

OAB uncovers RO 6 million embezzlement; customers safe

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) revealed that it has filed a criminal complaint with the Royal Oman Police (ROP) following the unearthing of a suspected case of forgery and embezzlement involving funds totalling around RO 6 million. The bank advises that this occurrence will not have any impact on the bank's customers, and assures the public that the bank's internal committees are handling this matter with the utmost level of seriousness and professionalism to safeguard the interests of all parties dealing with the bank. **DETAILS ON P13**



Established 1981. Editor-in-chief: **Salim al Shueili**

OMAN OBSERVER

[www.omanobserver.om](#) [editor@omanobserver.om](#)

P10

ABRAHAM HITS DOUBLE AS CHELSEA SINK WEST HAM



P15

APPLE TARGETS CAR PRODUCTION BY 2024



P20

CLIMATE CHANGE RAVAGES KASHMIR'S 'RED GOLD'



MUSCAT

RARE SURGERY BY DOCTORS IN OMAN

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital, represented by the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, has conducted a laparoscopic surgery considered the first-of-its-kind in the Sultanate in the field of treating obstetric disorders. The operation was conducted on two patients who were suffering from the disorders for quite a long time. The laparoscopic surgery, to close the vesical fistula (an open connection between the colon and the bladder), was conducted by the hospital's medical team using quality treatment technique. **DETAILS ON P2**

HARBOURS HELP DOUBLE OUTPUT

MUSCAT: Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, has said that total production of fisheries in the Sultanate is expected to reach 1.3 million tonnes, according to the plan devised by the ministry to upgrade the fisheries sector. In a statement to Oman News Agency, Dr Saud said that the fisheries sector figures among the five sectors designated by the government as core components of economic diversification strategy. Vocational fishing accounts for 95 per cent of the total output and there is a plan to expand the commercial fishing sector without prejudice to the rights of Omani fishermen who depend solely on fishing as a source of livelihood. **DETAILS ON P5**



INSIDE



THAI PM BLAMES VIRUS SURGE ON ILLEGAL MIGRATION

P7



HUNTING FOR NEW JOBS, WORKERS LEARN SKILLS ONLINE

P9

COVID-19 vaccine is safe



US President-elect Joe Biden celebrates after receiving a COVID-19 vaccination at the Christiana Care campus in Newark, Delaware, on Monday. – AFP

212 NEW CASES, 1 DEATH

The Ministry of Health reported 212 new cases of COVID-19 on Tuesday, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 128,143.

The ministry reported one COVID 19-related death, taking the total death toll to 1,490.

The total recovery cases reached 119,945, which is 93.6 per cent of the total cases reported so far.

Four people were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 85, including 40 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

TURN TO P5



Al Nuoman Order for Honorary Consul

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has conferred Al Nuoman Order, Second Class, on Leonardo B De Ocampo, the Sultanate's Honorary Consul in the Philippines. He was granted the Order in appreciation of De Ocampo's efforts and contributions in serving relations between the Sultanate and the Philippines. The Order was handed over by Munthir bin Mahfoudh al Manthri, Sultanate's Ambassador to the Philippines, when he received De Ocampo at the Sultanate's Embassy in Manila on Tuesday. – **ONA**

First well stimulation on Block 61 completed

MUSCAT: BP Oman on Tuesday announced the successful completion of the first well stimulation on Block 61 by Abraj Energy Services, marking a significant milestone in its relationship with the Omani well services contractor. The well, located in the Ghazeer field, also represents one of the largest stimulations completed by Abraj.

BP Oman President Yousuf al Ojaili said: "We're delighted to reach this important milestone with Abraj. This is the first time the company has worked with us on a well stimulation. It's great to see what can be achieved when working collaboratively and with a commitment to in-country value".

He added that Abraj was initially awarded 30 per cent of the stimulation scope for Block 61, with the opportunity to potentially increase this based on performance.

The gas in Block 61's Khazzan and Ghazeer reservoirs is known to be 'tight'. This means that the hydrocarbon — gas and condensate — is tightly held within the reservoir formations and will not flow naturally to economic rates without stimulation. To do this, fluids and proppant are pumped into the formation at high pressures and rates which open the reservoir's rock — creating a 'super-highway' which allows the hydrocarbons to flow.

DETAILS ON P13



■ PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB MEMBERS HONOURED



The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth held a ceremony to honour the winners of the Youth Proficiency Award in Muscat on Tuesday. The ceremony was attended by His Highness Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham bin Tarik al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, a number of officials, and ambassadors. The Ministry honoured Qomra Photographic Club of the National University the Young Proficiency Award for youth initiative category in the field of culture. Students of Qomra Club participated with the initiative of an annual exhibition included photographs by members of Qomra accompanied by an art competition for the youth of various colleges and universities.

Royal Hospital team performs first-of-its-kind laparoscopic surgery

MUSCAT: The Royal Hospital, represented by the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, performed a first-of-its-kind laparoscopic surgery to treat obstetric disorders. The operation was conducted on two patients who were suffering from the disorders for quite a long time.

The laparoscopic surgery to close the vesical fistula (an open connection between the colon and the bladder) was conducted by the hospital's medical team using quality treatment technique. The team was headed by Dr Faiza bint Humaid al Darmakiyah, Specialist of Urogynecology and Pelvic Reconstructive Surgery, in cooperation with Dr Abdulrahman al Farsi, Senior Consultant, Cancerous Tumours and Obstetrics, and Dr Thuraya al Rawahy, Senior Consultant, Obstetrics and Gynecology, in



addition to the anaesthesia and nursing crew.

She added that the laparoscopic surgery has been used in this operation as part of an approach to keep pace with the latest advances in the treatment of obstetric disorders/diseases.

Compared to conventional methods, curative treatment of this type help avoid open-wound surgeries, said Dr Faiza, adding

that only three openings of 1-1.5 cm are opened. Such surgeries limit complications and shorten patients' hospital stay.

After following up the case of the two patients for months, it became clear that they were not suffering any complications, said Dr Faiza, noting that the challenge posed to such surgery teams is the scarcity of women specialists. — ONA

Airport and border closures hit travel plans

Exit scheme applicants, holidaymakers grounded

SAMUEL KUTTY

@samkutttyp

It was confusion mixed with despair for most people when they learnt about the closure of the Muscat airport and the country's borders.

The closures, taken as a precautionary step against the fast-spreading variant of COVID-19 reported in the UK, have led to cancellation of flights to a number of Asian countries and Europe.

While the decision has come as a shock to many people who were wanting to travel as part of the government's exit scheme, it is a spoilsport for many others, as it scattered their Christmas and New Year plans.

"I bought my ticket last week after readying the necessary papers as part of the exit scheme to fly home after a gap of five years on Tuesday. Now I have to get a new date and ticket", said Moideen Ahmed, who hails from the South Indian state of Kerala.

The Supreme Committee dealing with the coronavirus development in the country, in line with the decisions taken by many countries in the world, decided to ban entry to and exit from the Sultanate via all travel outlets with effect from December 22 for one week.

Nasser al Wahaibi told *Observer* that his trip to Dubai had to be called off due to the border closure.

"I wanted to visit Dubai for a personal work in addition



to meeting my friend. Since I planned to go by road, and the matter was not of that important, I can make it when the border reopens," he said.

For Wasim Abdul Malik, cancellation of the flight to Muscat from Karachi has further delayed meeting his wife and children who were supposed to arrive on Tuesday.

"They have been away from me since February when they went to Pakistan. Due to the pandemic and expiry of my wife's visa they couldn't fly back. Now it has further been delayed," Wasim said.

Travel agents, meanwhile, said that they have been incessantly receiving phone calls inquiring about the next travel date.

"We are not able to make any amendments regarding the ticket. We are waiting for guidelines from the airlines", a senior official at a travel agency told *Observer*.

Oman Air in a statement on Monday said that passengers holding its flight reservations can contact its Call Centre at (+968) 24531111 or Oman Air representatives in their respective countries.

"In line with the directives of Oman's Civil Aviation Authority, Oman Air will suspend all international passenger flights to and from Muscat starting from Tuesday, December 22, 2020, for a period of one week. For further updates on our flight operations and services, please refer to our website and official social media channels", it said in a release.

A report from New Delhi, quoted India's national carrier Air India on Tuesday to have announced one-time free rescheduling of tickets for passengers travelling from the United Kingdom, Oman and Saudi Arabia after the government's decision to stop air travel in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

Air India said that passengers who were booked to travel on now suspended flights from the UK, Oman, and Saudi Arabia can avail a one-time free rescheduling for travel completed within December 31.

"All penalties for one-time rescheduling, cancellation, rerouting will be waived for bookings between December 22 and 31," it said.

■ GRADUATES LEARN JOB SKILLS



Sohar University, in cooperation with Outward Bound Oman, organised camping trips in the Rimal Al Sharqiya, one targeting women graduates and the other for men for four days. Each trip programme was designed to develop the skills that employers are looking for in young employees. The two trips focused on job-seekers and those in their early years of work, as it included training sessions that focused on leadership and employment basics, work ethics and behaviour in the work environment. Both trips started from Muscat on December 14 and ended on December 17. Outward Bound Oman is a non-profit organisation established by ministerial decision and it is part of the Global Outward Bound Foundation that began in 1941. It offers sessions that help young people develop in all aspects of life. Its activities aim to help young people become more self-confident, more effective and qualified in the school, college and work environment.



Online workshop on patient safety

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 22

The Ministry of Health's Directorate General of Quality Assurance Center (DGQAC) organised recently a online workshop to train the trainers (TOT) on implementation of the World Health Organization (WHO) Patient Safety Friendly Institutions Initiative in collaboration with the WHO Oman Office and with technical support from the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (EMRO).

The Initiative is a WHO-led initiative that encourages safe health practices in health care facilities as a core element of services provided.

The initiative provides a comprehensive set of standards and a framework through which hospitals can deliver safer patient care. It assesses hospitals' performance from a patient safety perspective, builds capacities of staff in patient safety and actively integrates patients and communities in improving health care safety.

The two-day training aimed to train the healthcare professionals and raising their efficiency on the first version of the Patient Safety Assessment Manual, as well as enhance their skills in healthcare that would enable them to assess the health institutions based



on patient safety manual. The standards that are being addressed during the training are a large array of measures, spanning from leadership to environment to infection control and drug safety. Patient safety in Oman presents a model for countries around the world in developing sustainable patient safety systems and quality of care.

Dr Qamra al Sariri, Director-General of Quality Assurance Centre, stressed that the DGQAC's vision is a world-class national reference in quality of health services and patient safety. She added that the health institutions in Oman have improved the patient

safety level through accessing the health services. Furthermore, the MOH and the public and private health institutions in the Sultanate and in cooperation with the world institutions and organisations, particularly the WHO have formulated policies, plans and health interventions with specific targets in various fields that contribute to improving the health services.

Since 2016, Oman has invested considerably in implementing patient safety standards in a large proportion of its health care settings. In August 2018, the Directorate General of Quality Assurance Centre (CQA), of

the Ministry of Health of the Sultanate of Oman was designated as the WHO Collaborating Centre for Quality and Patient Safety Training, as a result of tireless work over the past years to improve quality of care and patient safety.

The training attended by (60) participants from different quality management, patient safety and primary healthcare department with participation of a number of national and international speakers.

The trainers include experts from, WHO, Oman MOH, various bodies and the Ireland Quality Improvement & Patient Safety Team.

In brief

■ MUSCAT

**OMAN TAKES PART
IN GCC TRANSPORT
MEETING**

MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, on Tuesday took part in the 23rd meeting of the GCC Transport and Communications Under-Secretaries' Committee. The Sultanate was represented by Salim bin Mohammed al Nuaimi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology for Transport. The meeting discussed the study of establishing a GCC Railway Authority.

**TREASURY BILLS
TENDER RESULTS**

MUSCAT: A tender of Government Treasury Bills, issue number 152, was held at the Central Bank of Oman (CBO) this week. The results of issue are as follows: the total value of the allotted Treasury bills amounted to RO 9 million, for a maturity period of 182 days, from December 23 until June 23, 2021. The average accepted price reached 99.570 for every RO 100 while the minimum accepted price arrived at 99.640 per RO 100. The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.72198 per cent and 0.72489 per cent.

**NCSI BOARD TAKES UP
DATA STRATEGY**

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) met on Tuesday. The meeting was chaired by Nasser bin Khamis al Jashmi, Secretary-General of the Ministry of Finance, and NCSI Board Chairman. It reviewed the initial draft of the "Data Strategy" and approved a proposal to form the Standing Committee for Statistics. — **ONA**

Shura office discusses session agenda

MUSCAT: The Office of Majlis Ashshura meeting was chaired by Khalid bin Hilal Al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ashshura on Tuesday. The meeting discussed the agenda of the next session of the Shura and approved a number of items, including the report of the Economic and Financial Committee on the two decisions related to the issuance of the approved tariff regulation for the connection and supply of electricity, and the amendment of some provisions of the tariff regulation for the supply of potable water.

The meeting also approved



to include action plans of its committees in agenda of the meeting. The meeting reviewed a report and activities of the permanent committees during

the period between the first and second annual sessions in 2020. It also reviewed the messages of the permanent committees about their action plans for the current

annual sitting. Moreover, the meeting touched on the action plans of the Legislative and Legal Committee, the Economic and Financial Committee, the Health

and Environment Committee, the Education and Scientific Research Committee, the Services and Social Development Committee, the Youth and Human Resources Committee, the Food and Water Security Committee, and the Media and Culture Committee, in addition to reviewing a number of oversight tools submitted by Majlis Ashshura's members. The meeting was attended by members of Majlis Ashshura Office and Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ashshura. — **ONA**

Visit this Wadi, hot spring to beat stress

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

[@patkaushal](#)

Winter surely is the right time for everyone to take a trip to a stress-busting hot water spring at Wadi Al Hammam. The water at the source is so hot that one can cook rice, and soaking legs even for five seconds in the concrete canal, made for people to sit and drain the water to nearby farms, is a challenge.

No need to take a long drive to reach this unique gift of nature. It is located in Bausher, some 20km from Muscat city and quick access to it is through Ghala - Ansab exit.

According to local people, the hot water coming out of some natural well located in the adjoining mountain has many health benefits due to the presence of some minerals in it.

"With temperatures at around 65 degrees Celsius. The Ayn Al Hammam spring is said to be the hottest spring in Oman. It is considered to have healing properties due to its high mineral content," one tourism suggested document.

"The hot spring is situated at a huge fault structure, separating Triassic dolomite (sedimentary rocks) from ophiolite (volcanic rocks). They were brought together in a huge tectonic movement called obduction. It appeared when the ocean floor in front of Oman's coast was pushed above the Arabian continent, forming the Oman Mountains. Most of the hot springs in Oman like Ayn Al Kesfah in Al Rustaq, and Ayn Al Thawarah in Nakhal are located along this major fault," it said.

The hot water travels from the source, where the temperatures are higher. Much of geological and chemical combinations and permutations are involved here, as the hot water rises from the ophiolite where it comes in contact with dolomite.

Though the coronavirus pandemic has taken the sheen away from everyone's holiday plans, such local locations are emerging 'hot' favourites for them.



255,400 insured nationals in private sector

SHAMSA AL RIYAMIYAH
MUSCAT, DEC 22

The number of Omanis employed by the private sector and have insurance stood at 255,400 at the end of November, a 2.4 per cent decrease compared to the same period of 2019, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NSCI).

The majority of those (57,000) occupy clerical jobs while 55,000 occupy basic and assisting engineering jobs. There are 42,000 nationals in services jobs and 30,000 occupy business management roles.

According to the NCSI data, 70,000 Omanis earn salaries between RO 325 and RO 400 with a decrease of 9.8 per cent over the corresponding period of last year. The number of nationals earning salaries between RO 400 and RO 500 was 53,000 whilst 32,000 earn salaries between RO 1,000 and RO 2,000.

Those who earn salaries of RO 2,000 and above represent 15,000, a 10.2 per cent increase while nationals earning salaries between RO 500 and RO 600 represent 29,000, a 6.3 increase.

عمان

OMAN عمان DAILY
Observer

For Advertisements

Please Contact our Team

Head Office

Mohd Al Rashdi
99841230
m.alrashdi86@yahoo.com

Ali Al Maashari

99639264
wadialmeeh@yahoo.com

Salalah Office

Bakhit Al Shihri
92998577
bakhit.omandaily@gmail.com

Nizwa Office

Abdullah Al Abri
99429094
nizwaofc@omandaily.net.om

Suhar Office

Musalam Al Saidi
99429192
sohardaily@outlook.com



NEW POPULATION OF BLUE WHALES FOUND



STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 22

An international team of researchers has discovered what is believed to be a new population of blue whales in the Western Indian Ocean, including the Arabian Sea and the coast of Oman. This came as part of a research effort initially focused on the highly endangered Arabian Sea humpback whale, with ongoing collaboration between the Environment Society of Oman, New England Aquarium, African Aquatic Conservation Fund, Five Oceans Environmental Services LLC, Oman's Environment Authority and Oman's Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources. The work was funded by Shell Development Oman, with support from the International Whaling Commission, Renaissance Services and NOAA Fisheries.

Blue whales are the largest animals that have ever lived on our planet, and they are found around the globe in all oceans. All blue whales sing very low-pitched and recognisable songs, and conveniently for researchers, every population has its own unique song. In a recently published paper in the journal *Endangered Species Research*, the researchers describe a new blue whale song that is heard from

the Arabian Sea coast of Oman across to the Chagos Archipelago in the central Indian Ocean and as far south as Madagascar in the southwest Indian Ocean.

Dr Salvatore Cerchio, Director of the African Aquatic Conservation Fund's Cetacean Programme and Visiting Scientist at the New England Aquarium, led the analysis of recordings of the whale from three locations in the western Indian Ocean. Dr Cerchio first recorded the novel song in 2017, during research focused on Omura's whales in the Mozambique Channel off Madagascar, and he recognised it as a blue whale song that had never been described while working with a team of scientists collecting acoustic recordings off the coast of Oman in the Arabian Sea. While analysing the Oman acoustic data, the team recognised the same unusual song. This novel blue whale song likely belonged to a previously unrecognised population of blue whales in the western Indian Ocean.

"It was quite remarkable," said Cerchio, "to find a whale song in your data that was completely unique, never before reported, and recognise it as a blue whale." Blue whale song has been extensively studied globally, and several blue whale populations have been identified based on their distinct songs throughout

The finding of blue whales across Oman's coast is quite extraordinary. We look forward to continue collaborating with all partners to boost research showing evidence on how these endangered species can be conserved in the Arabian Sea
DR THURAYA AL SARIRI
Deputy General Director of Nature Conservation, Environment Authority

the Indian Ocean.

In 2018, the research team reported their findings to the Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission (IWC), which was in the process of evaluating the status of blue whale populations in the Indian Ocean. The finding created quite a bit of excitement at the meeting, and raised many new questions about blue whale

population movements and structure in the Indian Ocean.

Dr Thuraya al Sariri, Deputy General Director of Nature Conservation, Oman's Environment Authority, said, "Our objective is to always contribute to preserving the environment and its resources. The finding of blue whales across Oman's coast is quite extraordinary. We look forward to continue collaborating with all partners to boost research showing evidence on how these endangered species can be conserved in the Arabian Sea."

Upon reading the IWC report on the new song, researchers from the University of New South Wales recognised that the song had also been recorded off the Chagos Archipelago in the central Indian Ocean. The analysis of data from three sites suggested that the population may spend most of its time in the Northwestern Indian Ocean, in the Arabian Sea and to the west of the Chagos. It has long been recognised that a unique population of blue whales resides in the Northern Indian Ocean, but it was assumed that whales in the Arabian Sea belonged to the same population that has been studied off Sri Lanka and ranges into the southcentral Indian Ocean. However, the songs tell a different story.

Walid Hadi, Oman Shell

Country Chairman, said, "Oman Shell is always working towards building collaborations with key partners like the Environment Society of Oman. This research provides a significant step to help scientists in formulating a new understanding of the world of the endangered blue whales' population. Despite their incredible size, this species often depends on conservation efforts in order to keep them protected. Dedicating our efforts to understand their patterns and behaviours will certainly aid the restoration of this species' population."

Blue whales were hunted to near extinction around the globe during the 20th century, and populations have only started to recover very slowly over the past several decades following the global moratorium on commercial whaling. The Arabian Sea was targeted by illegal Soviet whaling in the 1960's, an activity that nearly eradicated what were already likely to be small populations of humpback whales, blue whales, sperm whales and Bryde's whales.

Some researchers consider both the northern Indian Ocean blue whales and Arabian Sea humpback whales to comprise unique subspecies, not simply populations, making them particularly special and important to biodiversity.



Harbours help double fisheries output

MUSCAT: Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, said that total production of fisheries in the Sultanate is expected to reach 1.3 million tonnes, according to the plan devised by the ministry to upgrade the fisheries sector.



In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Dr Saud pointed out that the fisheries sector figures among the five sectors designated by the government as core components of economic diversification strategy.

Vocational fishing (espoused by conventional fishermen, not firms) accounts for 95 per cent of the total output and there is a plan to expand the commercial fishing sector without prejudice to the rights of Omani fishermen who depend solely on fishing as a source of livelihood. Fishing harbours, both along the Arabian Sea and Sea of Oman, will achieve the strategic vision of the ministry, said the minister, who stressed the significance of the multipurpose fishing jetty at Duqm and the fishing jetty at Daba, currently under construction.

All these ports, once fully utilised, will double the production of the Sultanate, said the minister, adding that the plan also includes the setting up of a fishing jetty at Al Shuwaimiya in the Wilayat of Shaleem and Al Halaniyat Islands and another port in the Wilayat of Mahout.

FROM PAGE 1

COVID-19 vaccine safe

He added that viruses in general and the RNA viruses, in particular, mutate fast. More than 4,000 mutations of COVID-19 have been registered since it started the spread, he said.

Dr Ahmed stressed that, so far, no evidence corroborates the claim that the new variant of COVID-19 is more fierce or more dangerous than the mother virus. He emphasised that the available vaccines will have the same response to the mother virus.

The minister reiterated that the Health Ministry has prioritised target groups which are eligible to the doses during the first phase, noting that these groups include patients suffering from chronic diseases and the medical staff.

The minister said that the decisions of the Supreme Committee are well-studied and based on the epidemiological situation and recommendations submitted to the technical team. The committee's decision to impose a ban on travel from Tuesday came as a precautionary measure, since it is not possible to decide in which country the new strain of COVID-19 is spreading.

The minister credited the decline in infection cases with COVID-19 in the Sultanate to the high level of awareness among citizens and residents and their commitment to precautionary measures. No indications now warrant the closure of any part of the Sultanate, said the minister, who confirmed the ongoing epidemiological monitoring of the situation in the Sultanate. If ever the Supreme Committee decides any lockdown anywhere in the Sultanate, that will be in limited areas, said Dr Ahmed.

He said that imported cases of infection were very high, constituting 60 per cent of the registered cases.

EFFECTIVE TOOL

Scientists agree that vaccines are the most effective tool to combat infectious diseases, as they prevent six million deaths every year. Many studies have

proven that vaccines are safe. Dr Anthony Fauci, Chief Epidemiologist in the United States, said by administering the COVID-19 vaccine to a large number of people can end the pandemic, and it is the only way to end the lockdowns completely.

Many Gulf countries, like the UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, have started giving vaccines to their citizens. The official spokesman of the Saudi Ministry of Health, Muhammad al Abd al Aali, confirmed that all those who took the COVID-19 vaccine in Saudi Arabia are in good health, and that no unexpected symptoms are seen in those who received the vaccine.

RNA TECHNOLOGY

Badr bin Saif al Rawahi, Director of the Infectious Diseases Control Department at the Ministry of Health, stated that the first batch of the COVID-19 vaccine is a Pfizer type vaccine manufactured using RNA technology, stressing that a national plan has been prepared to distribute the vaccine, and health workers have been trained in all governorates of the Sultanate on the vaccination process.

Al Rawahi indicated that the ministry has prepared a strategy for vaccination to cover 60 per cent of the population, to be divided into stages, and the first phase begins with 20 per cent of the targeted percentage due to the limited supply in the current period.

"The target groups in the first stage are the groups most vulnerable to the disease, including frontline workers, patients with chronic diseases like diabetics, lung diseases, and kidney failure, the elderly, and those working in ICUs and COVID-19's care departments," Al Rawahi said to Oman TV.

He also said the vaccine will be delivered to individuals in two doses separated by 21 days, and vaccination centres will be announced within the next few days. "The Ministry sought to find consultation channels with several scientific institutions and international organisations as well as through direct negotiation."

Oman, according to him, is one of the first countries to obtain the vaccine in 2020.

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

SUMMONS FOR SETTLEMENT OF ISSUES (O.V Rule 20 (1-A) OF C.P.C.)
IN THE COURT OF THE CIVIL JUDGE SENIOR DIVISION 'C' COURT AT MAPUSA
Regular Civil Suit No. 337/2017/C

Mrs. Lalitaben Ugarejya V/s
.....Plaintiff

Mr. Peter Dominic Noronha & 5 Ors.Defendants
To, **The Defendant:-** 5. Mrs. Maria Christine Decouto, W/o Mr. Dominic Savio Keth Joe Noronha, Age 40 years, housewife, R/o G/15, Everard Nagar, Eastern Express Highway, Sion, Mumbai 400022 Presently reside in Building 3073, Flat No. 702, 7th Floor, Way 4149, Opp. Rawasco Super Market, Al Khuwair Souq, Al Khuwair, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

WHEREAS the above named plaintiff has filed a Suit for Declaration Sec. 34 of Specific Relief Act. (Copy of plaint may be collected from the office of this Court on any working day during the office hours.)

AND WHEREAS the Plaintiff has prayed for substituted service by publication in English daily newspaper widely circulated in court of Oman and this Court is satisfied that this is a fit case ordering such a service.

NOW THEREFORE, notice is hereby given to you Under Order V Rule 20 (1A) of C.P.C. to appear before this Court on **04th January, 2021 at 2.30 p.m.** either in person or by a pleader duly instructed if any and able to answer all material questions and you are directed to produce on the day all the documents upon which you intend to rely in support of your defence and to file your written statement.

TAKE NOTICE THAT, in default of your appearance on the day before mentioned, the suit will be heard and determined in your absence.
GIVEN under my hand and the seal of this Court, on this 29th day of October, 2020.

Sd/- (Head Clerk)
By Order of CJSD C-Court, Mapusa



Tender Announcement

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

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of tender document	Last date for tender submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
16/2020	Provision of desktops and laptops devices for autism national center building at Al Khoud	Excellent & One	Monday 11-1-2021 02:00 PM	Monday 1-2-2021 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

• Specialized Companies, registered with the Tender Board may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>), On Wednesday 23/12/2020.

• Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.

• The original (1%) bank warranty to be submitted at same day of submitting at tender box located in Directorate of Finance & Administration at MOSD HQ.

• For Inquiry , please contact through the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402222 or 24166670)

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

www.mosd.gov.om

**Investors/
Buyers**
Visit our website
www.almajdproperty.com

Muscat Municipality Announcement No. 60/2020

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tender:

S.No	Tender No.	Tender Description	Document Fee	Deadline for inquires submission	Deadline for obtaining Tender Docs.	Deadline for Submission
1	77/2020/MM/PA-23	SUPPLY OF LIGHTING MATERIALS	OMR 25/-	11/01/2021	28/01/2021	31/01/2021

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 eTendering website starting from the date of bid submission. The original copy of the bond shall be submitted in the box located in **Muscat Municipality Ruwi Building (Main Entrance), located on Capital Market Street.**

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 (+96824166670).

Website: www.mm.gov.om

Travellers need to be sure before availing of free visa entry

VINOD NAIR

[@vinot_nair](https://twitter.com/vinot_nair)

The authorities have clarified the eligibility of certain nationalities for free visa entry into the Sultanate. Oman's Embassy in Cairo said that the conditions for visa-free entry to the Sultanate for 10 days for Egypt nationals include that they must have one of the visas from the US, Canada, Australia, the UK, Schengen states, and Japan.

The visitors must have month-long health insurance that includes COVID-19 treatment, a hotel reservation, and a return ticket, and whoever wishes to visit for more than 10 days must obtain a visa issued by one of the approved tourism companies in the Sultanate.

JOB VACANCY

An Omani company that provides work-over services to PDO and other petroleum companies in the Sultanate of Oman is seeking to recruit a competent, self-motivated and enthusiastic candidate to the post of:

General Manager - Hoist Services - Oman

Key Responsibilities:

- Will have profit and loss account responsibility
- Will be the Custodian of all Management Systems and processes pertaining to the Contract while ensuring the records are kept up to date, and ensure full compliance with HSE procedures.
- Work on expanding the number of units under the Contract.
- Responsible and accountable for the management and execution of all aspects of the Service Contract on time and within agreed costs.
- Maintain all the hoists operational, close all pending action points raised by the client and promptly address all clients' concerns.
- Ensure that all Hoists are working efficiently and effectively without any down time. Ensure that all equipment are properly and regularly maintained along with adequate stock of spares.
- Closely monitor mobilization and transition periods to ensure smooth and efficient operations
- Maintain high standards of HSE.
- Work closely with the HR Department to recruit and retain personnel and ensure the team is fully motivated.

Requirement:

- Qualification: BE/B.Tech in Petroleum Engineering/Mechanical Engineering with management degree will be an advantage;
- Experience: minimum 10 years in management and in operations /commissioning of Work over/ Drilling Rigs ;
- Must be holding the position of Project head/ Manager for a period of 5 years.
- Preference will be given to the candidates who have worked in operations of Shell/PDO/Oxy.
- Should be a true team leader and self-motivated.

Place of Posting: Muscat/Oman but frequent visit to the sites will be required.

In addition to the CV the application must also include:

- Current package/ CTC;
- Expected package;
- A recent photo;
- Notice period;
- Name of Two reference with their contact number:

Updated CV may please be sent in confidence to muscatprojects@gmail.com



Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat and US White House Senior Adviser Jared Kushner arrive in Rabat, Morocco, on Tuesday. — Reuters

Normalising ties: Israel flight lands in Morocco

RABAT: The first Israel-Morocco direct commercial flight landed in Rabat on Tuesday to mark the latest US-brokered diplomatic normalisation deal between the Jewish state and an Arab country.

President Donald Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner was on board along with Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben Shabbat.

The trip aims to showcase the achievements of the Trump administration in Middle East diplomacy, weeks before Trump is replaced at the White House by President-elect Joe Biden.

Both sides expected to sign agreements paving the way for direct air links, to connect their financial systems and on a visa waiver arrangement for diplomats, according to an Israeli official source.

Morocco became the third Arab state this year, after the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, to normalise ties with Israel under US-brokered deals, while Sudan has pledged to follow suit.

Speaking at Israel's Ben Gurion airport before his departure, Kushner stressed that the UAE-Israel deal had already created commercial opportunities for

both countries.

"My hope is that this flight today to Morocco will create the same amount of momentum," between Morocco and Israel, he said before getting on the plane painted with the Hebrew, Arabic and English words for "peace".

Morocco became the third Arab state this year, after the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, to normalise ties with Israel under US-brokered deals

As part of the Morocco-Israel deal, Trump fulfilled a decades-old goal of Morocco by backing its contested sovereignty in Western Sahara.

Morocco closed its liaison office in Tel Aviv in 2000, at the start of the second Palestinian intifada, or uprising.

King Mohammed VI has said Morocco will remain an advocate for the Palestinians.

But the Palestinians — like the Polisario — have cried foul and condemned the normalisation announcement between Rabat and the Jewish state. — **AFP**

US reinstates Sudan's sovereign immunity over past terror attacks

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers on Monday backed legislation granting Sudan legal immunity for past militant attacks, a final step in a historic deal removing Khartoum from Washington's blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism.

The text restores Sudan's sovereign immunity with the exception of litigation already pending in US federal courts related to the September 11, 2001 attacks, and earmarks hundreds of millions of dollars in aid to Khartoum.

The legislation was part of the massive omnibus bill to fund the government for the coming year, which is also due to include a new aid package to help millions of Americans and businesses hit hard by the pandemic.

Sudan was removed from the



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (L) with Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok of Sudan in August as the legislation was being prepared. — **AFP file photo**

US state sponsors of terrorism blacklist a week ago, less than two months after the Arab nation pledged to normalise ties with Israel. The move also promises aid, debt relief and investment to a country going through a rocky

political transition and struggling under a severe economic crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of a deal, Sudan agreed to pay \$335 million to compensate survivors and victims' families

from the 1998 Al Qaeda twin attacks on the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and a 2000 attack by the militant group on the *USS Cole* off Yemen's coast.

Those attacks were carried out after now ousted president Omar al Bashir gave then Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden sanctuary in Sudan.

Adoption of the legislation is a key, final step to unblocking the money, which Sudan has already put in an escrow account.

Sudan's justice ministry on Tuesday hailed the US move as a "great event".

It "effectively means the end, once and for all, of the repercussions of a dark period in the history of its (Sudan's) relations with the United States and the world," the ministry said in a statement. — **AFP**

Parkour athletes jump for joy over new facility

GAZA: Often injured in high-risk jumps over obstacles in cemeteries and abandoned buildings, Gaza's parkour enthusiasts can now practise their niche sport on safer ground. The Palestinian territory's first parkour gym — equipped with wooden boxes over which youngsters can soar in twists and flips, and padded mattresses to land on — has opened its doors.

Developed in France, the dynamic urban sport took root in Gaza around 15 years ago. It provides its own sense of freedom of movement in an area locked in conflict with neighbouring Israel, which blockades the enclave, citing security concerns.

"I have played parkour for 13 years now. During those 13 years



Parkour enthusiasts exercise in a training facility in Gaza City. — **Reuters**

I have suffered several injuries, the worst was to my wrist, and it stopped me playing the game for

a year," said Jihad Abu Sultan, 32, one of two coaches at the new Wallrunners academy. Some 70

athletes are enrolled in his current free three-month course. Dozens are on waiting lists. — **Reuters**

Bethlehem's other children, and the home that cares for them

BETHLEHEM, WEST BANK: Walk out of Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity, across Manger Square and along Star Street and you come to a part of town where few pilgrims venture. Behind a discreet plaque saying 'Crèche' is a children's home — the only one that many illegitimate and abandoned children brought up there have ever known.

Run by Catholic nuns from the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul and Palestinian staff, it is a refuge for around 50 children, including those born out

of wedlock, at risk of violence and even rescued from garbage bins. There are children's refuges all over the world, all dealing with similar issues. But the Crèche bears the emotional weight of being in the traditional birthplace of Jesus, where the focus of the Christian world turns once a year to a story from Bethlehem that celebrates birth, family and hope.

Although a Christian institution, the children are raised as Muslim according to local law, unless the staff know the religion of the family that gave them up.



A staff member looks on as children play at the Crèche, a house sheltering children, in Bethlehem in West Bank. — **Reuters**

In 95 per cent of cases Iskandar Andon, the social worker who oversees the children's welfare, gets advance warning of a child conceived out of wedlock or from an incestuous relationship, but sometimes the first he knows is when he gets a call from the police that a baby has been found abandoned.

"For me as a social worker that lives with these children on a daily basis, I have the honour to be responsible for them, or to be part of their lives," Andon, 52, said. But he does not underplay the

emotional difficulties. Relatives may be violent, or drug addicts, or the children and mothers at risk from honour killings.

"It involves an ethical and moral responsibility, a professional responsibility," he said. Founded at the turn of the 19th century, the institution's echoing halls are a home from birth until the age of five. But the Crèche is short of money, especially this year, amid donor fatigue and the coronavirus which struck Bethlehem first in the Palestinian Territories, just before Easter. — **Reuters**

SHORT TAKES

BAGHDAD

Iraq orders vaccines, imposes travel ban

Iraq's government ordered new coronavirus restrictions including border closures on Tuesday, even as it signs a preliminary deal to receive 1.5 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines. Following its weekly meeting, the cabinet said it was taking new measures "following the emergence of a new strain of the coronavirus" that has spread rapidly in the UK and also been detected in other countries. It announced land borders will close and travel to the UK, South Africa, Austral-



ia, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Iran and Japan will be stopped immediately.

Non-Iraqi citizens currently in those countries will not be allowed to travel to Iraq. — **AFP**

NICOSIA

Al Jazeera journalists 'targeted' by spyware

Dozens of journalists at Qatar's Al Jazeera broadcaster had their mobile communications intercepted by sophisticated electronic surveillance, a cyber security watchdog said, following a months-long investigation. Interceptions of 36 journalists' phones were revealed in a report by the Citizen Lab research centre at the University of Toronto on Sunday, after they monitored journalists' devices for suspicious activity.

"The impact is very clear and



dangerous," Al Jazeera Arabic investigative reporter Tamer al Misshal, who was targeted, said on Monday. The news outlet said it approached the cyber security watchdog in January. — **AFP**

KHARTOUM

Sudan and Ethiopia start border talks

Sudan and Ethiopia started talks on Tuesday to demarcate their border, Sudanese Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok's office said, one week after a deadly clash in a disputed area. The delegations were led by Ethiopia's deputy prime minister and foreign minister, Demeke Mekonnen, and Sudan's minister in charge of the cabinet, Omar Manis.

Hamdok and his Ethiopian counterpart Abiy Ahmed had on Sunday agreed on the talks on the margins of a Djibouti summit of



regional bloc the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. The two-day talks come a week after Ethiopian forces reportedly ambushed Sudanese troops along the border, leaving four dead. — **AFP**

In brief

■ BEIJING



CHINA'S NEW LONG MARCH-8 ROCKET MAKES FIRST FLIGHT

China's new carrier rocket, the Long March-8, made its maiden flight on Tuesday, the country's space agency said, the first phase of a strategy to deploy launch vehicles that can be reused. The Long March-8 series is part of China's endeavours to develop reusable rockets, potentially lowering mission costs and paving the way towards commercial launch services. The programme has drawn parallels to private US rocket firm SpaceX's Falcon range, although China said in 2018 its reusable carrier vehicle would use different technologies. The new medium-lift carrier rocket sent five satellites into planned orbit. — **AFP**

■ NEW DELHI



GOVT APPEALS TO AGITATING FARMERS FOR TALKS

The Indian government on Tuesday appealed to farmers to hold further talks to break a nearly month-long deadlock over their demand for the repeal of agricultural reform laws, but farmers' leaders declined to relent unless these laws are withdrawn. Thousands of protesters have camped on the outskirts of New Delhi and blocked national highways for over three weeks to protest against new laws that the government says would increase farmers' income through more private investments. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has urged the farmers to engage in talks to end the deadlock. — **Reuters**

■ TOKYO



NO ACTION AGAINST ABE AFTER PROSECUTOR QUESTIONING

Tokyo prosecutors do not plan to take action against Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe after he submitted to voluntary questioning in a case against his secretary over unreported political funds, Kyodo reported on Tuesday. Abe, who stepped down in September, is under fire on suspicion his office helped cover the costs of dinner parties for supporters, a possible violation of funding laws that he denied when questioned in parliament last year. Prosecutors have been building a case against Abe's secretary over unreported funds involving as much as 40 million yen (\$386,922). — **Reuters**

New virus strain prompts India to take stricter steps

NEW DELHI: India is contact-tracing passengers who have arrived from Britain over the past two weeks and carrying out further tests on recent COVID-19 samples to trace any presence of Britain's mutated coronavirus, health officials said on Tuesday.

"To the best of our knowledge we have yet to spot the new virus variant," India's COVID-19 task force chief V K Paul said at a briefing. British experts say the new strain is 70 per cent more transmissible. India is among dozens of countries to have suspended flights to and from Britain, with the new controls set to take effect at 11:59 pm (1829 GMT). All passengers who arrived on flights from Britain to Indian cities on Monday and Tuesday are being quarantined and have to undergo RT-PCR tests.

Five passengers on a flight that reached New Delhi late on Monday tested positive, a Delhi government spokesperson said. They have been quarantined and their samples have been sent to the National Centre for Disease Control to identify the strain of the virus. Mumbai, which has been one of the epicentres of the virus, has imposed a night-time curfew from Tuesday until January 5.

All shops except medical stores and a few other essential services will be closed and all non-essential travel barred between 11



A passenger arriving from the United Kingdom receives hugs by his relatives after he went through a COVID-19 test at Sri Guru Ram Dass Jee International Airport on the outskirts of Amritsar on Tuesday. — **AFP**

pm and 6 am within the city limits, the government of Maharashtra said. No more than five people can assemble outside their homes during these hours. More than 1,000 people are expected to arrive from Britain on five flights to Mumbai before the flight ban sets in. They will be sent to institutional quarantine.

The Tamil Nadu government has decided to test all passengers who have arrived at Chennai airport from Britain in the past 15 days. Federal health officials at the New Delhi briefing said India was currently in "a good position" compared to many other nations which had seen a renewed spike in

To the best of our knowledge we have yet to spot the new virus variant
V K PAUL
COVID-19 task force chief

coronavirus infections. India has so far reported more than 10 million cases, second only to the United States, but the numbers of daily new cases had been showing a steady decline, Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan said. For the past seven weeks,

the daily new cases reported were fewer than 24,000 and deaths around 300. On Monday, India recorded 19,566 new cases, its lowest since July 3. The renewed spike and lockdowns in several European nations showed that the battle with the pandemic was far from over, Paul said. Discussions with scientists from Britain and the World Health Organization (WHO) indicated that the new variant itself could become a super-spreader, Paul said.

"This mutation as we understand today does not increase the severity of the illness or chances of death but its increased infectiousness is a cause of concern." — **dpa**

Indonesian president picks new health, trade ministers



President Joko Widodo and Vice-President Ma'ruf Amin announce new ministers during a news conference at the Merdeka Palace in Jakarta, on Tuesday. — **Reuters**

JAKARTA: Indonesia's president announced on Tuesday a sweeping reshuffle of his cabinet, including a replacement for a health minister criticised for his perceived mishandling of

the country's coronavirus crisis.

President Joko Widodo, known by his nickname Jokowi, said six ministers would be replaced, including in the portfolios of health,

trade, tourism and fisheries. The newcomers will be inaugurated on Wednesday. Outgoing health minister Terawan Agus Putranto, a military radiologist and former personal physician

to Jokowi's late mother, has faced public calls to resign over a coronavirus caseload that is among Asia's biggest.

At the start of the pandemic, Terawan was criticised for suggesting that prayer could help protect people from the virus. Indonesia has recorded over 678,000 cases and 20,250 deaths. Budi Gunadi Sadikin, a former head of Bank Mandiri and chief of Indonesia's economic recovery task force, would take over the health portfolio.

— **Reuters**



Municipal workers clean up debris at the site of a bomb attack in Kabul on Tuesday. — **AFP**

Two women prison doctors among five killed in Afghan bombing

KABUL: Two women doctors working at an Afghan prison with hundreds of Taliban inmates were among five people killed on Tuesday in a bomb attack, officials said, in the latest of several targeted killings in Kabul.

Deadly violence has rocked Kabul and several provinces across the country in recent months, despite the Taliban and the government engaging in peace talks.

Tuesday's blast happened in the south of the capital as the doctors were on their way to Pul-e-Charkhi prison when a bomb attached to their car exploded, Kabul police spokesman Ferdaws Faramarz said.

Two women doctors and two prison employees in the car — as well as a pedestrian — were killed, while a third woman doctor was wounded, Afghanistan's prison authority said.

Faramarz had earlier told reporters that four prison doctors had been killed by the bomb.

Hundreds of Taliban fighters and other criminals are incarcerated at Pul-e-Charkhi, on the eastern outskirts of Kabul.

"The terrorist groups including the Taliban who have faced defeat on the battlefields are targeting civilians in the cities, highways and public facilities," President Ashraf Ghani said in a statement.

"This is a sign of their desperation and defeat," Ross Wilson, the top US envoy in Kabul, also condemned the attack.

"It is shocking to learn of the deaths of Office of Prison Authority doctors, who work tirelessly each day to save vulnerable lives, especially during a pandemic when frontline medical personnel are desperately needed," he said on Twitter.

No group claimed the attack but the Taliban denied involvement. Violence across Afghanistan has surged in recent months, including in Kabul.

— **AFP**

Thai PM blames virus surge on illegal migration

SAMUT SAKHON: Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha on Tuesday blamed a spike in coronavirus cases on illegal migration, after the country's biggest outbreak yet saw more than 1,000 infections, mostly among workers from Myanmar at a seafood market near the capital.

Prayuth said he might this week announce new health regulations ahead of new year celebrations and attributed the latest outbreak in Samut Sakhon province to networks smuggling people into Thailand, which has so far had among the world's lowest coronavirus caseloads. "This latest flare-up of infections in



Women wearing reindeer hairbands look at their mobile phones as they pose amid decorations for Christmas and the New Year outside a shopping mall in Bangkok on Tuesday. — **AFP**

Samut Sakhon is primarily due to such illegal immigrants and they have brought much grief to the country," he said in a statement, parts of which he read in a televised address.

Prayuth said he would meet his COVID-19 task force this week and discuss "additional regulations that may be appropriate for the evolving situation," without elaborating. Health officials reported 427 new coronavirus infections on Tuesday and urged about 1,000 people from a quarter of the country's provinces who had visited the seafood centre this month to report to authorities.

— **Reuters**

EU bosses throw isolated UK a lifeline over closures

* Commission recommends lifting blanket UK travel bans * Trucks stuck in queues up to the horizon in England
* Britain isolated for second day as world closes borders * Johnson seeks to open French border for freight

BRUSSELS/LONDON: The European Union executive threw Britain a lifeline on Tuesday after it became stranded in COVID-19 isolation, recommending that EU members roll back sweeping border closures to allow freight to resume and let people return home for Christmas. Much of the world shut their borders to Britain after a mutated variant of the novel coronavirus was discovered spreading swiftly across southern England, halting a chunk of trade with the rest of Europe and leaving truckers stranded.

With queues of trucks snaking to the horizon in England and supermarket shelves stripped just days before Christmas, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson scrambled to get French President Emmanuel Macron to lift a ban on freight from Britain. Johnson and his advisers said the mutated variant of the coronavirus, which could be up to 70 per cent more transmissible, was spreading rapidly but that it had been identified because British scientists were so efficient at genomic surveillance.

Britain has been trying for at least 24 hours to hash out a deal with France to allow the Dover-Calais route to open. The European Commission advised that non-essential travel to and from Britain should be discouraged but said that people heading home should be allowed to do so, provided they undergo a COVID-19 test or quarantine for 10 days.



A woman wearing a face mask walks across Westminster Bridge past the Houses of Parliament, as the spread of COVID-19 continues, in London, on Tuesday. - Reuters

“Blanket travel bans should not prevent thousands of EU and UK citizens from returning to their homes,” European Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders said in a statement. The recommendations are designed to set common rules within the EU and the ambassadors will consider adopting them on Tuesday.

However, border controls are governed by national policy, so each EU country can have its own rules. One option is to roll out mass COVID-19 testing for truck drivers, though such tests usually take 24-48 hours for a

result so it was not immediately clear how swiftly trucks could be moving again with Christmas days away.

The discovery of the new strain, just months before vaccines are expected to be widely available, sowed a fresh wave of panic in a pandemic that has killed about 1.7 million people worldwide and more than 67,000 in Britain. The main worry is that the variant is significantly more transmissible than the original strain.

Scientists say there’s no evidence that vaccines currently being deployed in the UK —

made by Pfizer and BioNTech — or other COVID-19 shots in development will not protect against this variant, known as the B.1.1.7 lineage

FOOD SUPPLY WORRIES
The United Kingdom is in effective COVID-19 quarantine just nine days before it is due to part ways with the EU after a transition period — considered to be one of the biggest changes in post-World War Two British history. Countries across Europe and beyond have suspended travel from Britain since the weekend. Germany imposed a ban on UK

travellers from Tuesday that could remain in place until January 6.

Cases of the new strain have also been detected in some other countries, including Denmark and Italy. Experts said the prevalence found in Britain might be down to better detection. Britain’s border crisis led to some panic-buying in the country: shoppers stripped shelves in some supermarkets of turkey, toilet rolls, bread and vegetables. While the government said there was enough food for Christmas, market leader Tesco and No 2 player Sainsbury’s both said food

supplies would be affected if the disruption continued.

STRANDED DRIVERS
Britain said 650 trucks were stacked up on the M20 in Kent, southern England, and 873 at nearby Manston Airport, now being used as a giant lorry park. While trucks can still cross from France into Britain, they cannot return so European truck drivers are extremely reluctant to travel. The border closures were causing headaches across Europe, especially those trying to transport perishable food. Milk suppliers were already trying to boost milk stocks in Britain ahead of Brexit.

“The plan was to stock up in the next 10 days so if there is a Brexit problem there are stocks for January,” said Alexander Anton, the secretary general of the European Dairy Association. “Now you can’t find a transport company to send a driver to the UK.” Lactalis, the world’s biggest dairy company, has had to reschedule some lorry deliveries to Britain because of the border closure, a spokesman for the French group said.

As the sun rose, hundreds of stranded drivers waiting to be allowed to cross to France via either ferry or the Channel Tunnel brewed tea and coffee after a night spent on the M20 motorway. Drivers, some swearing about Johnson and Macron, said they just wanted to get back home in time for Christmas. — **Reuters**

Russia sanctions EU over poisoning of Navalny

MOSCOW: Russia said on Tuesday it was hitting EU officials with sanctions for their response to the poisoning of opposition figure Alexei Navalny, who the Kremlin said was suffering from “delusions of persecution”.

The foreign ministry in Moscow summoned several senior EU diplomats before announcing the new travel bans.

In response to “confrontational” sanctions imposed by the bloc in October, Russia “decided to expand the list of representatives of EU member states and institutions who will be denied entry to Russia.”

The announcement on Tuesday came a day after Navalny, 44, said in a report he had impersonated an official in the Kremlin’s Security Council



Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. — AFP file photo

and extracted an admission of guilt from a toxins expert with the FSB security service.

In a video of the conversation published by Navalny, the alleged FSB agent says agents placed poison in Navalny’s underwear this summer. — **AFP**

Pope adapts Christmas plans as cardinals test positive for virus

VATICAN CITY: Pope Francis will deliver his Christmas Day message indoors due to coronavirus restrictions, the Vatican said on Tuesday, as two cardinals close to the pontiff tested positive for COVID-19.

The pope traditionally gives his “Urbi and Orbi” (To the City and The World) message from the balcony of St Peter’s Basilica on December 25.

But this year Italy has imposed tough new restrictions over the Christmas and New Year period to stem the spread of coronavirus.

As a result, the Vatican said: “Pope Francis will deliver the Christmas message and impart the blessing ‘Urbi et Orbi’ in the

Hall of Blessings in the Vatican Apostolic Palace.”

On December 26 and 27 and January 1, 3 and 6, the recitation of the Angelus prayer will take place in the library. Christmas Eve mass on December 24 had already been brought forward to allow the faithful to get home by Italy’s 10:00 pm curfew.

The news came as Vatican sources said two cardinals in the pope’s entourage were confirmed to have coronavirus.

The Polish cardinal Konrad Krajewski, who is in charge of the pope’s charities, “tested positive for COVID-19”, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said.

The 57-year-old, known as



Pope Francis holds the weekly general audience at the Library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican on December 16. — Reuters

“Robin Hood” for his work with the poor and the homeless, had symptoms of pneumonia and is currently under surveillance in a hospital in Rome.

Officials are still seeking to identify his recent contacts, but he is known to meet with the pope regularly. Italian cardinal Giuseppe Bertello, 78, the president of the governorate — effectively the chief executive — of the tiny state of Vatican City has also tested positive, a Vatican source said.

The 84-year-old pope, known for his love of getting close to the faithful, has been reluctant to wear a mask despite the pandemic that has hit Italy particularly badly.

During a meeting with Vatican employees on Monday, the pontiff — he and his entourage without masks — could not resist having a cuddle with a baby. — **AFP**

PARIS

France rewards frontline staff with citizenship

Hundreds of foreigners in France whose jobs expose them to high COVID-19 risks will be naturalised quickly for their commitment during the health crisis, the interior ministry said on Tuesday. The ministry had in September invited people who “actively contributed” to the fight against the novel coronavirus.

Of the nearly 3,000 people who responded, 74 had already obtained citizenship and 693 more were in the final stage of the process. “Health professionals,



cleaning ladies, childcare workers, checkout staff: They all proved their commitment to the nation, and it is now the turn of the republic to take a step towards them,” it said. — **AFP**

FRANKFURT

BioNTech-Pfizer vaccine heads to EU countries

BioNTech is testing the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine it developed with Pfizer against a highly infectious new strain of the coronavirus as it prepares to send 12.5 million doses to EU countries by the end of year. The European Union is gearing up for a vaccination campaign of unprecedented scale following regulatory approval for the shot on Monday. The EU deliveries amount to more than half the 20 million doses expected to be available in the United



States before the end of the year, BioNTech’s chief business officer said. With two shots administered three weeks apart, the supplies are enough to vaccinate 6.25 million people. — **Reuters**

ROME

Italy reports 628 virus-related deaths

Italy reported 628 coronavirus-related deaths on Tuesday against 415 the day before, the health ministry said, while the daily tally of new infections increased to 13,318 from 10,872. After the usual weekend lull, the number of swab tests carried out in the past day rose to 166,205 from a previous 87,889.

The first Western country hit by the virus, Italy has seen 69,842 COVID-19 fatalities since its outbreak emerged in February, the highest toll in Europe and



the fifth-highest in the world. It has also registered some 1.977 million cases to date. Patients in hospital with COVID-19 stood at 24,948 on Tuesday, down by 197 from the day before. — **Reuters**

Let us not lower the guard against COVID-19

Lockdown eased. Businesses lifted their shutters. Beaches and parks opened for the public and people returned to work. And the eagerly awaited vaccine is around the corner brightening the hopes. Yet the optimism is tainted with fear with the emergence of another strain of the coronavirus in the UK. The virus is reportedly spreading quickly though experts say it is not clear whether it is more lethal.

With the rollout of coronavirus vaccines set to pick up speed in early 2021, the world is clearly worried about the new variant. Several European Union nations have moved to ban flights from the UK in a bid to stop a new strain of coronavirus from establishing a strong foothold on the continent. The Sultanate and some other countries in the region too have closed the airports and borders upending travel plans of thousands of people.

As far as we know, the Pfizer vaccine and other vaccines under development will still work against the new strain, as will existing coronavirus treatments. But what worries us most is why a second wave emerged and whether we will go back to a lockdown again.



SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyp

WHAT WORRIES
US MOST IS WHY
A SECOND WAVE
EMERGED

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, asserts that there is no need to impose the lockdown in the Sultanate at the moment. The decrease in coronavirus cases in Oman, he says, is due to societal awareness and commitment to precautionary measures. The positivity in his assertion has been evident with the drop in the number of cases being reported by hospitals in the country.

Experts have already expressed confidence that the vaccines now being rolled out would still be effective against it. Still, we should not have any leniency in following the measures to fight the pandemic as the minister said while referring to the decision by the Supreme Committee that “the closure is a precautionary step due to the inability to determine the countries in which the new strain of COVID-19 is spreading”.

According to the World Health Organisation, the viruses mutate over time; that’s natural and expected. The new variant transmits more easily but there is no evidence so far that it is more likely to cause severe disease or mortality. Also, we don’t know how long this strain can survive on surfaces like door handles.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said citing indications that the variant is 70 per cent more transmissible and is driving the rapid spread of infections in London and surrounding areas.

So we should not forget the fact the coronavirus is thought to spread mainly from person to person. The pathogen can spread from contact with infected surfaces or objects. A person can get COVID-19 by touching a surface or object that has the virus on it and then touching their own mouth, nose, or possibly their eyes. This can happen between people who are in close contact with one another. So we should not show any laxity in wearing masks and maintaining social distance as maximum as possible to keep the virus at bay.

Also our past experience shows that shutting down the country is not sustainable in the long-term. The social and economic damage would be catastrophic. We should be optimistic, but at the same time, we should keep in mind that we are not far from the end. It can take a long time for the tide to go out — possibly years! So be aware of the peril hiding in our journey that we do not fall prey to another disaster.

MAKE US POORER

Metro brings uncertainty for displaced residents

SABRINA TOPPA

When bulldozers began roaring in front of Shakeel Ahmed’s home in Lahore’s historic Anarkali district, he and his neighbours huddled together at a nearby shrine - despairing about the loss of their property and land.

Like other families in the area, Ahmed, 40, said he was forced to sell his home to the Punjab provincial government for far less than market value to make way for a new metro in Pakistan’s second-largest city.

The \$1.8-billion Orange Line, which started operating in October, promises to cut traffic and air pollution in one of South Asia’s most-polluted urban hubs, but it has left hundreds of people facing an uncertain future.

“I didn’t want to go anywhere else. This is the only place I’ve known in my life,” Ahmed said. Today, he rents a room behind the revered Mauj Darya shrine, but fears being priced out of the rapidly gentrifying area — which now has its own metro station — in the years to come.

The Orange Line, operated by China Railway, NORINCO International and Pakistani partners,

is one of about two dozen new mass transit projects Beijing is launching globally as part of its trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative. It carries up to 250,000 passengers a day, and proponents of the metro trumpet its cheap cost - Rs 40 (about \$0.20) a ride - and the

dawn of a sleek, hi-tech mode of transportation.

Standing in front of Anarkali’s gleaming metro station, city resident Kafeel Chaudhary, 54, said the train would benefit Pakistan’s economy, which like those of its regional neighbours has reeled under the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

“We have very few examples of this type of modern infrastructure in Pakistan. These trains are usually only found in Europe. But now Pakistan has one too, thanks to China,” Chaudhary said.

But residents displaced by the Orange Line fear the city’s rapid infrastructure development may leave them on the economic margins - especially in historic areas along the metro’s route.

“For one million rupees (\$6,291), we’re never going to find a place in this area ever again,” said Ahmed, standing outside the government-owned Maharaja Building, a crumbling housing block of one-bedroom apartments occupied by entire families. Part of the building was demolished for the metro project, affecting about 200 residents, including Ahmed, who now rents a room in the section of the block that is still standing.

Today, most of the building’s former occupants fear they have sacrificed property in one of Lahore’s most iconic — and valuable — commercial areas. They expect property prices to rise in the coming years — but know they will not reap the rewards.

More than 50 households in the building were compensated a lump sum of one million rupees per room after being displaced by the Orange Line, according to the Lahore Development Authority (LDA), but many residents are unhappy.

“We didn’t get enough money,” Ahmed said, accusing local authorities of heavy-handedness as they vacated land during the construction process. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

LOGGING IN

Hunting for new jobs, India’s workers learn new skills online

ANURADHA NAGARAJ

When Shubham Saxena took his electricians course online during India’s coronavirus lockdown, he spent the first few days teaching his class of mainly unskilled migrant workers how to use the mute button. They fast progressed to weightier matters.

Millions of migrant workers who lost their jobs during the country’s strict lockdown earlier this year have turned to online training courses like Saxena’s to learn new skills as they seek to re-enter the labour market, or start a business.

“The response is amazing and we encourage our students to set-up their own shop,” said Saxena, 26, who uses an online platform created by start-ups Spayee and JustRojgar to teach.

“In fact, the lockdown has seen many workers become entrepreneurs, starting their own food stalls or vegetable carts and small businesses,” he said. An estimated 100 million migrants, predominantly daily wage workers with no job security, were among the worst affected by tough lockdown restrictions between March and early June — their plight drawing global attention.

Considered the backbone of India’s urban economy — they poured out of cities where they had worked on building sites and factories, drove taxis or delivered takeouts. Some trekked hundreds of kilometres to reach their home villages.

Many are reluctant to return to the cities having gone without work, pay or financial assistance in the first three



Workers walk on an unfinished temporary pontoon bridge built over river Ganges during preparations for the annual fair of in Allahabad on Tuesday. — AFP

MILLIONS OF
WORKERS WHO
LOST THEIR JOBS
DURING THE
LOCKDOWN HAVE
TURNED TO ONLINE
TRAINING COURSES

months of lockdown, labour right campaigners said.

Various state governments began mapping migrants for the first time this year, emphasising the need for them to gain new skills and increase their chances of finding work nearer home. The Indian government is also revamping its Skill India programme, which aims to give skills training to 400 million people by 2022 to broaden their employment options. It has launched an app aimed at workers, shifting focus to their needs rather than the skills requirements of businesses.

“We are launching a pilot project in January where district committees will be asked to identify what skills will help workers get better jobs,” said Praveen Kumar, secretary of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

“The new app will be user-friendly, in multiple languages and help workers identify their aptitude. We are also customising content for cheaper smartphones that workers use and are creating both practical and online training modules.”

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

HEAD OFFICE

Tel: 24649444, 24649450,
24649451, 24604563,
24699437
Fax: 24699643

SALALAH OFFICE

Tel: 23292633
Fax: 23293909

NIZWA OFFICE

Tel: 25411099
P.O. Box 955, P.C. 611

ADVERTISING

AL OMANEYA ADVERTISING &
PUBLIC RELATIONS, P.O. Box 3303, P.C.
112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: SWITCHBOARD: 24649444,
24649430/24649437/24649401
Fax: 24649434

DISTRIBUTION AGENT

Al OMANEYA for Distribution &
Marketing, P.O. Box 974, P.C. 100,
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24649351/24649360
Fax: 24649379

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY:

Ministry of Information
P.O. Box 974, Postal Code 100, Muscat,
Sultanate of Oman

sport



ABRAHAM

HITS DOUBLE AS CHELSEA SINK WEST HAM

LONDON: Tammy Abraham hit a quickfire late double on Monday as Chelsea beat West Ham 3-0 to reignite their Premier League challenge after a consecutive defeats.

The Hammers proved tricky opponents at an empty Stamford Bridge but lacked the firepower to hurt Frank Lampard's men, who led early through Thiago Silva's bullet header.

Chelsea enjoyed a strong start to the season before losses to Everton and Wolves checked their progress but the victory at the London Stadium lifts them into fifth spot.

Champions Liverpool have opened up a five-point gap at the top of the table but behind them, just seven points separate second-placed Leicester from 11th-placed Wolves.

"It was nice to see that at the end because we had a period at 1-0 where it was tough, we dealt with that well," Lampard told the BBC.

"We dropped off slightly and it was important tonight we came back," he added. "There were loads of things for the team to show their character — we want more.

"Christmas has been changed for everybody this year. For the lads we just have to prepare for Arsenal, it's a busy time of year for us."

West Ham had the ball in the net in the seventh minute after a cleverly worked free kick but Declan Rice was denied by the off-side flag after an impressive



Chelsea's Christian Pulisic and Tammy Abraham in action with West Ham United's Angelo Ogbonna and Fabian Balbuena. — Reuters

finish from a tight angle.

Three minutes later Chelsea were in front when Silva powered home a header from Mason Mount's corner.

The Brazilian found the net from close range after a well-timed run, leaving West Ham goalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski rooted to the spot.

Chelsea enjoyed the lion's share of possession after their goal without creating much of note but West Ham worked their way into the game as the half wore on.

WERNER GOAL DROUGHT

Timo Werner, who has

not scored for Chelsea since early November, had a golden chance to double their lead in the closing minutes of the first period but got the ball caught under his feet and Fabianski saved comfortably.

David Moyes's team made life uncomfortable for the home side after the break but did not make the most of their regular forays forward despite the introduction of forward Said Benrahma.

They were made to pay when Abraham, back in the starting XI, doubled Chelsea's lead with 12 minutes to go, settling their nerves and ending his own drought.

Werner cut inside and saw his scuffed shot tapped in by the England international, who was played onside by Aaron Cresswell.

Two minutes later Chelsea were 3-0 up when Abraham fired home from a tight angle after Fabianski had done well to keep out Christian Pulisic's header.

The win lifts Chelsea to 25 points — one behind fourth-placed Everton — while West Ham stay in 10th place.

Earlier, Burnley beat Wolves 2-1 to climb out of the Premier League's relegation zone, thanks to goals from Ashley Barnes and Chris Wood. — AFP

“It was nice to see that at the end because we had a period at 1-0 where it was tough, we dealt with that well”
FRANK LAMPARD
Chelsea manager

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS	
On Monday	Burnley 2 (Barnes 35, Wood 51) Wolves 1 (Silva 89-pen) Chelsea 3 (Silva 10, Abraham 78, 80) West Ham 0
On Sunday	Brighton 1 (Welbeck 87) Sheffield United 1 (Bogle 63) Tottenham 0 Leicester 2 (Vardy 45+4, Alderweireld 59-og) Manchester United 6 (McTominay 2, 3, Fernandes 20, 70-pen, Lindelof 37, James 66) Leeds 2 (Cooper 41, Dallas 73) West Brom 0 Aston Villa 3 (El Ghazi 5, 87-pen, Traore 84)
On Saturday	Crystal Palace 0 Liverpool 7 (Minamino 3, Mane 35, Firmino 44, 68, Henderson 52, Salah 81, 84) Southampton 0 Manchester City 1 (Sterling 16) Everton 2 (Holding 22-og, Mina 45) Arsenal 1 (Pepe 35-pen) Newcastle 1 (Wilson 64-pen) Fulham 1 (Ritchie 42-og)

Premier League 2020 2021	
Ranking	
	Points played
1 Liverpool	31 14
2 Leicester	27 14
3 Man Utd	26 13
4 Everton	26 14
5 Chelsea	25 14
6 Tottenham	25 14
7 Southampton	24 14
8 Man City	23 13
9 Aston Villa	22 12
10 West Ham	21 14
11 Wolves	20 14
12 Newcastle	18 13
13 Crystal Palace	18 14
14 Leeds	17 14
15 Arsenal	14 14
16 Burnley	13 13
17 Brighton	12 14
18 Fulham	10 14
19 West Brom	7 14
20 Sheffield Utd	2 14
▲	
● Won ● Drew ● Lost Last match	
AFP	



Casillas returns to Real Madrid in foundation role

Former Real Madrid goalkeeper Iker Casillas is returning to the club to take up a role within its foundation, the 13-time European champions announced on Tuesday. Casillas came through the club's youth ranks and went on to play in the first team from 1999 to 2015, winning three Champions Leagues.



Djokovic withdraws from ATP Player Council elections

World number one Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from this month's ATP Player Council elections citing the governing body's new rule that would make it a "conflict of interest" because of his role in the Professional Tennis Players' Association (PTPA). The Serb set up the breakaway PTPA in September.



Rizwan inspires Pakistan to stop NZ sweep

I never thought I'd be made the captain of Pakistan and I can't explain my happiness

MOHAMMAD RIZWAN
Pakistan captain

NAPIER, New Zealand: Mohammad Rizwan celebrated his elevation to the Pakistan Test captaincy in style on Tuesday, smashing a career-best 89 to stop New Zealand claiming a series sweep in the third Twenty20 in Napier.

Pakistan reached New Zealand's target of 174 with two balls to spare, ending on 177 after Iftikhar Ahmed sealed the win with a six in the final over.

But it was Rizwan's 89 from 59 balls, with support from 41-run Mohammad Hafeez, that inspired the victory.

It was a hard-fought win for the tourists, who suffered heavy defeats in the two opening matches after a rocky preparation that included COVID-19 quarantine in Christchurch with no training.

The win was particularly sweet for Rizwan, who was named

on Monday as captain for the first Test against New Zealand starting on December 26 after regular skipper Babar Azam was ruled out with a broken thumb.

"I never thought I'd be made the captain of Pakistan and I can't explain my happiness," he said after his man-of-the-match T20 performance.

Rizwan said the T20 victory was an important morale booster ahead of the two-Test series against the Black Caps.

"We want to take momentum from this into the Test match, so this is very important for us," he said.

After two losses when batting first, Pakistan changed tactics and opted to bowl when they won the toss, restricting New Zealand to 173 for seven, with Devon Conway top-scoring on 63.

Faheem Ashraf was the pick of

the Pakistan attack, taking three for 20.

The strategy of chasing down New Zealand's total paid off as Rizwan and Hafeez forged a 72-run partnership that laid the foundation for the win.

Hafeez, who was stranded on 99 in Hamilton, made 41 from 29 balls including three sixes.

Rizwan's innings, the sixth-highest by a Pakistan batsman in T20s, included a booming six that bounced off the roof of a stand and out of the ground, forcing the umpires to select a replacement ball.

Daryl Mitchell, on as a fielding substitute for the injured Martin Guptill, took three catches for the Black Caps and Pakistan made a nervy finish to the match.

But the solid start to the innings ensured the middle order had enough breathing space to steer the tourists home. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

NEW ZEALAND

M Guptill c Khan b Rauf19
T Seifert b Ashraf35
K Williamson b Ashraf1
D Conway c Khan b Rauf63
G Phillips c Haris b Afridi31
J Neesham c Khan b Ashraf2
S Kuggeleijn c Ahmed b Afridi14
T Southee not out6
K Jamieson not out0
Extras (lb1, nb1)2
Total (7 wickets; 20 overs) 173
Fall of wickets: 1-40, 2-45, 3-58, 4-109, 5-128, 6-159, 7-169

Bowling: Afridi 4-0-43-2, Hasnain 4-0-29-0, Rauf 4-0-44-2, Ashraf 4-0-20-3, Khan 4-0-36-0

PAKISTAN

M Rizwan c Conway b Jamieson89
H Ali c sub (Mitchell) b Kuggeleijn11
M Hafeez c sub (Mitchell) b Kuggeleijn41
K Shah c sub (Mitchell) b Neesham13
F Ashraf c Seifert b Southee2
S Khan c Seifert b Southee0
I Ahmed not out14
H Talat not out0
Extras (lb4, w3)7
Total (6 wickets; 19.4 overs) 177
Fall of wickets: 1-40, 2-112, 3-141, 4-163, 5-163, 6-171

Bowling: Boult 4-0-43-0, Southee 4-0-25-0, Jamieson 2-4-0-22-1, Kuggeleijn 4-0-40-2, Sodhi 1-0-6-0, Neesham 4-0-37-1

Bank Muscat, Orient Travels and Maniz Azad score easy victories

MUSCAT: Asghar Khan's splendid 94 and Ajay Hirlekar's superb 5 for 23 were the highlights of Bank Muscat's emphatic 80-run victory against OCT Seeb in a 30-over B Division clash at Muscat Municipality ground 2 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Rameshbabu Paulsamy's 34 was the other notable score in Bank Muscat's 225 for 8. Younis Murad picked up 3 for 53 while Mohammed Othman and Faris al Balushi took two wickets each.

OCT Seeb saw itself slide to 72 for 5 from 40 for 1 and could manage to score only 145 for 9 in its quota of overs. Younis Murad top-scored with 27 as Ajay made batting difficult for the middle and late order batsmen during his 6-over spell.

ARIF'S TON LIFTS ORIENT TRAVELS AGAIN

In another B Division game, veteran Arif Hussain's scintillating 119 off 78 powered Orient Travels/Gitacs to a massive 145-run win over PDO RC at Muscat Municipality ground 1.

Apart from Arif's ton, Orient Travels' 281 for 8 also included



Asghar Khan and Ajay Hirlekar of Bank Muscat.

BRIEF SCORES

B DIVISION

Orient Travels/Gitacs 281 for 8 in 30 overs (Arif Hussain 119 - 15x4, 1x6, Adil Khan 64 - 10x4, Zakir Khan 2-47, Mohammed Sharif 2-63) bt PDO RC 136 all out in 24.3 overs (Mohammed Sharif 24 - 2x4, Faris al Zadjali 22 - 4x4, Abid Ali 3-28, Ihsan Khan 3-28, Arif Hussain 2-30) by 145 runs.

Bank Muscat 225 for 8 in 30 overs (Asghar Khan 94 - 10x4, Rameshbabu Paulsamy 34 - 5x4, Younis Murad 3-53 Mohammed Othman 2-27, Faris al Balushi 2-30) bt OCT Seeb 145 for 9 in 30 overs (Younis Murad Rahmat 27 - 4x4, Salim al Balushi 24 - 4x4, Ajay Hirlekar 5-23) by 80 runs.

C DIVISION

Khalsa United CT 136 for 8 in 20 overs (Sushil Kadam 44 - 5x4, Irfan Ahmed 33 - 2x4, Moazzam Shah 2-22, Zaheer Abbas 2-29) lost to Maniz Azad International 137 for 3 in 14.4 overs (Shoaib Mohammed 46 - 4x4, 2x6, Adnanul Haq 34 - 3x4, 1x6) by 7 wickets.

Al Waad Trad & Contracting Enterprises 184 for 5 in 20 overs (Muthumurugan Muniyasamy 78 - 15x4, Parthipan Krishnan 26 - 3x4, Tanveer Rana 2-29, Syed Mohammed Ubadah 2-35) beat Jumbo Electronics 82 all out in 13.1 overs (Abrar Hussain 38 - 7x4, Pradeesh Kumar 4-16, Muthumurugan Muniyasamy 3-19, Mohamed Malik 2-3) by 102 runs.

D DIVISION

Spanio & VDD 118 all out in 15.5 overs (Ranjith Kumar 34 - 6x4, Monty Navani 4-22, Prem Anand 2-12, Fahad Hamsa 2-33) lost to Al Jadidi Engineering & Contracting 122 for 2 in 10.4 overs (Muhammad Rizwan 88 - 14x4, 3x6, Arif Al Balushi 1-3) by 8 wickets.

a fluent 64 by fellow opener Adil Khan. Zakir Khan and Mohammed Sharif bagged two wickets each.

PDO's response was way below the mark and it was dismissed for a dismal 136 in 24.3 overs. Mohammed Sharif was the only notable scorer with 24 off 26 as Abid Ali and Ihsan Khan claimed three wickets each while Arif bagged two.

SHOAIB SEES MANIZ AZAD TO VICTORY

Shoaib Mohammed's solid 44 not out helped Maniz Azad International to comfortable 7-wicket victory against Khalsa United in a C Division T20 League match at Muscat Municipality ground 1.

Sushil Kadam top-scored with 44 while Irfan Ahmed contributed 33 as Khalsa scored 136 for 8 in 20 overs. Moazzam Shah and Zaheer Abbas claimed two wickets each.

Maniz raced to victory in less than 15 overs, scoring 137 for 3 thanks to solid batting by Shoaib and Adnanul Haq who whacked 34 not out off only 18 balls.

Fifa complaint against Blatter over museum



A portrait of Sepp Blatter is seen in the FIFA World Football Museum during its inauguration in Zurich on February 28, 2016. — AFP

GENEVA: Fifa on Tuesday announced it had filed a criminal complaint against former president Sepp Blatter over the finances of its loss-making museum in Zurich.

In a statement, Fifa said it had "lodged a criminal complaint with Zurich's cantonal prosecutor as evidence of suspected criminal mismanagement by Fifa's former management and companies appointed by them in relation to the (museum) has surfaced."

Blatter's lawyer, Lorenz Erni, said "the accusations are unfounded" and vehemently denied wrongdoing.

According to Fifa, the museum generated a bill of 500 million Swiss francs (462 million euros) that instead "could and should have been channelled into the development of global football".

"We came to the conclusion that we had no choice other than to report the case to state prosecutors, not least because the current management of Fifa also has fiduciary responsibilities to the organisation and we intend to live up to them, even if those before us dismally failed to," said Fifa Deputy Secretary-General Alasdair Bell. The Zurich-based museum, a landmark Blatter project, was opened in February 2016 by current Fifa President Gianni Infantino just after he was elected as the successor to the disgraced Blatter.

Blatter was suspended from



Fifa former president Sepp Blatter

The museum generated a bill of 500 million Swiss francs (462 million euros) that instead could and should have been channelled into the development of global football

FIFA

football for six years over a two-million Swiss franc payment to then Uefa boss Michel Platini.

Fifa invested 140 million Swiss francs (130.5 million euros, \$138.6 million) in the museum, which is spread over three floors and 3,000 m2.

However, it lost \$50 million in its first year of operating and attracted an average of 11,000 visitors a month, barely half the target. — AFP

OOC to hold General Assembly tomorrow

MUSCAT: The Oman Olympic Committee (OOC) will hold the regular General Assembly meeting for 2020 at Oman Olympic Academy (OOA) on Thursday. The meeting will be presided over by Sayyid Khalid bin Hamad al Bussaidi, OOC Chairman, and the presence of OOC Board and General Assembly (GA) members.

During the meeting, the minutes of the previous meeting held on April 18, 2019, and the review of the annual report on the administrative situation and the activities of OOC in 2019, the project of various activities in 2020 and sub-committees and the agenda and programmes of

OOA, in addition to the Olympic solidarity programmes, will be reviewed.

The attendees will also review the final fiscal account 2019, the auditor's report and the financial statements to be approved by the members of the General Assembly, and the draft budget for 2020, in addition to presenting the requests of the sports associations that have applied for OOC membership which are Oman Golf Association, Oman Cycling Association and Oman Table Tennis Association. In addition to discussing postponing the General Assembly meeting to be held in the second half of next year 2021.

OMAN'S TEEN CRICKET SENSATION READY FOR BREAKOUT



HARIDEV PUSHARAJ
MUSCAT, DEC 22

Sakshi Shetty of Women's Cricket Sohar has been the standout performer of the 2019-2020 domestic cricket season in the Sultanate.

The Oman women's cricket team player has been prolific with her exploits with the bat and ball as she pocketed all three coveted individual prizes at the Oman Cricket Awards.

The tenth grade student of Indian School Sohar was happy with the way the season panned out for her.

"This is my third or fourth season. Talking about my season, it's been a consistent one for me. In most of the matches, I have been able to play some handy knocks and get some crucial scores in difficult situations," Sakshi stated.

Although Sakshi grabbed the Best Batswoman, Best Bowler and Best All-Rounder awards, she emphasised that she was primarily a batswoman.

"I'm basically a batswoman who can do wicket-keeping but I don't keep for my team. Other people are there. This season has been really great for me overall with the bat and ball."

"This season is special because I was striking the ball well and could hit a six which was one of my first sixes in a while."

Sakshi owed a lot of her success to her father Vijay Shetty and coach Kamal.

"I have been helped by my father who was actually my first coach and another coach (Kamal) who is my school teacher has been really helpful. He was the one who introduced me to the season ball. My principal and school management committee have always supported and encouraged me to play and take up cricket," she added.

The teenager from Mangalore in the south Indian state of Karnataka spoke about some of the challenges that she faced in her cricketing journey thus far.

"I am the only one from my

school who plays cricket and I used to travel 3-4 days a week to Muscat from Suhar. I also used to attend Oman Cricket coaching camp where I was trained and helped by Vaishali Jesrani, who is the Oman women's cricket team captain.

"Sakshi has been playing for the Oman women's team since 2017.

"I have played about 16-17 matches for Oman and been selected for three tours. It has been a great experience representing the national team and learning new things from Vaishali. The support staff, including the coaches and physios, have all been very professional in their approach and I have learnt a lot," Sakshi stated.

The COVID-19 pandemic has really changed the definition of normalcy and presented a whole new scenario for all and sundry. Sakshi's has been no different.

"Covid has been really tough on me because of the travelling challenges that I faced having to travel to Muscat 3-4 times a week for practice. Moreover, this year being in tenth grade there is added pressure because of the academic importance."

"This year they have started training and practice for the national team but my parents are reluctant to send me because it is tenth grade and probably once the exams get over I'll be able to join them."

Sakshi has been juggling her academics and cricket fairly well and felt despite the challenges she faced, her dedication to the sport never suffered.

"There are occasions when I would take some notes in the car while travelling to Muscat and would do some of my studies there. Sometimes, I do have to miss a few classes when I take a half day at school but my classmates and teachers help me with the notes. I am very prompt with my notes and submissions so my teachers are always supportive towards my interest in cricket," Sakshi explained.

SAKSHI HAS BEEN JUGGLING HER ACADEMICS AND CRICKET FAIRLY WELL AND FELT DESPITE THE CHALLENGES SHE FACED, HER DEDICATION TO THE SPORT NEVER SUFFERED

SAKSHI IN 2019-2020 SEASON

Matches	: 6
Runs	: 229
HS	: 67
Wickets	: 9
Economy	: 3.20
Average	: 7.11



business

MUSCAT
STOCK
MARKET

3,603.99

CRUDE
OIL PRICE

Oman Crude \$49.90

Brent Crude \$50.59

Light Crude \$47.96

OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om

follow us: @oman_biz

PRIORITY BANKING SERVICES

Year-End Prize for Al Riadah
Priority Banking customers

OMR
250,000
each
for two winners

#It'sYourTurn

To get a chance to win with
Year-End Prize for Al Riadah

Open Savings Account today!

Guaranteed prizes for every branch
• Bigger prizes • More winners

Be a winner with
BankDhofar Savings Account

For more information
www.bankdhofar.com/en-GB/Saving_Account.aspx

Al Riadah

الرياضة

the best bank for you

3477 5775

www.bankdhofar.com

Contractors eye main construction package of \$110m seafood cannery project in Duqm

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A number of local and international firms are lining up to bid for a substantial contract to build a major seafood cannery plant at the new Duqm Fisheries Complex envisaged alongside the fisheries port currently under development at the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Duqm on Oman’s southeast coast.

International Sea Food Company SAOC (ISFC), a subsidiary of Oman Food Investment Holding Company (OFIC) — the government’s food sector investment and development arm — is overseeing the establishment of the fish processing plant with an investment of around \$110 million.

OFIC is spearheading the

development of the project in partnership with a number of local and regional investors, including the publicly listed Oman Fisheries Company (OFC).

When fully operational, the cannery plant will boast a processing inflow capacity of around 88,000 tons per annum of sardine and tuna, while churning out sizable quantities of fishmeal and fish oil as well.

“The establishment journey of (ISFC) into a domestic, regional and international player in the seafood industry will enable it to work towards its objective of diversifying its asset, product offering, and customer base, thus striving for a sustainable growth and values added-return to its shareholders,” said the company in prequalification tender documents distributed to



interested contractors earlier this month.

“A detailed feasibility study was conducted looking at market opportunity, company positioning and project execution philosophy. The feasibility showed the viability

of the project given the key project assumptions and market positioning,” it noted.

ISFC’s world-class cannery plant will come up on a plot of land that is part of a sprawling 7 sq km fisheries and food processing zone envisioned alongside the fisheries harbour at Duqm. It will be one of the first fish processing related investments to materialise at the cluster which, together with the fisheries port, will position Duqm as a major fisheries hub in the Middle East.

On Monday, a multinational consortium led by Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), the fisheries sector investment and development arm of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), signed an agreement with Duqm SEZ to develop and operate the fisheries port in Duqm.

Al Wusta Industrial Fisheries Company, a subsidiary of FDO, also inked a land usufruct deal to oversee the development of the adjoining fisheries cluster. Total investment by the consortium, which also includes Oman Fisheries, Port of Duqm and

French fisheries port operator SEM Lorient-Keroman, is estimated at \$130 million.

According to ISFC, engineering — procurement — construction (EPC) packages covering the construction of the seafood cannery plant are expected to be issued to prequalified contractors by around the end of Q1 2021.

At the heart of the cannery complex is a main steel structure, offering 40,000 sq metres of covered built-up area, that will house the cannery operations, as well as other facilities, such as cold storage, workers’ amenities, offices and labs.

Integrated with the main building will be separate units for the manufacture of empty cans, and production of fishmeal and fish oil, as well as facilities for desalination, sewage treatment, and so on.

Oil drops as new virus strain revives demand fears



LONDON: Oil dropped towards \$50 a barrel on Tuesday, adding to losses from the previous session, as a new coronavirus strain in the United Kingdom revived concerns over demand recovery.

Detection of the new strain prompted several countries to close their borders to Britain, though a British minister said the UK and France are working to reopen one of Europe’s most important trade routes.

Brent crude was down 32 cents, or 0.6 per cent, at \$50.59 a barrel by 1125 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude fell 67 cents, or 1.4 per cent, to \$47.30.

Both benchmarks slid nearly 3 per cent on Monday, partly erasing recent gains driven by the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, seen as key to allowing a return to normal life.

“In the battle between immediate negative concerns and future optimism, the former is now fighting back,” said Tamas Varga of oil broker PVM.

The latest rally culminated in Brent hitting \$52.48, its highest since March, on Friday. Some see the potential for prices to fall further.

— Reuters

Omani oilfield firm completes first well stimulation on Block 61

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 22

BP announced on Tuesday the successful completion of the first well stimulation on Block 61 by Abraj Energy Services, marking a significant milestone in its relationship with the Omani well services contractor. The well, located in the Ghazeer field, also represents one of the largest stimulations completed by Abraj.

BP Oman President Youssef al Ojaili commented: “We’re delighted to reach this important milestone with Abraj. This is the first time the company has worked with us on a well stimulation. It’s great to see what can be achieved when working collaboratively and with a commitment to in-country value.”

Abraj was initially awarded 30 per cent of the stimulation scope for Block 61, with the opportunity to potentially increase this based on performance.

Abraj Managing Director Abdullah al Hady commented:

Abraj was initially awarded 30 pc of the stimulation scope for Block 61, with the opportunity to potentially increase this based on performance

“We’re delighted to have worked with bp to deliver this well stimulation, proving the capability of a local company to perform one of the most complex services in well engineering and in one of the most challenging reservoirs. We’ve been grateful for BP’s continuous support, technical advice and for providing us with the opportunity to demonstrate our capabilities.”

The gas in Block 61’s Khazzan and Ghazeer reservoirs is known to be ‘tight’. This means that the hydrocarbon – gas and condensate - is tightly held within the reservoir formations and will

not flow naturally to economic rates without stimulation.

To do this, fluids and proppant are pumped into the formation at high pressures and rates which opens the reservoir’s rock – creating a ‘super-highway’ which allows the hydrocarbons to flow.

The well was stimulated late November and started to flow shortly thereafter with productivity better than expected. Once wells flow, residual chemicals and proppant must be removed before they reach the central processing facility.

Historically, hydrocarbons produced during well testing would be flared.

BP Oman has pioneered the green completions concept where hydrocarbons are routed to the production facility instead, reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Since adopting this approach in 2019, 201,000 tonnes of CO2 emissions have been saved – equivalent to removing 44,000 cars from the road for a year.



OAB uncovers RO 6m embezzlement



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 22

Oman Arab Bank (OAB) revealed on Tuesday that it has filed a criminal complaint with the Royal Oman Police (ROP) following the unearthing of a suspected case of forgery and embezzlement involving funds totalling around RO 6 million.

The publicly listed lender said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) that investigations into the alleged theft of funds are also underway by the competent authorities.

“The Bank further advises that this occurrence will not have any impact on the Bank’s customers, and assures the public that the Bank’s internal committees are handling this matter with the utmost level of seriousness and professionalism to safeguard the interests of all parties dealing with

the bank. In the interim, the Bank has notified the insurance companies and will pursue all options available to recover the amount,” OAB CEO Rashad al Musafir stated.

In June, OAB completed its takeover of Alizz Bank (AIB) – one of the first fully-fledged Islamic banks in the Sultanate – to become the first lender delivering both conventional and Sharia-compliant Islamic banking services.

The transaction was the first takeover to be regulated by the new Oman Public Takeover Regulations and involved AIB becoming a wholly-owned Islamic banking subsidiary of OAB, a de-listing of AIB from the Muscat Securities Market (MSM) and a subsequent listing of OAB on the MSM. Combined assets at the time soared to over \$8.4 billion.

UK banks draw up plans to cut cost and space in HQs

WITH the pandemic having plunged the financial sector into great uncertainty, the one thing that seems clear is that London's financial district (known as the 'City') will be contracted as a result of the crisis.

Large investment banks have been exploring ways to cut office space and costs as thousands of finance workers are keen to have permanent flexibility in their jobs.

Banks have been considering everything from shrinking headquarters, giving up back-up offices, sub-letting parts of their main London operations or pulling out of expensive properties, according to people familiar with the matter.

Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank, Citi, Nomura and JP Morgan have all been exploring ways

to cut office space, according to bankers, executives and advertisements for commercial real estate.

Financial services sector lead at CBRE (commercial real estate and investment firm), Michelle Buckman, said: "COVID-19 has been a catalyst for many companies and has pushed real estate higher up their agenda. There is now an opportunity for these occupiers to re-assess their space requirements as well as how their space is occupied and where it is located."

With fresh calls from the UK government to work from home – which has stalled the return of workers to the offices in the financial district – banks face pressure to overhaul their working practices permanently.

A survey of 600 investment bankers, asset managers, and private equity by Humans in Finance – a lobby group set up



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

COVID-19 HAD PRESENTED OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BANK TO CUT COSTS BY REINING IN REAL ESTATE AND STAFF TRAVEL

by bankers to improve working life in the sector – found that just 3 per cent want to return to the office full-time.

Meanwhile, 75 per cent of respondents said firms would face trouble retaining talent if they did not embrace flexible working.

But banks have another motive – cost-cutting.

Deutsche Bank chief executive had said that COVID-19 had presented opportunities for the bank to cut costs by reining in real estate and staff travel.

And Citigroup looked for "further consolidation" of its real estate footprint. Credit Suisse and Japanese bank Nomura had both started planning back in October to sublet floors in their headquarters.

Since the start of the second half of this year, with the coronavirus still rampant, there has been a 9 per cent increase

in the amount of "tenant-controlled" office space coming to the market in the banking sector, according to estate agent Savills.

In the broader financial sector, this has increased by 21 per cent in the same period.

Head of central London office agency at Saville, Philip Pearce, said: "Lockdown has legitimised certain ways of working previously considered unlikely to be productive."

He added: "Even traditional service sectors, historically conservative about a tech-supported remote workforce, now understand that digital transformation offers advantages."

Property agents Knight Frank said bringing staff back to the office safely amid the pandemic is complicated and costly.

Hundreds of firms headquartered in the City and

Canary Wharf (another financial hub) will have to rent out an extra 13 million square feet of office space to ensure staff are able to follow the government's social distancing rules.

A key target for banks has been the prospect of closing their back-up offices.

So-called business continuity sites are scattered around London in unglamorous locations. They serve as locations for staff in the event of an emergency, but have largely sat idle through the pandemic as banks instead sent staff home.

"We're questioning whether we really need these back-up sites," said a senior deal maker at a European Bank. "It's a disaster recovery site that has sat empty through one of the biggest crises to hit in living memory."

(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

360K malicious files detected daily in 2020

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 22

In 2020, an average of 360,000 new malicious files were detected per day — an increase of 5.2 per cent when compared to the previous year, according to a report by Kaspersky.

Driving this growth a large increase in the number of Trojans (malicious files capable of a range of actions, including deleting data and spying) and backdoors (a specific type of Trojan that gives attackers remote control over the infected device): a 40.5 per cent and 23 per cent increase respectively.

The company's detection systems discovered an average of 360,000 new malicious files every day over the past 12 months — 18,000 more than the previous year (a 5.2 per cent increase) and up from 346,000 in 2018. 60.2 per cent of those malicious files were non-specific Trojans. In general, the percentage of Trojans detected increased by 40.5 per cent when compared to the previous year.

There was also a noticeable increase in the number of backdoors detected, as well as worms (malicious programmes



that self-replicate on your system), written in the VisualBasicScript language and usually belonging to the Dinihou malware family.

On the decline were adware (programmes that bombard you with advertisements), which experienced a 35 per cent decrease when compared to 2019.

The vast majority of malicious files detected (89.80 per cent) occurred via Windows PE files — a file format specific to Windows operating systems.

At the same time, the number of new malware related to Android operating systems declined by 13.7 per cent. Given that many people were working and studying from home, most

likely on computers and laptops, attackers appear to have shifted their focus to these devices.

"Over the past year, our detection systems discovered far more new malicious objects than they did in 2019. Due to the pandemic, users from around the world were forced to spend more time on their devices and online. It's hard to know whether or not attackers were more active or our solutions detected more malicious files simply because of greater activity. However, if users take basic security precautions, they can significantly lower their risk of encountering them," comments Denis Staforkin, a security expert at Kaspersky.

— PRESS RELEASE — OMINVEST RECEIVES BUSINESS LEADERSHIP AWARD



Oman International Development and Investment Company (OMINVEST) was presented the "OER Excellence Award for Business Leadership" at the 11th edition of OER Business Summit. The award was received by AbdulAziz al Balushi, OMINVEST CEO.

Talal bin Sulieman al Rahbi, Deputy-Secretary General, Supreme Council for Planning, was the chief guest at the Summit held under the auspices of Shaikh Salim bin Mustahail al Mashani, Chairman of Muscat Overseas Group.

OMINVEST actively participated in the Summit agenda. Shahid Rasool, Deputy CEO, OMINVEST made a presentation on "Economic and Business Competitiveness beyond the COVID-19 Era"; and shared insight on the rapidly changing global economic and business landscape, COVID-19 implications, global megatrends, technology trends, business disruption, and major sectors' performance.



6.9pc growth in fixed Internet subscriptions

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 22

Oman's total fixed Internet subscriptions rose 6.9 per cent to touch 506,091 at the end of November 2020 compared to the same period of 2019.

Of this, fixed broadband Internet connections, which have more than 256 kilobytes speed, rose 6.9 per cent to 504,049 at the end of November 2020, according to the latest data released by National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The number of active mobile broadband subscribers rose 12.1 per cent to 5.31 million at the end of November 2020 compared to the same period of 2019, whereas total fixed telephone lines fell by 0.7 per cent to 591,316.

According to the NCSI

report, the number of voice-over-Internet protocol (VoIP) lines surged by 11.8 per cent to 236,906. Further, analogue fixed connections fell by 8.6 per cent to 298,361 at the end of November 2020 compared to the same period of the previous year, whereas ISDN channels fell 2.4 per cent to 47,823.

A total number of mobile subscribers fell 1.1 per cent to 6.22 million until the end of November 2020 compared to the same period of 2019.

Out of this, postpaid mobile connections increased by 26.8 per cent to 976,772, and pre-paid mobile connections fell 5 per cent to 5.24 million at the end of November 2020. Also, the number of subscribers of resellers rose by 11.9 per cent to 1.05 million at the end of November 2020 compared to the same period of 2019.

Strengthening partnerships is key to Oman's connected future

CHEN BING

THE information and communications technology (ICT) sector today forms the key factor of intelligent societies. This sector, and the people who work within it, are helping to drive Oman's industries and businesses forward.

This provides the momentum for socio-economic growth while contributing towards the realization of Oman Vision 2040.

The essential role of connectivity has never been more prominent than in the last year. Without fast connections provided by advanced telecom networks, video

conferencing, cloud computing, and other technologies, the world would have ground to a halt during lockdowns. Creating new value with synergy across these tech domains is key to the development roadmap of Oman.

Empowering local talent as an integral part of the Sultanate's overall ICT ecosystem is spreading advantages to other sectors and industries. A talent-focused and "innovation" mindset is the only way to addresses the requirements of a more digital-centric and sustainable future.

Therefore, a strong talent pool is essential for Oman to reap the full

benefits of digitalisation, to unlock more opportunities for people and business, and to accelerate national recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

In particular, the field of education was significantly impacted, yet also took advantage of connectivity and advanced technology solutions. New challenges arose in providing students with the necessary tools to advance their education without the use of physical labs, shared equipment, and traditional curriculums.

Unfortunately, the digital divide might have widened during this period, setting back gains achieved



Chen Bing, CEO, Huawei Tech Investment (Oman)

in recent years.

While digital infrastructure has evolved to combat COVID-19 more broadly, Oman will need to simultaneously focus on equipping the country's youth with advanced technical skills. Developing these skills will ultimately create a more



versatile generation who are well-suited for future employment, and who can rise to be the future leaders in achieving the targets of their country's ambitious national visions.

That is easier said than done, of course. Throughout many years of being present in Oman, we have

seen tremendous efforts made by the government and our partners towards growing talent in the ICT arena.

For example, encouraging knowledge and experience sharing will create more open ecosystems. These provide more opportunities for technology to evolve in ways that are beneficial to society. Promoting the value of public-private partnerships to nurture an innovation mentality and to foster ICT talent growth is also essential, particularly in terms of practical skills development.

(The writer is CEO, Huawei Tech Investment in Oman)

In brief

WASHINGTON



CYBERATTACK HIT KEY US TREASURY SYSTEMS

Hackers broke into systems used by top US Treasury officials during a massive cyberattack on government agencies and may have stolen essential encryption keys, a senior lawmaker said Monday.

Senator Ron Wyden, who sits on both the Senate Intelligence and Finance Committees, said after a closed-door briefing that the hack at the US Treasury Department “appears to be significant.”

Dozens of email accounts were compromised, he said in a statement. — AFP

BRUSSELS



EU GIVES GREEN LIGHT TO FIAT CHRYSLER, PSA MERGER

The European Union on Monday gave conditional approval to the mega-merger of car giants Fiat Chrysler (FCA) and Peugeot Citroen (PSA), after the firms promised to address competition fears.

The tie-up, which was announced late last year and planned to be completed in early 2021, will create Stellantis, set to be the world's fourth-largest automaker in terms of volume, and number three in terms of sales. — AFP

US Congress approves \$892 bn relief package

WASHINGTON: The US Congress on Monday approved an \$892 billion coronavirus aid package, throwing a lifeline to the nation's pandemic-battered economy after months of inaction, while also keeping the federal government funded for another year. President Donald Trump is soon expected to sign the package into law.

After days of furious negotiation, both legislative chambers worked deep into the night to pass the massive bill, with the House of Representatives first approving it and the Senate following suit several hours later in bipartisan votes.

The virus relief bill includes \$600 payments to most Americans as well as additional payments to the millions of people thrown out of work during the COVID-19 pandemic, just as a larger round of benefits is due to expire on Saturday.

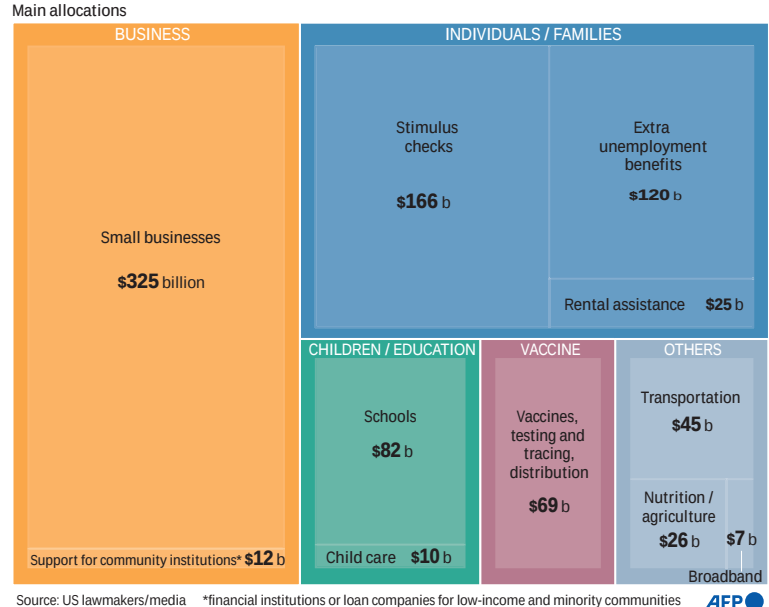
House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat, said she supported the virus relief bill even though it did not include the direct aid for state and local governments that Democrats had sought.

She said they would try for it again next year after Democratic President-elect Joe Biden takes office.

The bill, she said, “doesn’t go all the way but it takes us down the path.” Republican Representative Hal Rogers, who also supported the package, said: “it reflects a fair compromise.”

At 5,593 pages, the wide-ranging bill that also spends \$1.4 trillion on an array of federal programs through next September, is likely to be the final

Covid-19 in US: \$900 billion stimulus package



major piece of legislation for the 116th Congress that expires on January 3.

Congress included a measure continuing current levels of government spending for seven days, ensuring no interruption to federal operations. It has a net cost of roughly \$350 billion for coronavirus relief, Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said, adding that more than \$500 billion in funding comes from unspent money Congress had authorised.

The stimulus package, the first congressionally approved aid since April, comes as the pandemic is accelerating in the United States, infecting more than 214,000 people every day and slowing the economic recovery.

More than 317,000 Americans have died. The legislation also expands a small-business lending programme by about

\$284 billion and steers money to schools, airlines, transit systems and vaccine distribution. The small-business loan and grant programme, known as the Paycheck Protection Programme, would exclude publicly traded companies from eligibility.

Amid reports that the Trump Organization received past aid, the bill contains disclosure requirements for the president, vice president, heads of Cabinet departments, lawmakers and spouses and prohibits those individuals from receiving loans in the future.

State and local governments, which are struggling to pay for the distribution of newly approved COVID-19 vaccines, would receive \$8.75 billion from Washington, with \$300 million of that targeted at vaccinations in minority and high-risk populations. — Reuters

Apple targets car production by 2024

CALIFORNIA: Apple Inc is moving forward with self-driving car technology and is targeting 2024 to produce a passenger vehicle that could include its own breakthrough battery technology, people familiar with the matter told Reuters.

The iPhone maker's automotive efforts, known as Project Titan, have proceeded unevenly since 2014 when it first started to design its own vehicle from scratch.

At one point, Apple drew back the effort to focus on software and reassessed its goals. Doug Field, an Apple veteran who had worked at Tesla Inc, returned to oversee the project in 2018 and laid off 190 people from the team in 2019.

Since then, Apple has progressed enough that it now aims to build a vehicle for consumers, two people familiar with the effort said, asking not to be named because Apple's plans are not public.

Apple's goal of building a personal vehicle for the mass market contrasts with rivals such as Alphabet Inc's Waymo, which has built robo-taxis to carry passengers for a driverless ride-hailing service. Central to Apple's strategy is a new battery design that could “radically” reduce the cost of batteries and increase the vehicle's range, according to a third person who has seen Apple's battery design. Apple declined to comment on its plans or future products.

Making a vehicle represents a supply chain challenge even for Apple, a company with deep pockets that makes hundreds of millions of electronics products each year with parts



from around the world, but has never made a car. It took Elon Musk's Tesla 17 years before it finally turned a sustained profit making cars.

“If there is one company on the planet that has the resources to do that, it's probably Apple. But at the same time, it's not a cellphone,” said a person who worked on Project Titan. It remains unclear who would assemble an Apple-branded car, but sources have said they expect the company to rely on a manufacturing partner to build vehicles. And there is still a chance Apple will decide to reduce the scope of its efforts to an autonomous driving system that would be integrated with a car made by a traditional automaker, rather than the iPhone maker selling an Apple-branded car, one of the people added.

Two people with knowledge of Apple's plans warned pandemic-related delays could push the start of production into 2025 or beyond. Shares of Tesla ended 6.5 per cent lower on Monday after their debut in the S&P 500 on Monday. Apple shares ended 1.24 per cent higher after the news.

— Reuters

Ford Signature Facility Launched in Oman

At the first-ever, Ford digital launch event, Arabian Car Marketing Company, launched Ford Signature Facility in Oman. The event offered viewers a glimpse of the first-of-its-kind Ford facility and exclusive reviews of the All-new Ford Explorer and the All-new Ford Taurus. The digital event encouraged customers to enjoy the benefits of digital technology, stay up-to-date with all the happenings at their favourite brand and get an opportunity to win 4 i-pad minis while staying safe and comfortable, wherever they are.

The event was showcased on all the Ford Oman social media pages on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

For over three decades, Ford Motor Company and Arabian Car Marketing Company's partnership has continually delighted customers in Oman with world-class products, service and parts. The Ford Signature Facility welcomes customers to a brand new experience in car purchasing. Every aspect in the showroom is centred around customers' desires. The new Reception area provides all the answers to queries customers may have, even redirecting them to specific teams in case the customer is interested in more information. To make this initiative symbolic, is the big blue Ford halo above the Reception area that is Ford's way of informing customers that 'we take your desires seriously and do our



best to offer a reliable and valuable ownership experience'.

Another interior highlight is the attractive Lighting Rafts that literally crown Ford's focus models with their colour changing mood lights. Subtly drawing customers to get a closer look at their favourite Ford models.

The Customer Lounge is another area that is new in the Ford Signature Facility. Here a cool, casual and relaxing environment, offers customers and their families the space to sit back and relax. The digital experience on the screens helps them to learn more about their favourite Ford vehicle. Should they feel the need, Ford sales consultants will happily help with any questions they may have.

The exclusive Customer Purchase Rooms with engaging digital screens offer customers an opportunity to think through their buying decisions

at leisure, making their overall experience here a delight.

The Celebration Bay in the Ford Signature Facility is a special zone to celebrate a customer's journey into the highest point of their ownership experience. Marking the fantastic decision of owning a Ford!

Backing customer ownership experience all along is the world-class support from Ford Service and Parts that makes the journey of owning a Ford an absolute delight.

At the digital event, customers even had an opportunity to know more about the All-new Ford introductions – the Explorer and the Taurus, through an exclusive review. The all-new Ford Explorer now in its 6th Generation, is a smart SUV with smart technologies built to make you enjoy the most of life's adventures with its sheer size, exterior design and all-

round capability.

The all-new Explorer is powerful. The cabin space is really impressive. It is spacious and has the quietest cabins ever on any generation Explorer. Powering the Explorer is Ford's proven 2.3 Litre EcoBoost Engine that is paired to a 10-speed automatic transmission. It dishes out 300 Horsepower and 420 N.M Torque. That's a good amount of power to help you get through varied driving conditions. In terms of features, the all-new Explorer is loaded to keep journeys filled with fun and safety. They include the premium B&O Sound System with 12 speakers, 10-way Power Driver's Seat, (Heated and Cooled Front Seats), SYNC 3 with 8" Touchscreen with Apple CarPlay compatibility, Hands-free Liftgate, Ford Co-Pilot360 that includes Blind Spot Information System with Cross Traffic Alert, Lane Keeping System, Pre-Collision Assist with Automatic



Emergency Braking and Co-Pilot 360 Assist plus which includes Intelligent Adaptive Cruise Control with Stop and Go, Lane Centering and Evasive Steering Assist.

The all-new Ford Taurus has an impressive array of new and improved features and technology. Built on Ford's all-new global D Platform, the Taurus showcases the strong advantages of the “One Ford” strategy and flexibility in product development. The award-winning EcoBoost is Ford's most technologically advanced engine ever. Delivering up to 20% better fuel efficiency – than its larger conventional counterparts.

The Ford Taurus is powered by a 2.0L EcoBoost Petrol Engine with 240PS that is paired to an 8 Speed A/T with Rotary dial. As you can see here, the Taurus interior is large and spacious with a large 470 Litre cargo space. That is quite a bit to help you

carry your desires. It is equipped with Hands-free Power Trunk Lid, Driver and Passenger Heated and Cooled Seats, Dual Zone Auto Temperature Control A/C, Rear View Camera, Blind Spot Information System, adaptive LED Headlamps and Lane Keeping Aid, among the many driver and passenger-focused features and technology.

Customers are welcome to visit the first-ever Ford Signature Facility in Oman at Watayah, anytime from 8:30 am to 7 pm from Sunday to Thursday and on Saturdays from 10 am to 1 pm. Additionally customers wishing to experience the All-new Ford Explorer and the All-new Ford Taurus are encouraged to visit their nearest Ford showroom.

Those wishing to catch up on the most happening digital launch event, that they missed, can view the event on Ford Oman social media channels.

WJ Towell Group Company

Quality car rentals at competitive prices.

Muscat 9014 6672, 9679 0684
Sohar 9731 6218 Salalah 9429 9325
www.orbit-oman.com

• Fleet of 2,000 vehicles
• Choose from a wide range of brands & models
• PDO, OXY and BP spec vehicles available
• Attractive rates for short-term & long-term lease

أوربيت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

Observer

For Advertisements
Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office
Muscat Al Rashdi: 99451166
E-mail: oman4n@gmail.com

Salalah Office
Salalah Al Rashdi: 99451166
E-mail: oman4n@gmail.com

Sohar Office
Sohar Al Rashdi: 99451166
E-mail: oman4n@gmail.com

WEDNESDAY | DECEMBER 23, 2020 | JUMADA AL ULA 8, 1442 AH

OMAN DAILY
Observer

Classified Section

Mohammed al Rashdi: 99841230
m.alrashdi86@yahoo.com

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
ali.almashari@omandaily.om

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

FOR RENT

NEW family flats in Darsait near the beach, 5 bedrooms, hall with AC, 4 bathrooms, balcony with sea view, RO 450 per month. Contact: 99315986.

FLAT for rent. 98403020

FLAT for rent in Maabela 3 master rooms. 96088926.

2 BEDROOM flat Al Khuwair. 99322344.

FOR rent in Salalah, north Auqadain. Call 91711118.

NEW apartment for rent, one room, 2 toilets, kitchen and dinning. Location, Al Khoudh Market, Red Taj building, 7th floor. Per month rent RO 190/-, 92838118

WELL maintained 1&2 BHK and office space/ store available at Rex Road. Contact 92227165

NEW penthouse, N Ghubra — 2 bedroom + 3 toilets + 1 maid room with toilet and 1 big hall 99370300.

FLAT for rent at Al Khuwair 33, 4 bedrooms, majlis, 2 halls, kitchen and store. 99383446.

NEW apartment in Ruwi near church consists of 2 rooms with its facilities. Contact. 94664635, 95850345.

1BHK & 2 bhk flats for rent at Ruwi and Al Khoudh. 93994402, 93994403, 24834644.

3 BHK Flat & studio flat in central Ruwi & 2 BHK in Medinat Al Ilam. Call 99238012/ 24704994.

SIT. VACANT

1. Electrical engineer, 11kv 33 kv DCRP approved 5-year experience with CEP card holder.
 2. Mechanical engineer for PAEW water works 5-year Experience.
 3. HSE manger DCRP approved.
 4. Cable jointer 11kv 33kv DCRP, Raychem certificate holder.
 5. 33 kv supervisor year experience.
 6. Testing and commission engineer DCRP approved.
 7. Line men 11 kv 33 kv.
 8. Draft man electrical mechanical civil 6 years experience.
 9. Office boy.
 10. Receptionist lady, knowledge in office keeping.
 11. Quantity surveyor, electrical, mechanical, civil.
 12. Electrical engineer 220 kv tower line 6 years experience.
- Send your CV on following mail, mohan@gewoman.com

PROPERTY leasing manager, send CV to vepsupervisor@gmail.com

WE are urgently for AC & Auto electrician (car electrician) who can join immediately. Contact: 99677756.

SALES ENGINEER (PEB) B.Tech Mechanical with minimum 7 years of experience in Pre Engineered Steel Building (PEB) sales and marketing. Responsibility involves Technical discussion with the customers, preparing proposals, cost estimation and quotation. Valid GCC driving licence is a must. Contact: hrjob191@yahoo.com.

INVESTMENT

AN organic jaggery (Al Harifayuh)1 manufacturing industry available for partnership or investment in Hubli India. 0091 9742421122.

SIT. WANTED

EXPERIENCED Pakistani light driver, excellent knowledge of Oman roads/areas. Knows English, Arabic, Urdu, Hindi languages, seeks job. Contact 96091082, 79250786.

MECHANICAL engineer, 21, Indian male currently in Oman looking to work at any engineering field. Contact 96511338. Email: rkdhanush11@gmail.com

BUYING

AL Awsad Modern llc, electronic and furniture used. 99834373.

We buy used and broken cars which have instalments in cash. 90202090.

SIT. WANTED

INDIAN male looking for the post of Sr Sales Executive with valid Omani licence. Contact 79285701.

LADY Indian English teacher with over 25 year experience, currently seeks full time position in colleges or training institutions. Responsibilities in English language teaching or soft skills trainer with preference for aviation sector. Possess valid Omani driving license. Contact GSM 92541510

BE Civil Planning Engineer, 6 yrs experience in Sobha Limited (India) looking for suitable job in Oman. Email: vasanthcivil19@gmail.com GSM: 0091 8870345416, 97676177

B Tech Mechanical Engineer, 2 yrs experience, looking for suitable job in Oman. Email: boovarasanboopathi@gmail.com GSM: 0091-9159352599, 97676177.

INDIAN male, having bachelor's degree looking for position in office administration/ document control, total 22 years of experience, 19 years in Oman with Oman driving licence. NOC available. Contact 99757759.

ACC AVAILABLE

SINGLE room with attached bathroom and air-condition for executive bachelor, non-cooking, Wadi Kabir/ Al Falaj/ Ruwi High Street area. Contact 99657906

MANPOWER

MANPOWER from Philippines. Whatsapp: 91206344.

PEST CONTROL OMAN CO. L.L.C.

Supply of Pesticides, Gel (crocoraches), Public Health chemicals, Agriculture chemicals, Snake repellent, Rodent baits and other insect repellent from UK & USA

PROFESSIONALS in Pest Control Service, Bedbug Treatment, Rodent Treatment, Snake Treatment and Termite Treatment (Pre & Post Construction)

Tel: 24787606, 24787503
Direct Line: 24786077
GSM: 99382355, 99172309
pcomctom@omantel.net.om
P.O. Box 555, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

SIT. WANTED

25 YEARS Oman experience, civil engineer (8 Tech), (Projects), looking for suitable placement. GSM 94275502/ 92887723. Email: barkatasures@gmail.com

YOUNG experienced Pakistani driver with Omani light vehicle driving licence seeks suitable opening. Speaks Arabic, Hindi, English and familiar with interior and Muscat areas. Contact GSM 95856719.

FOR SALE/RENT

COLD store in Al Seeb for lease or sale. Contact: 94272979, 96252664.

NEW 3 storey villas for sale/rents Wadi Kabir/Al Khuwair), (Shops/offices for rent/ Al Khuwair) (Flats for rent/Wadi Kabir). 96596348.

RENT A CAR

abc RENT A CAR
SPECIAL Rates on New Cars & 4 WDs
RENTING & LEASING
Tours and Airport Transfer
Tel: 24582663
GSM: 95859497,
Fax: 24582664,
abcrent@omantel.net.om

Buttercup Rent A Car
AMAZING OFFERS
○ Rent a car for 10 days and get an extra free day.
○ Rent for one month and get 5 days free.
All the cars are 2016 brand new special prices for public departments, companies and long-term contracts. ☎972494490.

LUXURIOUS Toyota bus 2016, air-conditioned, 30 passengers, offered for daily/monthly/annually, Muscat. Contact: 98080609, 96316269.

SMART Indian, excellent English, double masters, Arabic speaker, 17 years Oman experience in Airport project, Hospital, Media, EPC. Immediate joining. NOC. Contact 99283938.

SALES/Marketing/ retail executive BMS in Marketing. 6 years experience. Contact 93920174. Rehankadri91@hotmail.com

SERVICES

A LEGAL translation office needs **Marketeers**. Contact E-mail: oman4n@gmail.com

1. AC maintenance and servicing.
2. Fridge, washing machine and dish washer repairing.
3. Painting and cleaning services.
4. Electrical, plumbing and carpentry work 97014234, 99447257, 24290686.

ORIENT Trading llc, Shampooing, sofa, carpet, floor polishing. Old house repairing. 99834373.

AL SUMRI AC maintenance. We are ready to repair and install all types of Air-Conditioner within Muscat Governorate. 94301888.

PLUMBING, painting, tile fitting, interlock, all maintenance. GSM: 98937266, 96191837.

FOR SALE OR LEASE

A STORE which can be made into a two-storey building, has a 350 sqm area. Contact 97811111.

FOR SALE

INSTITUTION Licence contact 95595512.

WE supply quantities of excellent mountainous soil in Bausher (suitable for compaction and filling) 99242445, 99327939.

USED vehicles for sale on as-is-where-is basis. Further we have scrapped steel, cables, etc for sale. These can be inspected at NTS Camp in Ghala. Interested parties may contact on 99259157/ 93677827. Sealed offers with item-wise quote should be submitted on or before 14 December 2020 with security deposit.

A SHOWROOM in Al Qurum in strategic location with extravagant interior design on 280 sqm is offered for sale at RO 25,000. 92470024.

DIESEL Tanker, 1,600 gallon Volvo, 1987. 92836774

Lands for Investment

Investors or investor partners are sought to invest in commercial, agriculture, industrial lands, existing factories, stores, farms, residential buildings and showrooms.

Abu Talal
91370519



URGENTLY REQUIRED

A leading Trading Healthcare Organisation operating in 13 countries in the Middle East and North Africa Region requires:-

1. **PHARMACY GRADUATE** - with License from MOH with 2 - 3 years experience in Drugstore.
2. **SALES REPRESENTATIVE** with 2 - 3 years experience in the Sale of Medical Devices.

Location: Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Omani Nationals, with good English communication skills and knowledge of MS Office software.

Please send your application to:
Email to careers@amicogroup.com

RHC
مرکز الرسيل الصحي
RUSAYL HEALTH CENTER

COVID - 19RT - PCR test
(Muscat region) Will be provided at 20.000 OR Within 6 to 8hrs

مختبرات لفحص فيروس كورونا
(محافظة مسقط) سعر الفحص 20.000 ريال عماني في غضون من 6 الى 8 ساعات

WORKING DAYS : 7 DAYS IN A WEEK
أيام العمل : 7 أيام في الأسبوع

الموقع : مدخل الرسيل بجانب مبنى طبية
Taiba building - AlRusayl Industrial Estate

للتواصل والاستفسار :
Communication and Enquiries
+968 95830239
+968 94429896
+968 24162332

features



Challenging societal issues through art

Sparking discussions on topics considered to be 'taboo' and controversial, 18-year-old Omani artist and screenwriter Tanya Shamil is opening doors for people of our society to become more empathetic and accepting of one another... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

CLIMATE CHANGE



CLIMATE CHANGE RAVAGES KASHMIR'S 'RED GOLD' SAFFRON CROP

On sweeping fields once blanketed in lush purple, a thin and bedraggled crop of flowers is all farmers in Indian-administered Kashmir's saffron-growing region Pampore have to show for this year's harvest. **Story on Page P20**

MARINE CONSERVATION



OMAN POST RAISES AWARENESS ON WHALE AND DOLPHIN CONSERVATION

Raising awareness about the Sultanate's precious marine life, Oman Post, an Asyad member company, has launched a new series of stamps, Whales and Dolphins of Oman... **Story on Page 19**

READ



ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is an 1865 novel by English author Lewis Carroll. It tells of a young girl named Alice, who falls through a rabbit hole into a subterranean fantasy world populated by peculiar, anthropomorphic creatures.

SPECIES



WORLD'S UGLIEST ORCHID' AMONG NEW SPECIES NAMED IN 2020

Orchids are not often called ugly, but that is how the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, London, described a new species of the normally vibrant and delicate flower discovered in the forests of Madagascar.... **Story on Page 19**

COVID-19



LEADERS INFECTED

Macron on Thursday became the latest world leader to test positive for COVID-19. He will self isolate for the next week, and "will continue to work and carry out his activities remotely," his office said in a statement.

Tanya Shamil: Challenging societal issues through art

BY MOUJ HIJAZI

Sparking discussions on topics considered to be 'taboo' and controversial, 18-year-old Omani artist and screenwriter Tanya Shamil is opening doors for people of our society to become more empathetic and accepting of one another.

Tanya began her Instagram account called 'The Gluten Club' as a random art account back in 2017. As her ideas developed, she began creating art that conveyed different societal issues in the style of pop art.

"It wasn't much of a conscious decision, I just happened to be interested in things that were happening and I wanted to respond to that," said Tanya.

In her art, she explores themes such as inequality, mental health, women in the Middle East, and much more. These subjects are generally not discussed publicly in our community and considered contentious. Naturally, Tanya felt some reluctance about addressing them in her work.

"The thing with sharing art is that once you put it out into the world, it's going to be interpreted in thousands of different ways, sometimes people will perceive it in a way you intended, and sometimes it's taken way out of context," said Tanya.

"The only thing I could do about it is to remind myself of my intentions and purpose; which is to trigger important conversations and hopefully change people's approach on taboo issues."

The goal behind Tanya's artwork is to open the minds of our people and encourage them to view matters from a different perspective. The power of art and its ability to do so should not be underestimated.

"I strongly believe that if everyone saw an art piece or a movie that reflects each other's life, we would be more understanding of one another," shared Tanya.

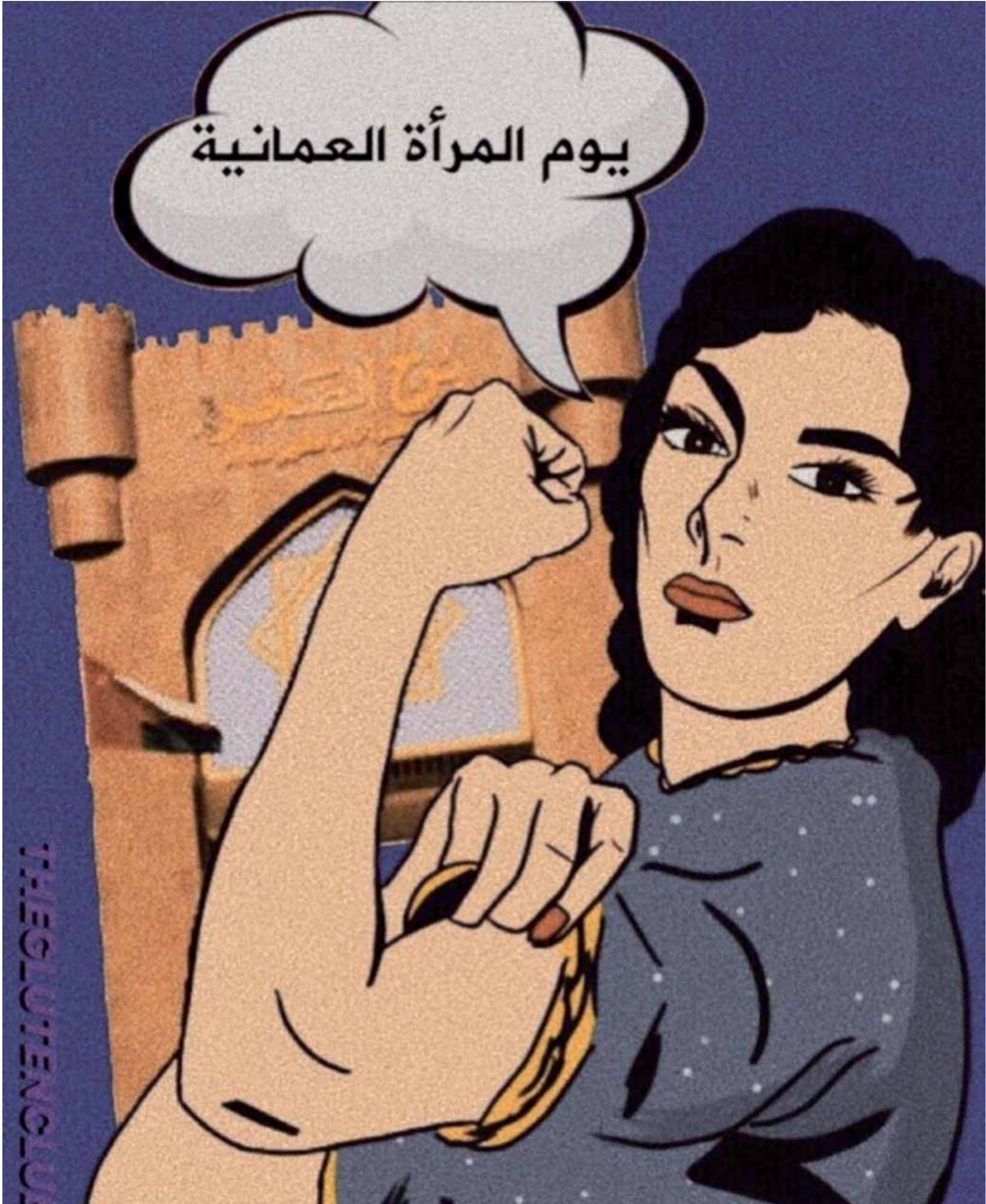
She expressed that each piece of her art has its own purpose and goal. "Sometimes it's to start a conversation, sometimes to question things that confuse me, or even to make fun of patriarchal ideals."

Tanya pointed out that she purposely does not post very often on The Gluten Club, with the intention of allowing the audience to mull over and absorb her viewpoints.

"The account isn't there to mass-produce and constantly shove new ideas down people's throats, but rather to create an impact through the rumination of those ideas."

In terms of the public's reactions to her work, Tanya has received a mixture of positive and negative comments, which was expected.

"I've gotten a lot of support and encouraging messages



from people telling me that they feel seen, or talk to me about their experience and what they've been through,"

Tanya shared that her favourite piece that she's done is one where an Arab man is questioning "where's the Hijab?" in the style of a comic panel. It conveys the patriarchy and hypocrisy that exists within our society in a simple, yet humorous manner.

"There are some reactions that don't agree with the content of my art, but then again you need two perspectives to have a conversation," Tanya

remarked.

She commented that she doesn't make judgements personally, however she does take into account constructive criticisms regarding how she should bring forward issues in the future.

Tanya expanded her capabilities and began exploring screenwriting after she was inspired by the screenplay of the movie 'Birdman' and realised it was something attainable.

"Watching films allowed me to open up to different perspectives, cultures, and knowledge. That being said; it

made me realise that I've never seen myself truly reflected on screen in terms of identity or experience," Tanya mentioned.

Irritated with the extremist and/or oppressed ways Hollywood perceives and depicts the Middle East, Tanya wanted to take matters into her own hands to create stories reflecting our region.

"I'm tired of seeing superficial characters. I want to explore who we are instead of what we are."

To keep up with Tanya, follow @theglutenclub on Instagram.



find us on
TWITTER
Scan the QR Code or follow us on
www.twitter.com/omanobserver

OMANDAILYOBSERVER
WEDNESDAY | DECEMBER 23 | 2020

19

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



sachinorthodoc16 • Follow
Salalah, Oman



etapon • Follow
Sultan's Armed Forces Museum



abhic281 • Follow
Mirbat



SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select three photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.



MARINE CONSERVATION

Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.om

Oman post raises awareness on whale and dolphin conservation



Raising awareness about the Sultanate's precious marine life, Oman Post, an Asyad member company, has launched a new series of stamps, Whales and Dolphins of Oman. Created in coordination with the Environment Society of Oman (ESO), the set of stamps depict five of the endemic and endangered cetaceans that swim in the coastal waters, namely the Arabian Sea Humpback Whale, Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin, Northern Indian Ocean Blue Whale, Spinner Dolphin, and Indo Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin. Philatelists and wildlife enthusiasts alike can enjoy the stamps' special issue, and their associated first day covers, souvenir sheets, and postcards.

The seas of the Sultanate of Oman occupy an isolated corner of the Indian Ocean, where some of the world's most varied and biologically productive waters are found. ESO estimates there are around 20 different

species of cetaceans, which includes whales, dolphins, and porpoises, some of which are critically endangered. The biggest threats to their populations include entanglement in fishing gear, noise pollution, risk of ship strikes and habitat loss as a result of increasing development.

"We wanted to showcase some of the amazing and unique marine life that call Oman's waters home. Our marine environment is one of the things that makes Oman a must-visit destination, but this can only be the case if it continues to

be protected. We are glad to be supporting the Environment Society of Oman in their conservation efforts, and our stamps serve as a reminder that we all need to do our part to collectively work towards the goal of saving these beautiful creatures," said Rami Al Lawati, Manager Stamps & Philatelic at Oman Post. "We hope that philatelists and wildlife lovers will enjoy the stamps and be reminded of the importance of securing Oman's whale and dolphin populations for the future."

ESO has been active in its

conservation efforts which focus on improving the numbers of cetaceans through scientific research, better defining distribution, identifying, assessing and helping mitigate threats through conservation management recommendations and action, and enhancing environmental education in Oman.

Suaad al Harthi, Executive Director at the Environment Society of Oman, added, "We are grateful to Oman Post for its support to this cause and for highlighting the importance of preserving the Sultanate's natural heritage. Raising awareness on the unique whale and dolphin species that exist in Oman's waters will help us gain more support for conservation initiatives from a wider audience. Recognising the species that exist in Oman and the threats that they face helps us to prioritize the needs of the environment and remain diligent stewards of Oman's biodiversity."

World's ugliest orchid' among new species named in 2020



Orchids are not often called ugly, but that is how the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, London, described a new species of the normally vibrant and delicate flower discovered in the forests of Madagascar. *Gastrodia agnicellus*, one of 156 plants and fungal species named by Kew scientists and their partners around the world in 2020, has been crowned "the ugliest orchid in the world".

"The 11 mm flowers of this orchid are small, brown and rather ugly," Kew said in its list of the top 10 discoveries of the year. The orchid depends on fungi for nutrition and has no leaves or any other photosynthetic tissue. Although assessed as a threatened species, the plants have some protection because they are located in a national park. Among the other discoveries officially named this year were six new species of webcap toadstool mushrooms in the United Kingdom and a strange shrub encountered in southern Namibia in 2010. Botanist Wessel Swanepoel could not place the shrub in any known genus and

neither could anyone else, and so Swanepoel called Kew's molecular expert Felix Forest and his team for analysis. The result was that it was not just a new species, but a new genus and a new family called Tiganophyton karasense.

While around 2,000 plants are named new to science annually, new families are only published around once a year. The shrub has bizarre scaly leaves and grows in extremely hot natural salt pans, hence its name Tiganophyton, derived from the Greek 'Tigani', or 'frying pan', and 'Phyton', or 'plant'. Martin Cheek, senior research leader at Kew, welcomed the latest natural discoveries. "Some could provide vital income to communities while others may have the potential to be developed into a future food or medicine," he said. But he warned: "The bleak reality facing us cannot be underplayed. With two in five plants threatened with extinction, it is a race against time to find, identify, name, and conserve plants before they disappear." — Reuters



CLIMATE CHANGE RAVAGES KASHMIR'S 'RED GOLD'

SAFFRON CROP



On sweeping fields once blanketed in lush purple, a thin and bedraggled crop of flowers is all farmers in Kashmir's saffron-growing region Pampore have to show for this year's harvest.

Dry conditions blamed on climate change have seen yields of the world's most expensive spice halved in the past two decades, threatening the future of a cash crop that has brought wealth to the region for 2,500 years.

"These fields used to be like goldmines," said Abdul Ahad Mir in Pampore, just south of Kashmir's main city Srinagar.

Saffron has long

thrived there, and Mir's family was reared in the delicate work of plucking the lucrative but tiny crimson threads from purple crocus flowers.

"In my childhood we needed 80 men over a week to pick the flowers," Mir said.

"Today our family of six finish it in a day."

Warming temperatures caused by climate change have made rainfall erratic, depleting the thirsty saffron fields of water. Shrinking glaciers across the Himalayan region have also cut water flows to the foothills downstream.

It takes around 160,000 flowers to yield one

kilogram of the precious spice, which will sell for around \$1,350 in local markets.

But official figures show that harvests of the so-called "red gold" were just 1.4 kilogrammes per hectare in 2018 — half the figure recorded in 1998.

Mohammad Ramzan Rather says his acreage in Pampore only produced around 30 grams of the crop this year, down from two kilogrammes 12 years ago.

The harvest season — which lasts for just two weeks at the end of autumn — has also been devastated by the coronavirus pandemic, as

well as recent security lockdowns in response to a long-running insurgency.

ANCIENT PRIDE

Historians say saffron has been cultivated in Kashmir since at least 500 BC.

Locally the spice is added to traditional dishes and used as an ingredient in Kehwa, a sweet drink served during special occasions such as marriages.

Elsewhere in the world, it is prized for its use in cooking and cosmetics and can fetch prices of more than \$10,000 per kilogram on the international market.

Nearly 90 per cent of the world's saffron is grown in Iran, but experts consider Kashmir's crop to be superior for its deep red colour and distinct aroma.

In 2010, Indian authorities sought to halt the impact of climate change by launching a \$54 million fund to introduce modern agricultural technology to farmers.

Authorities have touted it as a success, claiming it has rejuvenated Kashmir's 3,700 acres of saffron fields.

But farmers disagree. They have ripped up plastic irrigation pipes that are now strewn

across fields, saying they bring little water and make it harder to till the land.

Others say high-yield seed varieties introduced under the scheme have ruined their crops.

Jalal-ud-Din Wani said some farmers were turning their land into orchards because apples need less water.

Though he said the government's intervention had failed, Wani believes that the luck of some farmers may improve.

If they stick to traditional methods of farming the crop, he said, "there is still a sliver of chance to revive it."

— AFP