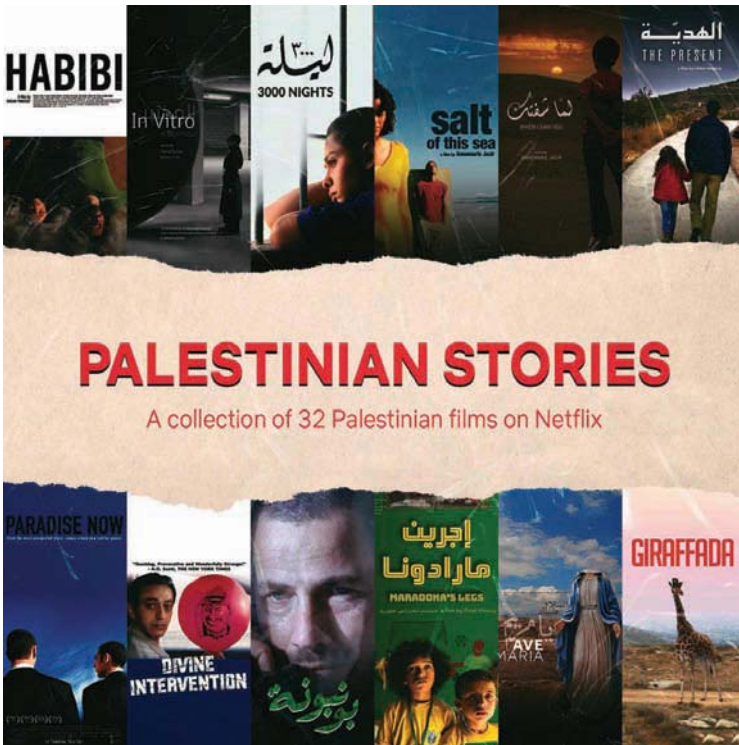
"This is why we make films, because we want our stories to travel, we want people to know about us," Nayfeh, 33, said.

"Now when you type Palestine in the search button on Netflix, you will see so many different titles that you can watch. Before, when I would type Palestine I would get Israeli titles," he said.

Netflix's new Palestinian collection, titled *Palestinian Stories*, is made up of 32 award-winning films that are either directed by Palestinian film-makers or tell Palestinian stories, the company said in a press release on Tuesday.

"The diversification of our content sits close to my heart as Netflix works to become the home of Arabic cinema," said Nuha El Tayeb, a spokesperson for Netflix.

Many of the films tell stories of Palestinian life in the Israeli-occupied West Bank



and Gaza, territory Israel captured in the 1967 Middle East war and which Palestinians seek for a future independent state.

Israel maintains military checkpoints in the West Bank, citing security concerns. Palestinians say the roadblocks severely restrict their mobility throughout the territory.

Before film-makers, Palestinian musicians began reaping the benefits of streaming to a global audience after Spotify launched its music streaming service in the Middle East and North

Africa in 2018.

Netflix has made the new collection of Palestinian films available to all customers, the company said.

Huda al Imam, an actress in the Oscar-nominated film *Ave Maria* which is also featured in Netflix's Palestinian collection, said it would expand the reach of Palestinian stories.

"Thanks to Netflix, now Palestinian stories and Palestinian life with its beauty and agony will be shown all around the world," Al Imam said. — Reuters

AROUND OMAN IN 3RD GEAR



Rachael MacIver
Instagram: @rachael_maciver

The adventure of a blonde and a very old car #14

"I HONESTLY NEVER realised one could fit so much into a Yaris", Mrs J sounded genuinely surprised.

She took a step back to admire our packing. The little rental car groaned under the weight of all the camping equipment, the size XL cool box and, of course, Mrs J's giant suitcase. It wasn't exactly what you would call a rugged offroader like our old Pajero, still in a garage somewhere in Salalah, but it would have to do. We would just have to stick to the tarmac for a few days.

We had planned a trip that would take us out of Salalah and back into the wild. "The wild???" I repeated with a lifted eyebrow. "Yes, you know, no traffic lights or Starbucks", Mrs J clarified slightly irritated. The hotel stay had done her good and she was ready to meet the wild in her crispy white linen shirt, straight from the hotel's laundry service.

Our first stop out of town was the Hafa roadside fruit stalls, the road lined with booming stalls standing shoulder to shoulder. "Fresh coconuts!" Mrs J squealed excitedly as soon as she spotted the stalls. The tiny Yaris swerved dangerously to avoid the hustlers coming running towards us as soon as they saw the car slowing down. With each stall offering more or less the same selection of fruits, there was a fight to win over potential customers. "Best coconuts in Salalah" they each claimed without seeing the irony.

I'm still not entirely sure how we, after 5 minutes, found ourselves with 5 whole tender coconuts, an enormous bunch of bananas still on the stem, 2 tomatoes and a small plant in a pot. Mrs J beamed like a small child in a sweet shop. We were finally back on the road, the sun was out, we had provisions and adventures awaited. Luckily it was too late by the time Mrs J noticed that I had left her potted plant back at the stalls.

We soon realised that there was a lot more walking involved when camping in a Yaris. Especially a rented one. "Whatever happened to 'don't be gentle' – it's a rental?" Mrs J mumbled as I carefully parked next to the road and made her walk the non-tarmac bit towards the Wadi Darbat. This was not

terrain for a Yaris. Cascading water forming small waterfalls, the wind carrying the fine spray of water towards us – gently caressing our sweaty faces. We sat on the rocks for a while and took in the scenery. It was beautiful and serene.

A small herd of camels were watching us with poorly veiled contempt, as we made our way back to the car. They had surrounded our small Yaris and took turns using it as a scratching pole, making the poor car bounce up and down like a pogo stick. We approached tentatively.

"Do you know how to move a camel?," Mrs J asked. Having lived in Oman for many years, I thought I did. Oh, how wrong I was. The animals didn't budge. We needed to divert their attention long enough for one of us to get inside the car. As always I drew the shortest straw and soon found myself doing jumping jacks while singing one of Frank Sinatra's greatest hits in a loud voice, in an attempt to get the camels to notice me. They looked at me in stunned surprise but took a few curious steps towards this spectacle playing out in front of them. And a few more steps. And a few more. In the meantime, Mrs J had sneaked up from behind and gingerly opened the car door to slide in. She grabbed the huge bunch of bananas from the back seat and ran, as fast as her little old legs could carry her, in the opposite direction of where I was performing. Holding the bananas up in the air she shouted "Hey you, come and get a piece of this!". I assumed it was directed at the camels. The animals didn't hesitate and moved with surprising speed towards the promised treat. Mrs J sped back to safety in the car from one direction, and I from the other. We sat for a while to catch our breath and watch the camels gorge on our bananas.

"There went our lunch", I sighed.

"Well, there is always the coconuts", Mrs J looked down at the hard green balls at her feet.

"Did you pack a machete?," I smirked. She sat silent for a while.

"Frank Sinatra? Really???" she smirked back. Lunch, who needs lunch when you can laugh...



Why are handmade kummas more pricey than mass-produced ones?

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

Sewing the Omani kumma, a piece of reinforced fabric embroidered with beautiful patterns made by women and worn by men, is one of the works that contribute to preserving the heritage of this ancient country. The preservation of this legacy has added an important dimension to building a modern Oman.

Kumma, in the past, was made by hand, and housewives took it as a hobby that brought them an abundant amount of money. Nowadays, technology has aided in the fast production of this important Omani identifier with many factories both located in Oman and other countries producing the said product in large quantity in a shorter amount of time which result in a drastic drop in pricing.

"Kumma is made from very simple tools which include threads, scissors, a needle and a kumma template/pattern (two pieces of fabric). Like other manual professions, making one requires a lot of patience and effort", shared Fatima al

Tawakli, who has been producing kumma manually for the last seven years.

While factories mass-produce kummas in recent times, stitching Omani kumma by hand is still widely practised in different wilayats all over the country.

With the production divided into two stages, Fatima shared that, "The specialised tailor, in the beginning, prints the drawing on the fabric and fills in some details so that the drawing stands out correctly. The women, in the past, would bring a piece of white cloth and draw on it something that is inspired by Omani nature or from buildings or Islamic inscriptions, and then cut the piece according to the size to be sewn."

"The women sew and embroider the drawing in attractive colours. Kumma comes in the form of two pieces. After the embroidery is completed, the machine comes and merges the two pieces, where the kumma is completed and becomes ready to be worn", Fatima said.

Manual production also used two types of threads — a thin and a thick one.

"These threads are made wet with water as water adds more strength to the thread and prevents it from breaking during the sewing period. A large needle is pushed into the kumma to help make a small hole in it and from there, the women

begins sewing", shared Ruqaya al Hashmi, who has been making kumma for the last six years.

Both women are in agreement that mass-produced kummas affected the demand for hand-embroidered kumma.

"While demand for hand-embroidered kumma remains, it's not as much as before due to its high price. Machine-made kummas are usually sold at a cheaper price. Thankfully, there are still people who are passionate and love hand-stitched kumma and are willing to pay especially if they see the quality", Ruqaya said.

"As the hand-stitched kumma are more expensive than the factory-made ones, you'd usually find people haggling for a lower price. Because of the current challenges and the stiff competition, there are also not a lot of shops for hand-made kummas", Ruqaya added.

"It is not necessary to have shops in an era where social media platforms exist." Fatima shared. Fatima promotes her work through her Instagram account "@tagiti_", Ruqaya as well "@komty_".

The prices of the Omani kumma vary according to its quality. Those that have lots of details and inscriptions are usually more expensive. The price of a machine-made kumma is estimated at RO 3, while a handmade kumma may start from around RO 30 and exceed RO 100.

"What determines the quality of kumma is the perfection of stitches (which is a single turn or loop of thread). Stitches are the fundamental elements of sewing and when buying a handmade one, should look into the excellent filling of voids, and the cleanliness of the punch inside and out", Fatima pointed out.

The time required to sew a piece depends on the patterns required to decorate it, which also affects its price when it is put on the market.

"Omani women, sometimes, spend several months to complete one kumma. This is determined by the type of stitch, the shape of the drawing in the kumma's pattern, and the size of kumma (because it determines the daily working hours). The diversity of stitches is the most prominent form of the Renovation in the kumma without compromising its original identity", Fatima mentioned.

Despite the high price of the Omani kumma, Ruqaya believes that this profession can provide a sufficient source of income for its owners. "Choosing a suitable colour and shape, taking care of accuracy, quality and speed of performance, the profession can provide sufficient income for its professionals."

Ruqaya confirms that a lot of people complain about the prices, and she said, "But if you come to think about it, this piece that you paid for is not just a product, but hundreds of hours, experiences, frustration and moments of pleasure. I mean, you bought a part of someone else's soul and life."

