

Royal Opera House reopens for public today

The Royal Opera House Muscat will reopen its doors to the public from today. Visitors can once again enjoy the magnificent opera house building and experience the inspiration of this splendid institution through special guided tours. The Royal Opera House Muscat has prioritised the health and well-being of visitors and staff, with a strategic approach to safeguarding these in every part of the building following guidance from the COVID-19 Supreme Committee. **SEE ALSO P5**



P10

ROONEY ENDS PLAYING CAREER TO BECOME FULL-TIME DERBY BOSS



P15

US RETAIL SALES FALL WHILE MANUFACTURING SHINES



P19

ROBOTS ARE THE 'HEROES' IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



MUSCAT

HM CONDOLENCES TO INDONESIA PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of condolences to President Joko Widodo of Indonesia on the victims of the earthquake that struck Indonesia's Sulawesi island. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincerest condolences and sympathy to President Widodo, the friendly Indonesian people and the victims' families wishing the injured speedy recovery. — ONA

RIYADH

SAUDI EMBASSY SET TO REOPEN IN QATAR

Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan said Riyadh will reopen its embassy in Qatar as part of a deal to normalise ties with its neighbour and end a three-year rift. The kingdom will restore full diplomatic ties with Qatar as part of the deal struck earlier this month, and the Saudi Embassy in Doha will reopen within days, the foreign minister said. He added, in remarks broadcast on official Al Ekhbariyah television, that any delay is only due to logistics.

Now get news on the go



INSIDE



INDIA BEGINS WORLD'S BIGGEST VACCINATION DRIVE

P7



ARMIN LASCHET: MODERATE AND MERKEL LOYALIST

P9

TARGET GROUPS TO GET SECOND DOSE OF VACCINE

NO APPROVAL TO VACCINATE CHILDREN UNDER 16

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine will be administered to the target groups from Sunday, said the Ministry of Health.

"In line with the schedule for the implementation of the national campaign for immunisation against COVID-19, the second dose of the vaccine targeting the same target groups receiving the

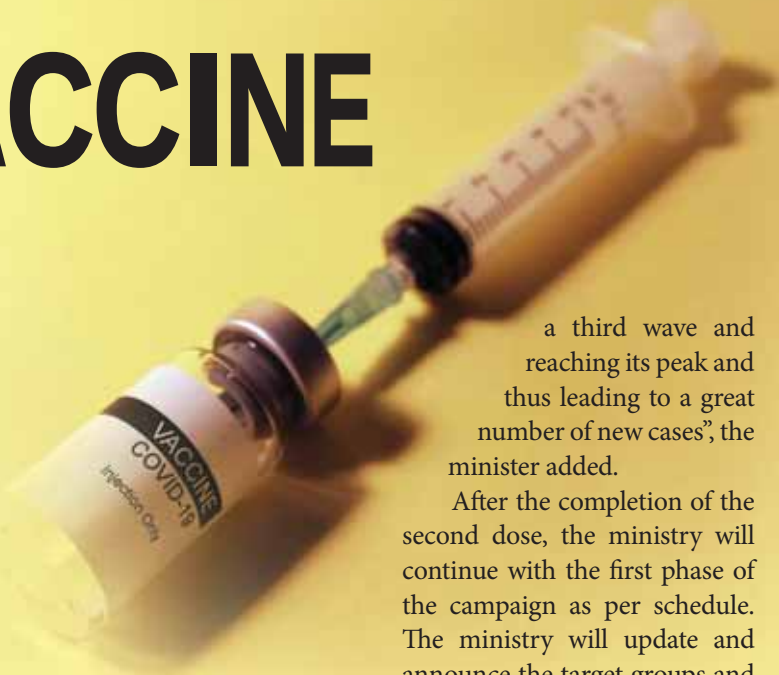
first dose in the past weeks, is scheduled to begin on Sunday. The first dose of the vaccine was administered to 24,204 people as of January 15."

The first phase witnessed a good turnout by the target groups, achieving the desired coverage as planned. That was the result of the significant efforts made by stakeholders at the central level and in various governorates to overcome challenges at the level of

planning and implementation on the field.

Speaking at a press conference on Thursday, the Minister of Health said: "Though Pfizer vaccine poses logistical challenges including storage, Oman has the capability to maintain it and eventually distribute it to various governorates."

He added, "I have received the first dose of the vaccine and have not experienced any side



a third wave and reaching its peak and thus leading to a great number of new cases", the minister added.

After the completion of the second dose, the ministry will continue with the first phase of the campaign as per schedule. The ministry will update and announce the target groups and the timetable for vaccination through the media channels.

TURN TO P5

Palestinians to elect new president

RAMALLAH: Palestinian voters will go to the polls at the end of July to elect a new president for the first time in 15 years. The voting date was set for July 31, according to a decree signed by incumbent President Mahmud Abbas on Friday evening. A parliamentary election was also scheduled for May 22.

Voters in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem will be eligible to participate.

Elections were planned several times in the past few years



Hanna Nasir, head of the Palestinian Central Election Commission, during a press conference in the West Bank city of Ramallah, on Saturday. — AFP

— but no presidential decree was ever signed.

A vote was last planned for around the end of 2019, when Abbas made it dependent on Israel's permission to hold it in East Jerusalem. Permission was never given. Palestine last held a presidential election in 2005, with the previous parliamentary election occurring in 2006.

A veteran West Bank analyst Hani al Masri was sceptical that the elections would happen.

DETAILS ON P6

Forgetful of reusable bags? Get a pinch at checkouts!

SAMUEL KUTTY
@samkuttyvp

Most consumers in Oman are still struggling to embrace the single use plastic bag ban in retail shops, as they are buying more bags after forgetting their reusable ones at home.

"Shoppers are frustrated and still struggling to change old habits of reaching hands free to the marketplace", said Mohammed Elias, a sales manager at a leading

hypermarket.

As shoppers continue buying new bags every time they walk into the shops, they will now have dozens of reusable bags stored in their kitchen, he said.

While some of the retailers are offering smaller and flimsier bags free of cost, shoppers have to fork out an extra at most shops. The cost depends on the size of the bags, which are available in different colours and designs.

Bharat Patel, salesperson at another supermarket in Muscat, said that many shoppers come prepared with more than one bag depending on their shopping volume.

"Older shoppers, especially those with families, have been the most supportive of the ban. Most of them bring their bags", he said, adding, "youngsters were initially outraged by the ban".

TURN TO P5

FIRST ARAB WOMAN TO REACH MOUNT AMA DABLAM



Oman's Nadhira al Harthy has become the first Arab woman to reach the summit of Mount Ama Dablam (6,812 metres), which is one of the highest Himalayan peaks located in Nepal. The winter ascent to Ama Dablam consisted of at least 14 climbers which is the first Arabian group ever to climb Mt Ama Dablam in winter. **DETAILS ON P2**



صندوق عمان العقاري
OMAN REIT FUND
(Under Formation)

Subscriptions starts from Today!

Don't miss your Opportunity!

Subscribe Now in Oman REIT Fund (Under Formation)

Biggest Real Estate Investment Fund in Oman with 7% and above annual yield distributed on quarterly basis.

Offer Value 102 Bz per unit

Subscription open from 17 Jan 2021 to 31 Jan 2021

Subscription open to all nationalities

For more details & risk factors please refer to prospectus

CONTACT: 24763300 / 24763337
ayman@usoman.com

Investment Manager
شركة إدارة صناديق الاستثمار في عمان
Shamookh Fund Management LLC

Issue Manager
المتحدة للأوراق المالية
UNITED SECURITIES

Collecting Banks/Agents:
Bank Muscat SAOG
Oman Arab Bank SAOC
National Bank of Oman SAOG

Bank Dhofar SAOG
Ubhar Capital
United Securities
Global Financial Securities

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 25°C Min 15°C SALALAH: Max 29°C Min 21°C NIZWA: Max 28°C Min 10°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:51 FAJR: 05:32 DHUHR: 12:22 ASR: 15:27 MAGHRIB: 17:48 ISHA: 19:02



Nadhira al Harthy first Arab woman to summit Mount Ama Dablam

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Oman's Nadhira al Harthy has become the first Arab woman to reach the summit of Mount Ama Dablam (6,812 metres), which is one of the highest Himalayan peaks in the hilly country of Nepal.

"A team from seven summit treks 'First Arab Ama Dablam Expedition' comprising Qatari climber Fahad Badar, Sherief Elabd from Egypt and Nadhira al Harthy from Oman have attempted Mt Ama Dablam (6,812 m) on January 14," reported the thehimalayantimes.com.

The winter ascent to Ama Dablam consisted of at least 14

climbers which is the first Arabian group ever to climb Mt Ama Dablam in winter, the report said.

Nadhira earlier said that as part of her preparations to climb Mount Everest, "I had to go experience several situations similar to that goal and I searched for what qualifies me for Everest. I chose to climb mount Ama Dablam because it is one of the most difficult mountains to climb in many ways."

Thanking everyone for sharing her story, she said, "The night was very difficult due to the cold and wind, but I achieved a new Omani and Arab achievement."

"We may not lack anything from the necessities of daily life

now during our stay in Mount Amadiplum camp, but you feel at the same time that nothing is complete, neither the taste of water, nor sleep, movement, nor reading makes you feel comfortable or at ease. Emotions are conflicting in one day, between preparation and waiting," She said sharing her journey experience.

To start the journey to Ama Dablam, Nadhira reached Lukla, which has one of the most dangerous airports in the world that is located between the mountains and the length of the runway does not exceed 727 metres. In May 2019, Nadhira became the first Omani woman and the second Omani to climb Mount Everest.

Agro-climatic regions set ground for Oman's rich biodiversity

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Oman's diverse agro-climatic regions have set an impressive ground for the country's rich biodiversity for food and agriculture. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has dwelt upon Oman's well-perceived plan to protect the country's biodiversity that forms the basis for the long-term national economic plan in terms of diversification of the agricultural production and sustainable utilisation of existing resources.

Among the livestock, the country has a wide diversity of animal breeds of sheep, goats, cattle, and camel, besides crop plants for food or feed purpose in addition to other human use.

Among the important crop plant species are field crops, vegetables, fruit trees, forest trees, and rangeland pasture species and a few aromatic and medicinal plant species "which are known to be grown in the Sultanate since time immemorial."

"Oman has not only several locally adapted breeds of both small and large ruminants besides poultry, but it has also diverse cultivars and landraces of crop species and unexplored wild relatives of some crop plants as well as wild foods in the forest areas which can be explored for use," the report said.

The FAO, however, has listed some challenges for the country's agricultural biodiversity. Soil quality, water salinity, drought, scarcity of irrigation water, and high grazing pressure by the increased number of livestock, are some major challenges listed in the FAO report.

"These factors are inevitably posing a serious threat to the



very survival of Omani indigenous species and cultivars in its rich biodiversity. A similar situation exists concerning aquaculture and fisheries. It is a challenge for the institutions of Oman to revert this trend through an integrated and balanced approach, which takes advantage of the expertise and capacity of all national stakeholders," the report said.

Being associated with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Oman holds good knowledge of the status and biodiversity trends. It has its national biodiversity strategy and action plan (NABSAP) since the 1990s.

The report hailed trends in many species and communities of biodiversity. "They are documented and monitored, and new research programmes have been initiated to fill key gaps by the relevant stakeholders especially on the topics of climate change, invasive species, wild crop relatives, marine environments and forest species for food."

However, the drivers of changes in Oman's biodiversity,

according to the FAO, are not clear to establish the components.

The major needs to improve optimum utilisation of the country's biodiversity have been found in the identification of the crops and their indigenous landraces and nature of utilisation such as finding indigenous landraces tolerant to witches broom in lime, dubas bug in date-palms, mango decline in mango and salinity in the field, vegetable and forage crops for sustainable development in agriculture. The report emphasised on taking steps to avoid duplication of activities in utilisation of plant genetic resources for food and agriculture among the stakeholders.

Among the needs, it is important to "increase capacity of the stakeholders in the field of biodiversity through academic and in-service training programmes, and collaboration with agricultural private sectors to develop a national project and plan of action for breeding and seed production of biodiversity," said the report.

زكاة

لجنة الزكاة بولاية السيب

وزارة الاوقاف والشؤون الدينية

ZAKAT AL-SEEB COMMITTEE

UNDER SUPERVISION OF MINISTRY OF ENDOWMENTS & RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

وزارة الاوقاف والشؤون الدينية

Ministry of Endowments & Religious Affairs

ZAKAT AL-SEEB COMMITTEE

AL-SEEB ENDOWMENT 1

THE FIRST ENDOWMENT FOR THE ZAKAT AL-SEEB COMMITTEE

DEDICATED FOR THE NEEDY AND UNDERPRIVILEGED PEOPLE

THE COLLECTED FUNDS ARE ALLOCATED FOR INSOLVENT FAMILIES AND VARIOUS CHARITIES PROJECTS

ABU HURAIRAH (MAY ALLAH BE PLEASED WITH HIM) REPORTED:

THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH (ﷺ) SAID, "WHEN A MAN DIES, HIS DEEDS COME TO AN END EXCEPT FOR THREE THINGS: SADAQAH JARIYAH (CEASELESS CHARITY); A KNOWLEDGE WHICH IS BENEFICIAL, OR A VIRTUOUS DESCENDANT WHO PRAYS FOR HIM (FOR THE DECEASED)."

THE ENDOWMENT AMOUNT: 600,000 OMR

NUMBER OF SHARES: 20000

PRICE PER SHARE: 30 OMR

We Accept Cash & In-Kind Donations

Contribute On Al-Meethaq Account:
0624500673530001
Zakat Seeb Waqf

لجنة الزكاة بولاية السيب

www.zakatseeb.net

zakatseeb@gmail.com

92475055 – 24265900

97538307 - 97545354

zakatseeb1

NATIONWIDE BLOOD DONATION CAMPAIGN BEGINS TODAY

MUSCAT: A nationwide blood donation campaign will begin on Sunday.

The campaign will be launched under the auspices of His Highness Sayyid Kamil bin Fahd al Said, Assistant Secretary-General for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers. It is aimed at encouraging young people to get involved in humanitarian activities and disseminating the culture of blood donation among various segments of society.

The blood donation campaign, organised by the Directorate-General of Specialized Medical Care (DGSMC) represented by the Department of Blood Banks Services, also aims to encourage members of the public to contribute towards providing safe blood to the health institutions, and to urge them to commit to blood donation all through the year to maintain adequate blood supply at the blood banks and achieve self-sufficiency in safe blood and blood products nationwide. — ONA

المجد لإدارة العقارات

AL MAJID PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

للبيع

عدد 31 قطعة أرض سكنية

وبمساحة إجمالية=19123م2

FOR SALE

INDIVIDUAL RESIDENTIAL PLOT

(Total plots=31nos. Total Area=19,123 Sqm)

92822040

97365922

97365897

enquiry@almajidproperty.com

Condolences

The National Bank of Oman's Board of Directors, Management and Staff extend their sincere condolences to

Mr. Mohammed Ismail Mandani Al Emadi,
Board Member

On the passing of his father,

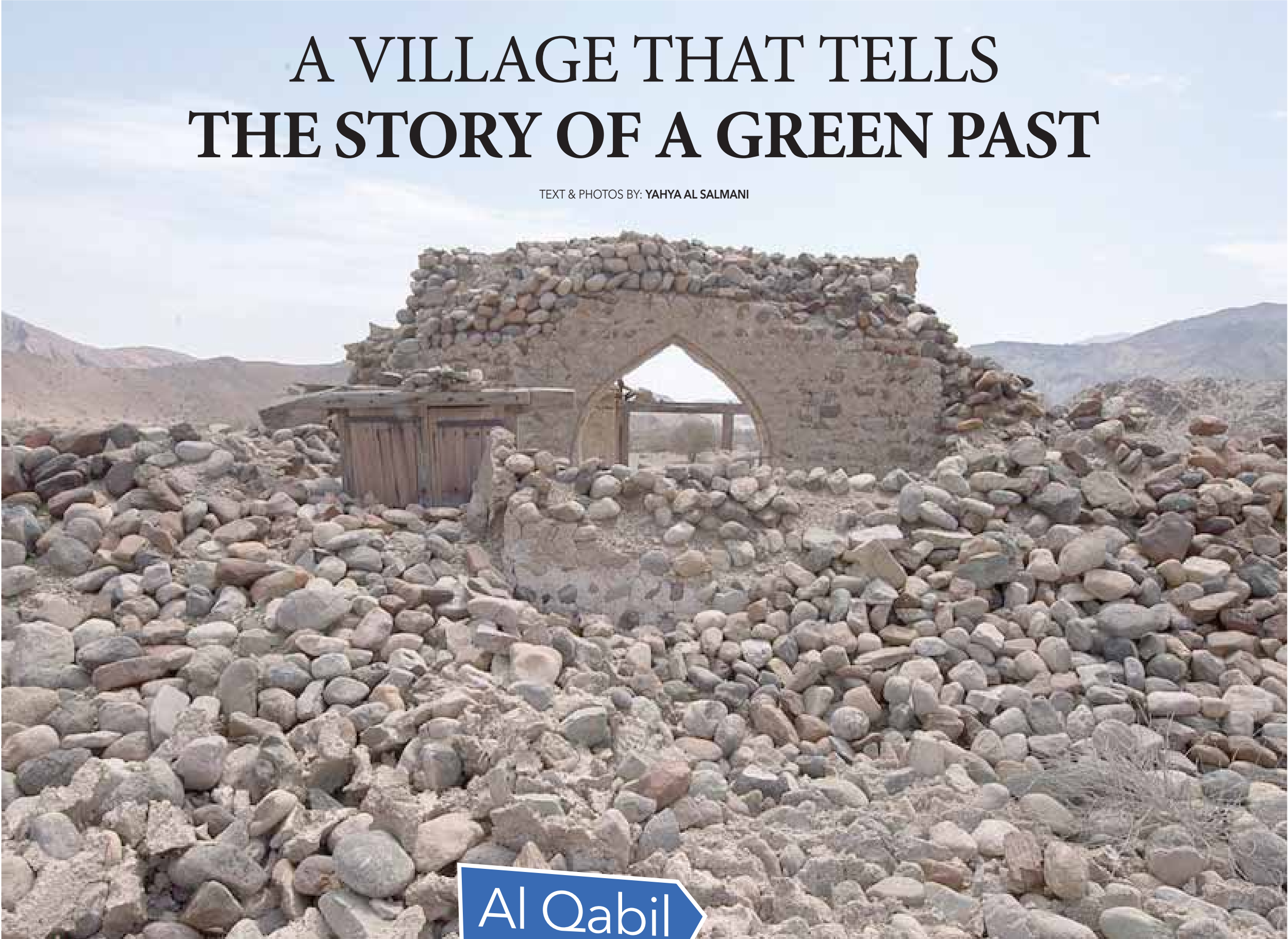
Ismail Mandani Al Emadi

May his soul rest in peace and give his family the strength to overcome such a profound and irreplaceable loss.

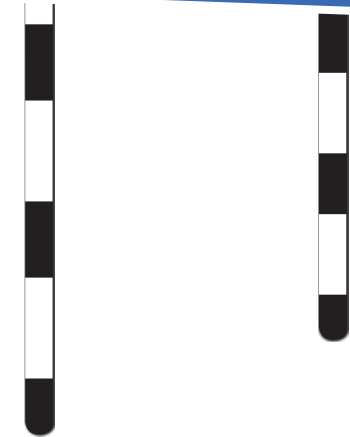
Inna Lillahi Wa Inna Ilayhi Raji'un

A VILLAGE THAT TELLS THE STORY OF A GREEN PAST

TEXT & PHOTOS BY: YAHYA AL SALMANI



Al Qabil



Al Qabil, one of the prominent historical and archaeological sites in Qurayat, is a small village located a few kilometres away from the road that connects the Wilayat of Al Amerat with Qurayat.

A long stone wall that surrounds this village contains several rooms, residential facilities and a mosque, all of which were built with stones and mud in a sophisticated architectural style.

A falaj, the traditional irrigation system found in different parts of the Sultanate, irrigates the fields of Al Qabil. This falaj has been surrounded by water basins and bridges built with stones.

Historical records indicate that this small village was an agricultural oasis lined with palm, mango, lemon and many other local trees. This agricultural oasis originated from Wadi al Sareen which supplied fresh water, especially during heavy rains.

Al Qabil village is currently in a state of drought, as its trees that were lush green decades ago do not exist now after its residents abandoned it. The buildings, their doors and windows, and also the falaj are now in ruins.



■ ROHM REOPENS TODAY



MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) will reopen its doors to the public starting from Sunday, January 17. Visitors can once again visit and enjoy the magnificent views of the opera house building and experience the charm of this splendid institution through special guided tours. The ROHM has given priority to the health and well-being of visitors and staff by taking all precautionary measures against the spread of the coronavirus. In every part of the building, arrangements have been made to follow the directives of the Supreme Committee on COVID-19. – **ONA**

■ FROM P1

Forgetful of reusable bags?

Hameed al Balushi, who came to shop at a hypermarket in Ruwi, said he supported the measure with a suggestion that there should be a better solution so that the cost of the bag is not passed on to consumers.

"It's a good policy, but retailers should do something to help customers as well. Before the ban, retailers were spending heavily on plastic bags which they needed in large quantities," he said.

MONITORING

Meanwhile, a statement from the Consumer Protection Authority said it will constantly monitor the market for discrepancies.

"We want to ensure that the prices of environmentally-friendly bags are not raised," the authority said in the statement.

George Elias, a marketing executive, said that shopping is a spontaneous act, "so you won't always have your own bags at hand. It's understandable that some shoppers are frustrated and still struggling to change old habits."

But he suggested, keeping a handful of bags in the car will help avoid spending on the same item again and again. "But if you're buying several bags a week, over the course of a year, those costs add up," he added.

Oman rolled out a ban on single use plastic bags in retailing businesses from the New Year day as part of the government initiative to contain environmental pollution.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion has already set standard specifications for the reusable shopping bags with a RO 1,000 fine for non-complying manufacturers.

According to the decision, reusable shopping bags made of polyethylene is a binding Omani standard specification.

The ministry also held meetings with manufacturers to ensure their readiness in the transitional period by finding suitable alternatives, and merchants and commercial centres were prepared to implement the ban.

Target groups to get second dose of vaccine

The Ministry of Health praised the efforts exerted and the societal response to the first phase of vaccination campaign against COVID-19, underscoring the importance of following up the vaccination process and the continuation of hard-work for the success of the campaign which, the ministry says, will be achieved only by raising public awareness about the importance of vaccination and enabling the targeted groups to access immunisation.

The Ministry of Health urged the public to ignore the rumours and to receive information only from the official sources.

OPTIONAL

There is no permission yet to vaccinate children under 16 years of age, pregnant and breastfeeding mothers. "We affirm that vaccination is not compulsory but rather optional," the Ministry of Health said.

India promises to meet Oman's COVID-19 vaccine requirements

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT: A meeting of the India-Oman Strategic Consultative Group (IOSCG) was held in New Delhi on Thursday.

The meeting expressed happiness that the Air Bubble arrangement between the two countries is functioning well. The Omani side expressed appreciation that India had facilitated food and medical supplies to Oman during the pandemic. India assured Oman of assistance in its requirement for COVID-19 vaccines.

Both sides expressed satisfaction that despite the COVID-19 pandemic both the countries have kept in close touch and sustained momentum in further consolidation of their strategic relationship. Secretary (CPV&OIA) thanked the Omani side for taking excellent care of the large Indian community in Oman during the pandemic.

The Indian delegation was led by Sanjay Bhattacharya, Secretary (CPV&OIA), MEA, while the Omani delegation was led by Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary for Diplomatic Affairs, Foreign Ministry. This was the first high-level official visit from Oman to India since the onset of COVID-19.

During the IOSCG meeting, both sides reviewed the entire spectrum of the India-Oman relationship including in political, energy, trade, investment, defence, security, space, mining, S&T, culture and consular fields.

It was agreed that the two sides



will pursue various agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) in these areas for a future-oriented relationship. They looked forward to trade and investment linkages regaining momentum once normalcy returns after COVID-19. They also discussed intensifying cooperation in the areas of health and food security. The two sides exchanged views on recent regional developments as well as global issues of mutual interest.

Dr S Jaishankar, Indian External Affairs Minister, also received Al Harthy and conveyed congratulations to the Omani side on the first anniversary of the reign of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. He reiterated the invitation from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to His Majesty for a visit to India. He also looked forward

to the continuous strengthening of the India-Oman strategic partnership in various fields.

"Oman is a strategic partner of India in the Gulf and an important interlocutor at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League and Indian Ocean Rim Association fora. Oman also accords high priority to its ties with India. The two countries across the Arabian Sea are linked by geography, history and culture, and enjoy warm and cordial relations.

"These are attributed to historical maritime trade contacts, close links of the royal family with India and the seminal role played by the Indian expatriate community in the building of Oman, which is acknowledged by the Omani Government," a press statement from India's Ministry of External Affairs said.

Bid to revive traditional games

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousuf

Efforts are underway to identify various cultural and traditional physical activities, customs and lifestyles so that the younger generation can learn and even practice the symbols of traditional activities.

A traditional sports activity called Almokabasah, which is on the verge of extinction, is being revived, thanks to the efforts of the authorities.

"We are aiming to present this historic sport form, Almokabasah, to the young generations as part of creating awareness about Omani culture and traditions," said Sayyed Salem Mohammed al Huraizy, President of Almokabasah Association.

Almokabasah is a traditional Omani wrestling similar to judo which was practiced mostly in South Oman, in the Governorate of Dhofar and especially the Wilayat of Salalah.

"We are reviving this old and pure Omani sport and as part of it, we have started training the enthusiasts about the Omani tradition, culture and sport. We will try to popularise the sport on the national level and



present outside of Oman," Risto Dimitrov, an Almokabasah virtuoso, who has been selected to be the special representative for the sport for the Muscat Governorate, told the *Observer*.

The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth will also be a part of it, according to the association.

"We have sent a word on this sporting activity, and national and international competitions are soon to be organised. Additionally, we are expecting

some Macedonian nationals to learn this form of sports," added Risto.

Almokabasah is also practiced in parts of eastern Yemen in Al Mahrah Governorate. In Oman, this form of sports began between the 18th and 19th centuries in the south of the Sultanate of Oman. In the past, there were a few and different means of entertainment and mostly is conducted between siblings and friends, each trying to drop

We have sent a word on this sporting activity, and national and international competitions are soon to be organised. Additionally, we are expecting some Macedonian nationals to learn this form of sports

RISTO DIMITROV

Almokabasah virtuoso

the other and grabbing the opponent from the waist belt, and puts him on to the ground and win.

"With the international participation and training programmes, Oman's tourism sector will be highly benefitted as we have several foreigners seeking to learn this with Macedonia at the forefront. This can be a live example of how such traditional forms of sports and games can support the tourism sector especially at a time like this," said Sayyed Salem.



Muscat Municipality
Announcement No. 1/2021

Specialized companies in the field of tender shown below and registered with **Tender Board**, may obtain tender documents from the website through the following link:
(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
against non-refundable fees until the end of deadline stipulated below.

Tender No.	E- Tender No.	Description of Tender	Tender Fee	Last date to collect the tender	Tender return date	Grade
PRE/20/111	(2020/MM/ QS/52) (Re Call)	Construction of Fountain at Quriyat Lake Park (E- Tender) (Re Call)	Rial 25	14/02/2021	25/02/2021	First

Tender Conditions:-

- Bidders shall submit their offers electronically accompanied with an electronic copy of bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat municipality. The bond shall be (1%) of the tender value valid for ninety (90) days starting from the date of bids submission. Any tenders which do not meet the required bond shall not be accepted.
- Tender Bonds shall be placed in the Tender Bond Box for E-Tendering in the Ground floor at Muscat Municipality Building, Ruwi, before 10:00 am as per the date Mentioned in the above table. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Tender being presented and no other marks.
- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please visit e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).
- For technical support of e-tendering system please send an email to (etenderhd@ta.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).

Iran to begin mass COVID-19 vaccinations in March

TEHRAN: Iran is to begin mass vaccinations against COVID-19 in March, President Hassan Rouhani said on Saturday.

"We will start with the vaccination before the end of the year", Rouhani said on state television, referring to the Persian new year, which is on March 20.

"Doctors and care workers have priority", Rouhani said, adding that vaccinations would then be gradually expanded.

Iran would use Iranian as well as foreign vaccines, especially the Pasteur jab, Rouhani said without giving further details. The Pasteur vaccine is said to be an Iranian-Cuban preparation.

Last week the Cuban Foreign Ministry said it would test its vaccine Soberana 02 together with Iran, which Iran confirmed.

Only few people have contracted the novel coronavirus in Cuba, making testing of a COVID-19 vaccine difficult, while Iran has already seen more than 1.3 million infections and more than 56,000 fatalities since the start of the pandemic.

Vaccinations against COVID-19 have become a point of contention in Iran.

Palestinians to elect new president

RAMALLAH: Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas on Friday announced dates for the first Palestinian elections in more than 15 years, setting legislative polls for May 22 and a July 31 presidential vote.

Abbas's Fatah party, which controls the Palestinian Authority based in the occupied West Bank, and the Hamas who hold power in Gaza, have for years expressed interest in taking Palestinians back to the polls.

The two main Palestinian factions was seen as a leading factor in stalling progress towards a new vote.

But Fatah and Hamas have lately been engaged in unity talks, reaching an agreement in principle in September to hold elections in 2021.

Hamas on Friday welcomed Abbas's announcement.

"In recent months, we have worked to overcome obstacles in order to reach this day", it said in a statement.

It added that it looked to "free elections in which voters can express themselves without pressure and without restrictions, in all fairness and transparency".

A statement on the official Palestinian Wafa news agency said Abbas has signed "a presidential



Hanna Nasir, head of the Palestinian Central Election Commission, gives a press conference in the West Bank city of Ramallah. — AFP

decree concerning elections", specifying the May and July dates.

"This announcement was eagerly awaited", Palestinian analyst Arif Jaffal, head of the Arab World Democracy and Electoral Monitor, said.

"It is a very important step", he said. The 2005 Palestinian presidential vote saw Abbas elected with 62 per cent support

to replace the late Yasser Arafat.

There has been no indication from Fatah as to whether the 85-year-old Abbas intends to seek re-election. A rare poll by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Research carried out last year said Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh would beat Abbas in a presidential election.

The statement from Abbas

said he expects polls will be held "in all governorates of Palestine, including east Jerusalem", which was annexed by Israel following the 1967 Six-Day War but is considered occupied territory.

Israel bans all Palestinian Authority activity in east Jerusalem, and there was no indication the Jewish state would

Fatah, Hamas have lately been engaged in unity talks, reaching an agreement in principle in September to hold elections in 2021

allow a Palestinian vote within the city. Israel's right-wing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who faces his own re-election contest in March, describes Jerusalem as Israel's "undivided capital".

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said his government "was ready to get things going to facilitate the electoral process, in total transparency, while waiting for pluralism".

Some 2.8 million Palestinians live in the West Bank, while the densely populated Gaza Strip is home to two million.

The last Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006 saw Hamas win an unexpected landslide.

The polls resulted in a brief unity government but it soon collapsed and in 2007, clashes erupted in the Gaza Strip between the two principal Palestinian factions, with Hamas ultimately seizing control of Gaza. — AFP

Lebanese parliament passes law to pave way for coronavirus vaccine deals

BEIRUT: Lebanon's parliament on Friday approved a law that paves the way for the government to sign deals for coronavirus vaccines as it battles a steep increase in infections.

Lebanon said in mid-December it was expecting to sign a deal for supplies of Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine and hoped to receive the first batch eight weeks after that.

But the country, now struggling with a severe spike in infections that has overwhelmed hospitals, hit a legal stumbling block that has so far prevented it from finalising the agreement.

The new law would give Pfizer-BioNTech, and other companies that provide vaccines to Lebanon, protection from any future liability claims for two years.

It includes a clause that points to the Lebanese health ministry as the only entity responsible for compensation.

Lebanon is under a three-week lockdown that ends on February 1



Lebanese Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri heads a legislative session at UNESCO Palace in Beirut. — Reuters

and a strict 24-hour curfew until January 25 after lax measures over the Christmas and New Year's holiday period led to a spike in cases.

Hamad Hasan, the country's caretaker health minister, has previously said the ministry had secured about 2 million doses

of Pfizer-BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine, to cover 20 per cent of Lebanese nationals, but the government has yet to announce a starting date for a national vaccination programme.

Hasan on Friday tweeted his thanks to the parliament for approving the law. He has been

hospitalised since Wednesday with coronavirus but is in stable condition and continuing to work from his hospital bed.

Apart from the anticipated Pfizer-BioNTech deal, Lebanon's President Michel Aoun approved on Friday the transfer of Lebanese £26.4 billion to COVAX to book 2.73 million vaccines, his official twitter account said.

The country had previously signed up for COVAX, the global scheme backed by the World Health Organization to provide vaccines to poorer countries.

As of Thursday, Lebanon had recorded 237,132 cases of coronavirus and 1,781 deaths since the start of the pandemic.

The latest spike in infections has hit the country hard as its medical system was already reeling from a severe financial crisis that led to supply shortages, and a port explosion in August that damaged major hospitals in Beirut. — Reuters

■ CYCLING AS A WAY OF EMPOWERMENT



Kurdish women take part in a cycling marathon for women in the northeastern Syrian town of Amuda in Hasakeh province. The marathon, under the slogan 'I want a bicycle,' was organised by activists who said it aims to encourage women to cycle and to empower them in society, as well as reduce environmental pollution in the region. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BRUSSELS

EU sanctions Syrian foreign affairs minister

Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister Faisal Mekdad's assets in the European Union have been frozen and he will no longer be able to travel to the bloc, after the EU Council decided to sanction him.

"The Council today decided to add Faisal Mekdad to the list of persons subject to EU restrictive measures on Syria, in light of his recent appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs", a press release said.

Mekdad was appointed foreign



minister when his predecessor Walid al Moallem died in November. Mekdad had served as a deputy foreign minister since 2006. — dpa

NEW YORK

UNSC approves new UN Libya mediator

The United Nations Security Council approved the appointment of veteran diplomat Jan Kubis as the UN Libya envoy, diplomats said, nearly a year after the last mediator stepped down. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had proposed that Kubis succeed Ghassan Salame, who quit the role in March last year due to stress. Salame's deputy Stephanie Williams has been acting Libya envoy.

Kubis, a former Slovakian



foreign minister, is currently the UN special coordinator for Lebanon. He has also served as the UN special envoy in Afghanistan and Iraq. — AFP

WASHINGTON

Trump fetes Morocco king, rallies behind claim

US President Donald Trump, bestowed a rare award on Morocco king as his administration rallied international support in a regional dispute.

Trump last month broke decades of precedent by recognising Morocco's full sovereignty over contested Western Sahara, with Morocco in turn saying it would normalise relations with the Jewish state.

The White House said it presented King Mohammed VI with the Legion of Merit, degree



of Chief Commander, five days before Trump's departure in a private ceremony in Washington in which Morocco's ambassador accepted. — AFP

In brief

■ ISLAMABAD



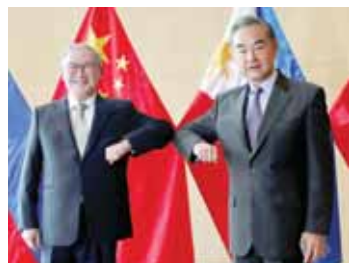
NEPALESE CLIMBERS MAKE HISTORY WITH FIRST CLIMB OF K2

A team of Nepalese climbers made history with an unprecedented winter climb of the world's second-highest peak, officials said.

"A team of 10 Nepalese sherpas have scaled the K2 this afternoon", the Secretary of the Alpine Club of Pakistan (ACP), Karrar Haidri said.

Haidri said the push to the winter summit had started at 1 am and the climbers conquered the K2 at 4.56 pm. The 8,611-metre-high K2, which has earned the nickname "savage mountain", lies in northern Pakistan near the border with China. — dpa

■ MANILA



PHILIPPINES, CHINA TO TIE UP FOR POST- PANDEMIC RECOVERY

Foreign ministers of China and the Philippines committed to prioritising post-pandemic recovery efforts as senior Chinese diplomat Wang Yi wrapped up a week-long visit to four Southeast Asian countries.

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte in March imposed one of the world's longest and strictest lockdowns to contain the virus, grounding to a halt what was one of Asia's fastest growing economies before the pandemic. "As a friend of the Philippines and your closest neighbour, we will firmly stand with the people of the Philippines until the defeat of this virus", Wang said in his opening remarks at a meeting with Manila's foreign minister.

■ KABUL



BOMBINGS, SHOOTINGS LEAVE 18 DEAD IN AFGHAN PROVINCES

A series of bombings and shootings in six Afghan provinces has left at least 18 dead, despite ongoing peace talks, officials said. In the capital Kabul on Saturday morning, two police officers were killed and another was wounded when a magnetic bomb attached to their vehicle went off, Kabul police said.

A car bomb also hit a spy agency facility in Daman district of southern Kandahar province, the Provincial Governor, Ruhullah Khanzada said.

Following the bombing, a group of assailants entered the facility and exchanged fire with the security forces, Khanzada said. — dpa

India begins COVID-19 vaccination drive

NEW DELHI: India on Saturday started inoculating health workers in what is expected to be the world's biggest coronavirus vaccination programme.

A sanitation worker at a government hospital in Delhi became the first person to receive a shot in the country of 1.3 billion people, shortly after Prime Minister Narendra Modi kicked off the year-long campaign with a nationally televised speech.

India plans to vaccinate 300 million people — nearly the size of the entire population of the United States — by the end of July.

"India is today launching the world's biggest vaccination programme. Never before has this type of vaccination and such a large-scale vaccination campaign been run in history... It shows the world our capability", Modi said in his address.

"These vaccines will help us decisively defeat COVID-19", Modi said, paying tribute to India's front-line workers and scientists.

An estimated 30 million doctors, nurses and other front-line workers will be the first to get the vaccination, followed by 270 million people aged over 50 or



A nurse prepares to administer a COVID-19 coronavirus vaccine to health workers at the KC General Hospital in Bangalore. — AFP

deemed high-risk.

India's drug regulator has given emergency authorisation to two vaccines: Covishield, developed by Britain's Oxford University and pharmaceutical firm AstraZeneca, and Covaxin, from Indian company Bharat Biotech.

At over 10.5 million infections, India has recorded the second-

highest number of COVID-19 infections in the world, after the US. India's coronavirus death toll stands at 151,918.

Some 300,000 health workers were to receive the shots on the first day of the vaccination drive, which federal Health Minister Harsh Vardhan said was "probably the beginning of the end" of

COVID-19.

The vaccination drive began at 3,006 sites; mostly state-run healthcare centres as well as government schools and municipal office being converted to temporary vaccination centres, with each site inoculating 100 people, government officials said. This number will be ramped up to



These vaccines will help us decisively defeat COVID-19

NARENDRA MODI

Prime Minister

over 5,000 sites as the programme progresses.

"There is relief as well as excitement. We are very lucky to get the vaccine, being part of the first line of defence against the virus", Anubhav Sharma, a doctor at Delhi's Lok Nayak Hospital, who received the jab, told broadcaster NDTV. "The past few months have been full of worry. We will be more confident in dealing with patients and provide even better care now."

Modi urged Indians not to believe "propaganda and rumours" about the safety of vaccines amid controversy over the locally produced Covaxin, which has been cleared for emergency use while still in clinical trials.

— dpa

■ PRECAUTIONS AGAINST CORONAVIRUS



People in protective suits spraying disinfectant on a street in Gaocheng district, which was declared a high-risk area for COVID-19 in Shijiazhuang, in northern China's Hebei province. — AFP

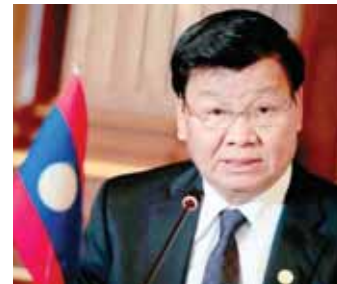
Laos Communist Party names PM Thongloun as new leader

VIENTIANE: The Communist Party of Laos on Friday named Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith as its new secretary-general, replacing retiring chief Bounnhang Vorachit, state media reported as the long-ruling party wrapped up its three-day congress.

Thongloun, 75, was elected to a five-year term as head of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party Central Committee — the top post in the country.

Its party congress also chose 13 members of the Politburo, Laos' top political body, and 71 party Central Committee members, it said.

Thongloun takes charge as the landlocked Southeast Asian country faces challenges from a potential debt default



Laos' Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith

and the global impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on its fragile, \$18 billion economy.

On Thursday, Thongloun outlined a new five-year socio-economic plan targeting annual economic growth of 4 per cent up to 2025 and aims to reach annual average per capita income of \$2,887 in 2025, the *Vientiane Times* said. — Reuters

Hunt for buried survivors after Indonesia quake

MAMUJU, Indonesia: Rescuers scrambled to find buried survivors on Saturday after a powerful earthquake on Indonesia's Sulawesi island killed dozens, injured hundreds and left more feared trapped in the rubble of collapsed buildings, as monsoon rains lashed the disaster-struck region.

At least 46 people died after the 6.2-magnitude quake struck in the early hours of Friday, triggering panic among residents of the island, which was hit by a 2018 quake-tsunami disaster that killed thousands.

Body bags were filled with corpses hauled from beneath crumpled buildings in Mamuju, a city of 110,000 people in West Sulawesi province, where a hospital was flattened and a shopping mall lay in ruins.

Others were killed south of the city. Grieving relatives began burying the dead on Saturday and

it remained unclear how many more victims could still be under mounds of twisted metal and chunks of concrete strewn across the seaside community.

Planes and boats packed with food and other emergency supplies flowed in, as the navy reportedly sent a ship equipped with mobile medical services to take pressure off Mamuju's still-standing hospitals, which have been flooded with hundreds of injured.

Rescuers said a shortage of heavy equipment was slowing the search effort.

Thousands left homeless by the quake took to makeshift shelters — many little more than tarpaulin-covered tents filled with families — that were lashed by heavy downpours.

"We're running out of food. There hasn't been any aid from the government yet", 24-year-old survivor Desti said from hard-hit



Rescuers move the body of a victim that was trapped in a collapsed building in Mamuju a day after a 6.2-magnitude earthquake rocked Indonesia's Sulawesi island. — AFP

Majene.

"Some people are using coconut leaves as mats", she added.

Many survivors are unable to return to their destroyed homes, or too scared to go back fearing more quakes or a tsunami. Worried about an outbreak of COVID-19

in the crowded camps, authorities said they are trying to separate high and lower-risk groups.

Mamuju resident Ice said he and his family were buried under rubble when they heard the voices of children searching for those still alive.

"They were shouting 'Who's alive?' and after hearing that I said 'Yes, I'm alive' and then me and my family were able to crawl out from under the rubble", said the man, who sustained a broken arm.

James, a construction supply seller taking refuge at a bus depot, said he leapt from the second storey of his home just before the violent tremor flattened the building.

"After shaking a few times, the house collapsed", he said, adding that his parents and sister also managed to escape.

A pair of young sisters plucked from under the mass of concrete and other debris were treated in hospital.

But the news was more grim for many, as eight corpses were plucked from under a collapsed hospital, while five members of a family of eight were found dead in the crumpled remains of their home. — AFP



Ugandan riot police are seen on a pickup truck near the house of the presidential candidate and singer Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu in Magere neighbourhood of Kampala. – Reuters

Uganda’s Museveni extends rule with disputed win

KAMPALA: Uganda’s Yoweri Museveni has won a sixth term in office with almost 60 per cent of votes, in an election his main rival Bobi Wine has said was marred by fraud and violence, the electoral commission announced on Saturday.

The veteran leader, who took power in 1986, is one of Africa’s longest serving presidents, and faced a stiff battle from the 38-year-old former ragga singer whose turn to politics fired up the youthful population.

Wine was under heavy guard at his home on the outskirts of Kampala as results were announced, with his party saying he was under “effective house arrest”, while the government said it was merely providing him with security.

The singer-turned-MP was among 10 opposition candidates and came second with 34.8 per cent of the votes, behind Museveni with 58.6 per cent.

“The electoral commission declares Yoweri Museveni... elected President of the Republic of Uganda,” said election commission chairman Justice Simon Mugenyi Byabakama. He said turnout was 57.22 of almost 18 million registered voters. Byabakama urged the population to “remain calm and accept the outcome of these elections” while reminding those celebrating to be mindful of the COVID-19 pandemic. The election took place after one of the most violent campaigns in years, with harassment and arrests of the opposition, attacks on the media and the deaths of at least 54 people.

While the government said the vote went off peacefully, Wine alleged widespread fraud such as ballot box stuffing and said his party agents had in some places been beaten and chased away from polling stations. — **AFP**

Centrist Laschet picked to lead Merkel’s divided CDU party

BERLIN: Germany’s Christian Democrats elected Armin Laschet as chairman on Saturday, aiming to unify their divided party behind a centrist who they hope can succeed Angela Merkel as chancellor when she steps down after federal elections in September.

Laschet, premier of Germany’s most populous state and the self-styled Merkel continuity candidate, won a runoff ballot of party delegates against arch-conservative Friedrich Merz.

Merkel, Europe’s predominant politician and a consistent winner with German voters since taking office in 2005, has said she will not run for chancellor again, and since she stepped down as CDU leader in December 2018, the party has struggled to find a suitable successor.

North Rhine-Westphalia premier Laschet, who beat Merz by 521 votes to 466, said he would do everything he could to ensure the CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), could “stick together through this year.”

They could then work towards making sure that “the next chancellor in the federal elections will be from the (CDU/CSU) union,” he said in his victory speech.

Saturday’s digital election will be confirmed by a postal vote with legally binding results expected on January 22.

Merkel said last year that Laschet, 59, had “the tools” to run for chancellor, the closest she has come to endorsing anyone.

In his candidacy speech, Las-



North Rhine-Westphalia's State Premier and new leader of the CDU Armin Laschet on stage with delegates after his election on the second day of the party's 33rd congress held online because of the coronavirus pandemic in Berlin. – **AFP**

chet said the next leader’s task would be to earn trust for both himself and for the party and emphasised his ability to integrate all of its wings.

“I keep hearing that you also have to be able to polarise. I say: no, you don’t have to,” he told an empty conventional hall, from which the congress was livestreamed to delegates due to the pandemic.

“Woulda, coulda, shoulda’ is not politics. You have to master the tools of centrist politics, the ability to unite.”

But after his narrow run-off victory, Laschet must move swiftly to unite the party or risk eroding its support and leaving its in a weaker position to negotiate a coalition should it — as currently predicted — come first in September’s elections.

Laschet beats arch-conservative Merz in runoff and is on course to run as chancellor candidate in September

By tradition, the CDU chairman is usually — though not always — the chancellor candidate for the CDU and CSU, and the conservative bloc is on course to win September’s federal ballot.

However, polls show Markus Soeder, the CSU leader, is the conservative most favoured by voters. Some CDU lawmakers want dynamic Health Minister Jens Spahn to run for chancellor, though he backed Laschet for the party leadership.

Soeder was one of the first to

congratulate Laschet and said he was looking forward to working with him. “Together we will continue the Union’s success story,” he wrote on Twitter.

Soeder wants to give the new CDU leader time to win over voters and, with his help, unite the party — or else unravel.

He has called for the Union to decide on its chancellor candidate only after state elections in mid-March, leaving open the possibility he could run if Laschet stumbles.

Finance Minister Olaf Scholz from the Social Democrats (SPD), junior partner in Merkel’s ruling coalition, wished Laschet luck for “the big task.”

“This year will be a challenge for all of us,” Scholz, who is the SPD candidate for chancellor, said on Twitter. — **Reuters**

Global COVID-19 death toll passes two million

PARIS: The global death toll from COVID-19 passed two million on Friday, with the World Health Organization (WHO) urging mass vaccinations as the pandemic progresses at a record rate.

As of 1825 GMT on Friday, at least 2,000,066 people worldwide had been confirmed dead of the virus that first emerged in Wuhan, central China, in late 2019, according to an AFP tally.

The grim milestone came as US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer said shipments of its vaccines would slow for a period in late January — a blow to fledgling campaigns

to immunise people against the virus. The WHO on Friday called for a worldwide acceleration in vaccine rollouts — as well as a ramp-up in efforts to study the sequencing of the virus, to tackle troubling new strains emerging around the world.

“I want to see vaccination under way in every country in the next 100 days so that health workers and those at high risk are protected first,” Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a press conference in Geneva.

His call came as infections snowballed, with 724,000 new

cases recorded on average per day globally over the past week, according to AFP’s tally — a record 10 per cent increase on a week earlier.

While countries from Spain to Lebanon have announced record caseloads, the surge has been most marked in Latin America and the Caribbean, where confirmed cases leapt 26 per cent this week.

In Europe, which has suffered more than 650,000 coronavirus deaths, there are concerns that delays to the Pfizer jabs could further slow a vaccine rollout that has already faced heavy criticism. — **AFP**

■ SNOW-ICE ALERT IN PARIS



A view of the Eiffel Tower after a snowfall in Paris. 32 departments, including Paris and the entire Ile-de-France, are placed on snow-ice alert by Meteo-France. – **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

ROME

Carbon monoxide leak kills 5 at Italy care home

Five residents of a retirement home near the Italian capital Rome were found dead after a suspected carbon monoxide leak, police said.

“Unfortunately there are five dead, then there are also five other residents in a serious condition and two care workers, a total of seven people in hospital,” police said.

The morning team of carers at the home, some 30 kilometres south of Rome, raised the alarm after discovering 12 people



unconscious. The five surviving residents are being treated at a nearby hospital and the two care assistants have been transferred to a hospital in Rome. — **AFP**

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan approves AstraZeneca vaccine

AstraZeneca’s COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for emergency use in Pakistan, the health minister said, making it the first coronavirus vaccine to get the green light for use in the South Asian country. Pakistan, which is seeing rising numbers of coronavirus infections, said its vaccines would be procured from multiple sources.

“DRAP granted emergency use authorisation to AstraZeneca’s COVID vaccine,” Faisal Sultan, Health Minister, said.

Approval has been given to get



more than a million doses of Sinopharm’s vaccine from China, he said. “We are in the process to obtain Western origin and other vaccines both via bilateral purchase agreements as well as via the COV-AX facility,” he said. — **Reuters**

WASHINGTON

Biden nominates veteran diplomats for top posts

Democratic President-elect Joe Biden on Saturday nominated US foreign policy veteran Wendy Sherman, a key negotiator of the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, to be the No 2 official at the State Department.

Biden also nominated Victoria Nuland (pictured), a retired career foreign service officer who was the top US diplomat for Europe, Nato ambassador and State Department spokeswoman, to be Under Secretary for Political Affairs, effectively the



third-ranking US diplomat. Sherman, who has a masters degree in social work, was the State Department counsellor from 1997 to 2001, a period when she was also policy coordinator on North Korea. — **Reuters**

A giant opportunity for nationals...

The Sultanate Has Got Talent: A Giant Opportunity for Omani Leadership and Management.

I see it as a positive and significant development over recent months, and years that Omanis are assuming management of many premier organisations and institutions across the Sultanate.

Leadership and management are evolving to Omani nationals across a significant number of professions, bringing with them an opportunity to demonstrate a responsiveness to customer and client needs, an accountability to stakeholders, standards of performance and excellence within their professions, and responsibility to effective management and professional development of themselves and their staff.

Many organisations and institutions, not only in Oman, are not backwards in espousing who they are, what they do, using words like ‘Number One,’ ‘Best,’ ‘Service,’ and ‘Satisfaction,’ which regrettably, turn out to be little more than words. They are rarely subjected to the litmus tests of customer satisfaction because their opening times are wrongly posted, phone calls are badly answered or redirected, and responses to complaints are not audited. Service providers should test their services and responsiveness robustly, to know how effective they are. It may not be comfortable listening to know you and your team have not performed to your stated standards, but you need to



Ray Petersen
petersen_ray@hotmail.com

KNOW YOUR
WORKFORCE,
EVERY ONE OF
THEM, AND
MAKE CERTAIN
THEY KNOW
YOU!

know. Talk is cheap, and talking the talk is easy, walking the walk, not quite so.

Accountability to stakeholders includes government and ministry officials, shareholders, and you dare not forget the general population. With so much development taking place a significant amount of financial activity in all sectors, within the Sultanate, is reliant upon the national budget, the government purse, which is in effect the public purse. It stands paramount then that financial responsibility, accuracy and clarity remain at the forefront of all considerations.

It needs to be clearly understood that globally governments do not have to ‘make money,’ while the private sector does, and traditionally, that is why the latter has enjoyed less oversight, control, and monitoring. In return however, there is an implied responsibility to the national interest of a moral and ethical nature which is demonstrated in partnership longevity. This is the perfect, symbiotic relationship between the private sector and government, where both get what they need, and the society benefits. Greater fiscal responsibility in the national overview, and consequent associated savings will allow greater investment in the key social areas of healthcare, education, and social services.

Thirdly, we come to professional development, in both the government and private sectors of employment.

Executives and management must have the opportunity to stay current with, or ahead of their professions, and should be subject to scrutiny from within. Especially under COVID-19, accepted protocols have been picked up and shaken mercilessly. There is hardly a single environment where the ‘norms’ have not altered significantly. Change has come, so get with the programme and know the changes from the top down. Be the facilitator, the driver of innovation and change, be the change. The day those below you on the corporate ladder know more than you, your days are numbered!

Know your workforce, every one of them, and make certain they know you! Make sure you know their names, and something about each of them. Have an overview on hand that you can refresh yourself with every time you visit a department or office. It will pay off in the long run. Have lunch, or coffee with them and let them know that you know them. Praise and appreciate their work, not the fact that they ‘turn up’ to their job, and at the same time slip in the stiletto by knowing who arrives late or leaves early every day, takes long lunches, or spends too much time on their phones. What? You don’t know... Oh oh.

This is the time for Omani Leaders and Managers. It is their generation, their opportunity, their time to drink from the chalice, and prove themselves, not only to be, but to do. Are you ready?

ANSWERS SOUGHT

Was the US Capitol attack planned?

PAUL HANDLEY

Attackers in organised columns, a woman shouting instructions on a megaphone, and suspicious tours the day before: investigators are probing the possibility that the January 6 attack on the US Capitol was planned, with help from insiders.

Disturbing videos, photos and online communications point to potential conspiracy. In one video, more than a dozen men wearing assault force-type garb push up the Capitol steps in a line, cutting through the dense crowd towards the building’s doors.

In another, a woman in a pink hat gives directions via megaphone to others inside the building, telling them where to go. And several men, including two who made it inside the Senate chamber, carried zip ties that could be used to restrain hostages.

Some officials said many of the pro-Trump protesters who broke into the offices of top legislators like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi appeared to know how to navigate the maze-like Capitol.

“They knew where to go,” senior Democrat James Clyburn told CBS News. “Yes, somebody on the inside of those buildings were complicit in this.”

Prosecutors have arrested dozens so far and say more than 200 could be charged. But they have not used the words “conspiracy” or “plot” to describe the unprecedented assault on the US legislature.

They knew where to go. Yes, somebody on the inside of those buildings were complicit in this

JAMES CLYBURN
Senior Democrat

Michael Sherwin, the Washington federal prosecutor overseeing the investigation, said on Friday they see “breadcrumbs of organisation” including communications between those

inside the building and outside.

He said it was a “Tier 1 top priority” for law enforcement to determine if there was an “overarching command and control” and “organised teams” in the breach of the Capitol.

“This is going to take weeks if not months to find out the actual motivations of some of these groups,” he said.

But, he added, “There is no direct evidence at this point of kill-capture teams and assassinations,” he said.

Analysts say much of the activity on January 6 was chaotic, disorganised and more typical of a spontaneous riot.

But Representative Mikie Sherrill said on Wednesday that groups of Trump supporters had toured the Capitol for “reconnaissance” a day before the attack, calling the visits “suspicious.”

The visitors “could only have gained access to the Capitol Complex from a Member of Congress or a member of their staff,” the former Navy helicopter pilot and other lawmakers said in a letter to Capitol security.

“The ties between these groups inside the Capitol Complex and the attacks on the Capitol need to be investigated.”

Much focus is on one video. In it, several protesters inside a Capitol room are regrouping to figure out where to go after their initial success entering the building.

The woman with the bullhorn shouts from just outside through a broken window.

“Hey guys, I’ve been in the other room,” she says. “In the other room on the other side of this door right here where you are standing, there is a glass that somebody, if it’s broken, you can drop down into a room underneath it.” — AFP

EARLY FAVOURITE

Armin Laschet: Moderate and Merkel loyalist

FEMKE COLBORNE

Armin Laschet, the new head of Germany’s conservative CDU party, is a sworn European and defender of multiculturalism who has promised to continue the centrist course of Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The affable 59-year-old was elected as head of the CDU on Saturday, beating corporate lawyer Friedrich Merz and foreign affairs expert Norbert Roettgen.

The CDU chairman traditionally leads the party and its CSU Bavarian sister party to the polls, meaning Laschet is in with a fighting chance of becoming Germany’s next chancellor.

A soft-spoken political moderate with a reputation for pragmatism, Laschet is currently the leader of Germany’s most populous state of North Rhine-Westphalia.

He is a sworn Merkel loyalist who famously stuck by the chancellor in 2015, when Germany left its borders open to hundreds of thousands of migrants from Syria and other hotspots.

If anything, he is seen as even more pro-migration than Merkel, celebrating diversity as a economic and social boon to his state. During his campaign to head the CDU, he positioned himself as the Merkel continuity candidate, telling *Stern* magazine that “a break with Angela Merkel would send exactly the



German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Armin Laschet during a meeting to discuss the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Duesseldorf, Germany. – Reuters file photo

THE AFFABLE
59-YEAR-OLD WAS
ELECTED AS HEAD
OF THE CDU ON
SATURDAY

wrong signal”.

Laschet emerged as an early favourite when the race to head the party was thrown open last year after the surprise resignation of Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer.

But his path to the top was anything but smooth, with critics accusing him of flip-flopping and poor leadership over his handling of the pandemic

in North Rhine-Westphalia. In the spring, Laschet pushed aggressively for the loosening of restrictions to curb the spread of the virus — only to backtrack after a huge outbreak at a slaughterhouse. He also sparked a row when he appeared to blame eastern Europeans for importing new coronavirus cases to Germany.

— AFP

LONDON: Former Manchester United and England star Wayne Rooney ended his illustrious playing career on Friday to take up the job of managing Championship side Derby on a full-time basis.

Derby confirmed Rooney, 35, has agreed a permanent deal until 2023, having succeeded Phillip Cocu on an interim basis in November.

In accepting the manager's role, Derby said the iconic forward had "elected to call time on his illustrious playing career to fully focus on his job".

Rooney was in charge for nine matches as interim boss at Derby, winning three and drawing four.

"We are delighted to confirm the appointment of Wayne Rooney as our new manager", said Derby County Chief Executive Officer Stephen Pearce.

"Our recent upturn in results under Wayne was married together with some positive performances."

Rooney said he had been "blown away" by Derby's potential when he arrived at the club after a spell playing for DC United in the United States.

"To be given the opportunity to follow the likes of Brian Clough, Jim Smith, Frank Lampard and Phillip Cocu is such an honour", he said.

"And I can promise everyone involved in the club and all our fans, my staff and I will leave no stone unturned in achieving the potential I have witnessed over the last 12 months of this historic football club."

RECORD-BREAKER

Rooney, who captained Manchester United and England, hangs up his boots as the all-time leading goalscorer for

ROONEY
ENDS
PLAYING
CAREER
TO BECOME
FULL-TIME
DERBY BOSS

United and his country.

He is also the second-highest goalscorer in Premier League history — behind only Alan Shearer — with 208 goals. His retirement was instantly recognised by the England official Twitter account, which posted: "A #ThreeLions legend. Congratulations on a fantastic playing career, @WayneRooney! Wishing you all the best in management."

Manchester United tweeted: "A captain. A goalscorer. A Legend. And now a manager. Happy retirement, @WayneRooney — thank you for the memories."

Rooney made his debut for boyhood club Everton in 2002 and shot to prominence by scoring a sensational goal to beat then-champions Arsenal days before his 17th birthday.

After an impressive showing for England at Euro 2004 he was signed by Alex Ferguson for United in a £27 million (\$37 million) transfer.

"I think we have got the best young player this country has seen in the past 30 years", said Ferguson on the day he splashed out a then world-record fee for a teenager.

Rooney soon started paying that fee back, scoring a hat-trick on his debut in the Champions League against Fenerbahce.

A potent combination of poise and power made Rooney a lethal goal threat before he finished his career showcasing his more cerebral side in a deeper role.

Capable of predatory finishes and spectacular strikes in equal measure, Rooney was one of the world's best forwards during his prime years.

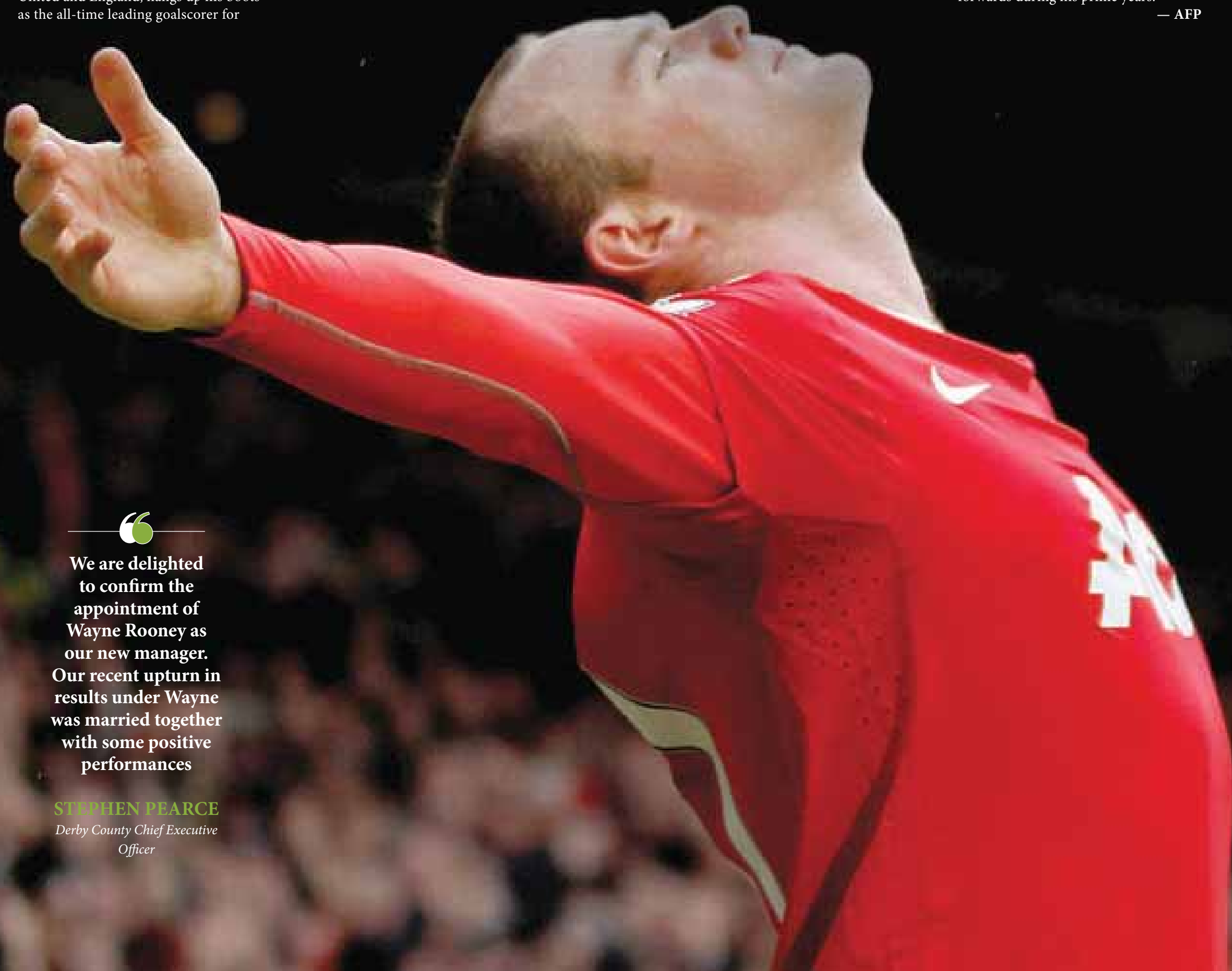
— AFP



We are delighted to confirm the appointment of Wayne Rooney as our new manager. Our recent upturn in results under Wayne was married together with some positive performances

STEPHEN PEARCE

Derby County Chief Executive Officer





'Mourinho helped me win more titles'

Manchester United forward Marcus Rashford said his former manager Jose Mourinho had helped him become more "savvy" in the box to win penalties. Rashford's comments follow some debate over how many penalties his team are awarded.



Sri Lanka dig in after Root double century

Lahiru Thirimanne led a stubborn Sri Lankan resistance campaign in the first Test on Saturday after England captain Joe Root's 228 had lifted the tourists' hopes of a quick victory. Thirimanne made an unbeaten 76 and Kusal Perera 62 as Sri Lanka reached 156-2 in their second innings.

Domestic sprinters set for busy year



ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 16

The Oman Athletics Association (OAA) are set for a busy 2021 year as more than 15 domestic events will be organised through the year.

The competitions panel at the OAA unveiled the agenda of the new season that will feature different athletics competitions and circulated to all the domestic clubs to take part.

The first scheduled event that will take place is on January 29 at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex and that is an open gathering for running, high jump and discuss throw.

The same gathering will be organised in Salalah in the first week of February while the last round (finals) of the gathering will take place again in Muscat at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on February 12.

The targeted categories in the open gathering are junior, youth under 22 and the senior. Musandam Race is a new event in this year agenda and that will aim to focus on the potential faces.

Musandam event will take place on February 18. OAA are keen to involve the local teams as they will organise a dedicated event for the local teams which fall under the official clubs and the tournament is scheduled on February 26.

The March month will feature two

The first scheduled event that will take place is on January 29 at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex and that is an open gathering for running, high jump and discuss throw

gatherings. The first gathering is for Dhofar and Al Wusta clubs athletes on March 12 while the other gathering for

Muscat, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Dhahirah, Al Sharqiyah, Al Batinah, Al Buraimi and Musandam on March 19.

The clubs tournament which targeted the girls sprinters will be held in every Friday of March at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex and will be for senior category.

The School Olympic Days (boys) for athletics will take place every Monday of March while for (ladies) on every Wednesday of March.

The Ministry Athletics Shield finals will take place at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex during 2-3 of April 2021. Salalah Festival Cross Country Championship is an open tournament that will take place on August 6.

A similar event of cross country will be held in Al Mudhaibi on November 5 and another cross country tournament for local teams in Bidbid on November 19. The final planned domestic event for this year is the Sultanate Cross Country Championship which will take place in Bidbid on December 10.

OAA concluded recently at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex the technical evaluations of the national sprinters after completion of the long intensive local camps in Suhar and Muscat.

The top selections will have another plan for development to represent the Sultanate's teams in the forthcoming regional and international events.

Suraj, Mehran power Al Turki to big win

MUSCAT: Suraj Kumar's vital 89 and Mehran Khan's fantastic 4 for 13 powered Al Turki NMC to a comfortable 146-run victory against AER in a Premier Division 50-over League game at OC Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Invited to bat first, Al Turki found the going tough, collapsing to 51 for 6 in 21 overs before Suraj put together 55 for the seventh wicket with Mehran (28 off 44). He found another dependable partner in Jitenkumar Ramanandi (65 off 51) and the duo added 86 for the eighth wicket before Suraj got out for 89 off 110. Al Turki was finally able to reach 227 for 9, a total it was able to defend rather comfortably thanks to a potent bowling attack.

Mehran was the pick of Al Turki bowlers, taking four wickets while Mohit Patel and Jay Odedara bagged two wickets each. Young opener Muzahir Raza 23 – 4x4, Mehran Khan 4-13, Mohit Patel 2-21, Jay Odedara 2-15) by 146 runs.

Usman leads Basta to victory

Usman Haider struck a solid 79 to help Basta CT to an exciting 21-run win over Ernst & Young in a keenly contested A Division 50-over League match at OC Turf 2 on Friday.



Suraj Kumar and Mehran Khan of Al Turki NMC

Basta posted a healthy 252 for 7 on the board thanks to major contributions from Usman and Shahid Mehmood (41 off 50). Shrey Wilson claimed 3 for 31.

E&Y got off to a good start reaching 149 for 2 in 35 overs that included a superb 72 off 73 by Issa al Balushi before losing the plot and falling short by 21 runs due to too many dot balls. Shrey Wilson (44 off 98), Sultan Ahmed (42 off 60) and Omer Sarfraz (35 off 32) were the other main scorers.

Brief Scores (A Division):

Basta CT 252 for 7 in 50 overs (Usman Haider 79 – 5x4, 1x6, Shahid Mehmood 41 – 3x4, 2x6, Shrey Wilson 3-31) beat Ernst & Young 231 for 9 in 50 overs (Issa al Balushi 72 – 6x4, 3x6, Shrey Wilson 44 – 1x4, Sultan Ahmed 42 – 2x4, Shamsudheen Shareef 3-30, Mohammed Abbas Naqvi 2-36) by 21 runs.

Mustansar Hussain's brilliant all-round performance powered Zubair CT to a nail-biting win over LC Tech in a B Division 30-over League game at Muscat Municipality ground 2 on Friday.

Mustansar's solid knock was the highlight of Zubair's 197 all out in 29.1 overs as Abdul Rauf claimed 3 for 42 while Jaleel Mahamood and Shahil Mohammed took two wickets each.

LC Tech fought well reaching 146 for 4 in 24 overs before losing a couple of quick wickets and letting the run rate climb higher. In the end, it could manage only 188, falling short by 9 runs. Mifas Mohammed scored a fluent 55 off 42 while Rahul Rajeev contributed 32 off 36. Mustansar bowled well, taking 2 for 35 while Mubashar Iqbal bagged 2 for 53.

Brief Scores (B Division):

Zubair 197 all out in 29.1 overs (Mustansar Hussain 70 – 8x4, Abdul Rauf 3-42, Jaleel Mahamood 2-26, Shahil Mohammed 2-26, Rajesh Shetty 2-49) beat LC Tech 188 for 8 in 30 overs (Mifas Mohammed 55 – 8x4, Rahul Rajeev 32 – 4x4, Mustansar Hussain 2-35, Mubashar Iqbal 2-53) by 9 runs.

Mohammed stars in OCT Ruwi victory

In another B Division game, top Omani all-rounder Mohammed Ali Akbar and Shuaib Ismail steered OCT Ruwi to an easy 7-wicket victory against PDO RC at Muscat Municipality ground 1.

Brief Scores (B Division): PDO RC 152 all out in 26 overs (Nadeem Ahmed 34 – 7x4, Taha Naqi 33 not out – 1x4, Mohammed Ali Akbar 3-22, Imran al Balushi 2-30, Zubair Ali Akbar 2-30, Shuaib Ismail 2-38) lost to OCT Ruwi 154 for 3 in 22.4 overs (Mohammed Ali Akbar 50 – 7x4, Shuaib Ismail 46 – 6x4)

Abdullah al Quraini claims Cross Country and Mountain Running Race title

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 16

MUSCAT: The national athlete Abdullah al Quraini lifted the title of first round of the Cross Country and Mountain Running Race on Friday at Madinat Al Irfan in Muscat.

Al Quraini's triumph came after he covered the distance of the race of 14.6 km in 53 minutes and 17 seconds. The event, which featured participation of 124 participants, was organised by Excellence Performance in coordination with Oman Athletics Association (OAA).

Ahmed al Amri finished the race as runner-up after he completed the distance in 53 minutes and 41 seconds. The third place award went to Mahmood al Quraini who covered the competition in 55 minutes and 21 seconds. The race included four races in running and biking in two stages. At the girls' general category, the participant Joanna Buchholtz from England claimed the first title award as she completed the race in one hour, 16 minutes and 48 seconds.



South African Lindie Jacobs bagged the second place award as she finished the competition in one hour, 22 minutes and 49 seconds, while Indian Lynsey Mackay managed to complete the race in one hour, 38 minutes and 22 seconds.

Many Omani girls took part in the race and delivered top performance. Hajir al Ruzaqi finished in sixth position as she cleared the distance in one hour, 38 minutes and 22 seconds.

At the under 20 years category, which was for 7.3 km distance, the younger star Quasai Amri was the champion as he cleared the distance in 33 minutes and 56 seconds. Affan al Dhubaini

ended the race as runner-up as he completed the distance in 35 minutes and 17 seconds, while the third place award went to Muadh al Julandani as he finished the competition in 35 minutes and 23 seconds.

All the participants had the chance to claim more points in the second round as the second stage is scheduled to be held on February 27.

The points of all the participants will be accumulated for the next round.

The top winners of the first round received cash prizes besides medals and the organising committee arranged awards for all who completed the race rounds.





Water is seen pooling on the surface near the wicket during a rain delay on day two of the fourth Test between Australia and India at the Gabba in Brisbane. – Reuters

Gabba Test hangs in the balance after rain stoppage

BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA: The deciding fourth Test between Australia and India in Brisbane hung in the balance on Saturday after a massive thunderstorm caused play to be abandoned following the tea break on the second day.

The Gabba was saturated during the storm, which began during the tea break, and while the ground drained quickly, the umpires decided the outfield was too wet to allow play to continue.

India will resume on Sunday at 62 for two, 307 runs behind Australia's first innings total of 369, with Cheteshwar Pujara on eight alongside skipper Ajinkya Rahane, who was on two. Australia had earlier claimed the vital wicket of Rohit Sharma 20 minutes before tea to seize the momentum.

Sharma had been in full flow, striking 44 stylish runs from 74 deliveries with six boundaries.

But with the score on 60 for the loss of opener Shubman Gill (7), Sharma threw his wicket away when he charged off-spinner Nathan Lyon, only managing to sky a ball to Mitchell Starc at deep mid-on. Pat Cummins had made the early breakthrough for the hosts when Gill got a thick edge and Steve Smith took a sharp catch at second slip.

After resuming at 274 for five on Saturday morning, Australia lost five wickets in the first session including the overnight batsmen Tim Paine and Cameron Green.

Paine and Green had started aggressively on a flat batting wicket and looked to push the score beyond 400.

SCOREBOARD	
Sri Lanka first innings: 135	14-1-44-2, De Silva 15-1-63-0, D Perera 36-1-2-109-4, Shanaka 7-1-22-0.
England first innings (O/n: 320/4):	
J Root c Embuldeniya b D Perera.....	228
J Buttler c Dickwella b Fernando.....	30
S Curran b Fernando.....	0
D Bess (run out).....	0
J Leach lbw D Perera.....	4
M Wood c Dickwella b D Perera.....	2
S Broad (not out).....	11
Extras (B-7, NB-6).....	13
Total (all out, 117.1 overs).....	421
Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-17, 3-131, 4-304, 5-372, 6-372, 7-382, 8-398, 9-406.	
Bowling: Embuldeniya 45-4-176-3, Fernando	
Sri Lanka second innings:	
K Perera c Leach b Curran.....	62
L Thirimanne (not out).....	76
K Mendis c Buttler b Leach.....	15
L Embuldeniya (not out).....	0
Extras (B-1, NB-2).....	3
Total (For 2 wkts, 61 overs).....	156
Fall of wickets: 1-101, 2-155.	
Bowling: Broad 8-6-3-0, Curran 7-0-25-1, Bess 13-2-30-0, Wood 7-1-20-0, Leach 20-2-67-1, Root 6-0-10-0.	

But shortly after reaching his half-century, Paine chased a wide ball from Shardul Thakur (3-94) and edged to Sharma at third slip to leave Australia 311 for six.

Green survived a sharp chance on 45 off Washington Sundar but two runs later, the off-spinner got his revenge when he bowled the

Australian number six for 47.

Thakur, playing only his second Test, took his third wicket when he trapped Cummins leg-before for two to leave the hosts struggling at 315 for seven.

However, Lyon and Starc went on the attack and the score raced to 354 before Sundar bowled Lyon

The Gabba was saturated during the storm, which began during the tea break, and while the ground drained quickly, the umpires decided the outfield was too wet to allow play to continue

with their total considering the benign nature of the wicket.

While many of the Australian batsmen got starts, only Marnus Labuschagne was able to convert, his 108 on Friday the standout for the home team.

The Indian attack features two players making their debut — Natarajan (3-78) and Sundar (3-89) — while their most experienced bowler, Mohammad Siraj, is playing just his third Test following a raft of injuries to their first-choice bowlers.

To compound their problems, Navdeep Saini was only able to bowl 7.5 overs on the first day before he broke down with a groin injury. However, they bowled with discipline and were helped by some injudicious shot selection by their opponents. — AFP



Arsenal's Mesut Ozil celebrates scoring their first goal. – Reuters

Ozil to end Arsenal contract, move to Fenerbahce: reports

LONDON: Arsenal and midfielder Mesut Ozil have reached an agreement in principle to terminate the German's contract six months before it expires so he can seal a move to Turkish club Fenerbahce, *The Athletic* reported on Saturday.

Ozil, 32, has not played for Arsenal since last March and was left out of the their Premier League and Europa League squads at the start of the season.

Turkish media reported earlier this month that Fenerbahce would sign the former Germany international, who has Turkish ancestry, for three and a half years.

Ozil, one of Arsenal's highest-paid players, is free to negotiate a pre-contract with other clubs as he is in the final six months of his contract with the London side, but *The Athletic* reported that Fenerbahce would sign him as a free agent.

"Fenerbahce is like Real Madrid in Spain. The biggest club in the country," Ozil said during a question and answer session with fans on Twitter this week.

Signed in 2013 for a then-club record fee of over £42 million



Arsenal's Mesut Ozil during the warm up before the match. – Reuters

(\$57 million) from Real Madrid, the playmaker played a crucial role under Arsene Wenger in ending Arsenal's trophy drought, winning the FA Cup in his first season.

But he found himself marginalised under Wenger's replacement Unai Emery and then again by current manager Mikel Arteta, who said the player's omission from the squad was for "football reasons".

Arteta said earlier this month that if a deal could be agreed that was "good for both parties", Ozil would leave during the January transfer window. — Reuters

IPO of Oman REIT Fund opens today

PROMISING INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITY: Oman REIT Fund could be a game changer in Oman's real estate sector, says fund manager

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 16

Bringing new vitality to Oman's real estate market, Jasser al Aulaqi, the CEO of Shumookh Fund Management LLC, announced the launch of the RO 65.48 million Oman REIT Fund (Under Formation), one of the largest real estate investment funds in the Sultanate. The fund's RO 26.1 million Initial Public Offering (IPO), representing 40 per cent of the total fund, of which the issuer can accept up to 39.2 million, representing 60 per cent of total fund, is available for subscription from today, January 17, 2021 to January 31, 2021.

Shumookh Fund Management LLC is the sponsor and investment manager of the Fund while United Securities LLC is the issue Manager, handling the public offer.

"Oman REIT Fund offers an investment opportunity to the investors to participate in Oman's high potential real estate market by allowing them access to a diversified portfolio of real estate assets located at strategic locations across the Sultanate," Al Aulaqi said at a press conference on Thursday.

"Oman REIT Fund could be a game changer in Oman's real estate sector. The Fund presents investors with multiple benefits



(L to R): Hamad bin Mohammed al Wahaibi, Board Member of Oman REIT Fund; Jasser Saleh al Aulaqi, CEO of Shumookh Fund Management; Shaikh Hilal al Hasani, Chairman of Oman REIT Fund; Mustafa Ahmed Salman, Board Member of Oman REIT Fund and Chairman of United Securities; and Tariq Abdelrazeq, Deputy GM of United Securities.

including stable and high income, hedge against inflation and high liquidity along with professional management of their wealth by a team of investment experts," he pointed out, adding, "The Fund aims to pay an annual dividend of 7.5 per cent per annum in the first year, which can grow up to 8.2 per cent per annum during the fifth year."

The close-ended Oman REIT Fund will be listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange for secondary market trading upon closure of the IPO.

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has already given the necessary approval for the fund to open to the public, Al Aulaqi stated.

Oman REIT Fund has its assets distributed across sectors in such a

way as to ensure higher and steady returns, Al Aulaqi noted, saying, residential cum commercial properties represent half of the fund's allocation, followed by office and retail assets at 30 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively.

Logistics and industry properties make up the rest.

"Oman REIT Fund is arguably the largest REIT in the Sultanate with the total appraised value of properties pegged at RO 65.48 million.

"It has a diverse portfolio of as many as 20 high-worth individual property assets spread across the capital area including Ruwi, Madinat Al Sultan Qaboos, Qurum, Al Khuwair, Ghala, Rusayl and Misfah, with a strategic mix of residential and commercial, retail, office and industrial as well as

logistics properties. The ranking of the Fund is expected to be on top among its peers upon listing on the MSM, in terms of market cap," he continued.

According to Tariq Abdelrazeq, Deputy General Manager of United Securities, the current offering consists of 261,903,576 units with the right to accept up to 60 per cent of the offer, and each unit is priced at RO 0.102 (unit price RO 0.100 and 2 balsa towards issue expenses). Oman REIT Fund promises strong growth potential supported by a diversified, high-value asset portfolio, he said, adding, the Fund offers a simple and affordable means to invest in Oman's high value real estate sector without buying property directly and to enjoy long-term

Oman REIT Fund could be a game changer in Oman's real estate sector. The Fund presents investors with multiple benefits including stable and high income, hedge against inflation and high liquidity along with professional management of their wealth by a team of investment experts

JASSER AL AULAQI
CEO, Shumookh Fund Management LLC

capital appreciation and reliable income that grows at an estimated rate of 7.5 per cent to 8.2 per cent over a period of 5 years.

Investors can subscribe to the IPO for as low as RO 102 and going up to a maximum of RO 16.37 million in a single application which is for 163,689,735 units (25 per cent of the issued units).

Elaborating on the types of investments the Fund offers, Abdelrazeq said investors can choose category I or category II depending on the investment size and status. Category I has minimum and maximum application sizes of 1,000 and 10,000,000 units respectively while the minimum and maximum application sizes for category II investors stand at 10,000,100 and 163,689,735 units respectively.

Bank Muscat posts 2020 net profit of RO 163.36 million



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 16

Bank Muscat has posted a net profit of RO 163.36 million for the year compared to RO 185.55 million reported during the same period in 2019, a decrease of 12.0 per cent.

Announcing its unaudited results for the year, the Sultanate's biggest lender noted that Net Interest Income from Conventional Banking and Net Income from Islamic Financing stood at RO 322.13 million for the year compared to RO 316.97 million for the same period in 2019, an increase of 1.6 per cent.

Non-interest income was RO 134.41 million as compared to RO 155.20 million for the same period in 2019, a decrease of 13.4 per cent mainly due to subdued business conditions due to COVID-19 related lockdowns in Q2, Q3 and Q4 2020 and waiver of certain fees due to regulatory measures. Operating expenses for the year were RO 179.85 million as compared to RO 195.93 million for the same period in 2019, a decrease of 8.2 per cent due to cost management measures taken by the bank.

Net Impairment for credit and other losses for the year 2020 was RO 81.04 million as against RO 56.13 million for the same period in 2019.

TURN TO PAGE 14

Liwa Plastics to boost Oman's polymer output to 1.5mtpa

NEW HORIZONS: Mega petrochemicals project to position OQ as a leading distributor of polyethylene and polypropylene to the global market

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Oman's production of polyethylene and polypropylene — two key polymer-based commodities with wide application in an extensive array for products of everyday use — rises to over 1.5 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) when the Liwa Plastics Industries Complex (LPIC), a mega petrochemicals project, is shortly brought into full commercial operation at the Port of Sohar.

Marketed locally and globally under the 'Luban' brand, polymer output from the \$6.7 billion Liwa Plastics project will position OQ — the integrated energy

group of the Sultanate — as a leading producer and supplier of polyethylene and polypropylene to the global market.

"OQ is primed to deliver reliable solutions that meet both local and global demand for polypropylene and polyethylene from our state-of-the art integrated refineries and petrochemical facilities," the energy group, wholly owned by Oman Investment Authority (OIA), said.

"From providing safe flexible packaging for our favourite foods, enhancing the durability and quality of the bottles we use, and advancing sustainable solutions for the home and workplace, OQ is dedicated to optimising how polymers improve our daily lives," it stated in a recent update on Liwa Plastics' polymer production capabilities.

The LPIC plant has a capacity to produce around 880,000 tonnes per annum (tpa) of polyethylene. Roughly half of this capacity (around 440,000 tpa) is dedicated to the production of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) — one of the



most versatile plastics materials.

HDPE is used in a wide variety of applications, including plastic bottles and containers for all kinds of food, beverage, personal care products and household items,

besides pipes, cutting boards and so on.

The other half is earmarked for the production of linear low-density polyethylene (LLDPE), which is similarly used in the

manufacturer of an extensive array of goods, notably general purpose film, stretch film, garment packaging, agricultural film, and so on.

Additionally, Liwa Plastics

will add around 300,000 tpa of new capacity to OQ's existing polypropylene manufacturing output of 340,000 tpa, effective raising the country's aggregate polypropylene output to 640,000 tpa.

As with polyethylene, polypropylene is used in the manufacture of packaging for consumer products, plastic parts for various industries including the automotive industry, and textiles, among numerous other products.

OQ hopes to leverage Oman's strategic location as the 'gateway to the world' to deliver the required supplies of polymers to markets around the globe within 4-6 days. The company has also set up marketing offices in Singapore and Shanghai.

"The expanded product offerings made possible with the LPIC project bring a wider range of sustainable solutions for flexible packaging, rigid packaging and durables, as well as in infrastructure and construction," added OQ.

Business evaluation: Auto repair workshop (PART 2)

Let us continue — with the help of my friend Bharat R Kanodia — evaluating pros and cons of owning an auto repair business. In the previous article we have learned about 2 ongoing trends in the industry. Let us see 2 more trends here.

Electrification
Demand for electric or hybrid and fuel cell cars is on the rise. Many such cars require expensive parts, special training for technicians, and certified software upgrades from the manufacturer.
On the other side of the coin, however, diagnostic tools have become readily available on the Internet and compatible with consumer mobile devices.

This has simplified drastically the troubleshooting. Let dirty hands and more tech solutions. I would count this as a half point up for the car repair business.
Shortage of Labour
The increase in demand for more software savvy technicians has added pressure on the already short supply of experienced and qualified technicians. This is very much a whole point down.
As the middle class grows in numbers, very few want to have their children to study mechanics and work in a “dirty job”.
So in some countries the industry heavily relies on foreign workers, but when immigration rules are tightened, labour shortage can be a costly headache for the owner of the business.
According to Bharat R Kanodia,



STEFANO VIRGILI
stefano@virgili.com

WE CAN SAY THAT THE DEMAND FOR AUTO REPAIR SHOPS WILL NEVER RUN OUT. THIS IS ONE OF THE FEW BUSINESSES THAT IS ALMOST RECESSION-PROOF.

auto repair shops sell for 25 to 40 per cent of their annual revenue, plus any excess inventory.
Machinery and equipment are generally included in this rule of thumb.
Only add excess inventory in case the business runs inventory heavy for example a tire shop.
In the US, 75 per cent of auto repair shops have revenue of less than \$1 million, which seems to be the tipping point at which the value increases, as buyers want to invest in auto shops where they can hire a manager and be absentee owners.
A few points that appraisers and buyers will be paying attention to and can help buyers maximise the value of the business.
Curb Appeal: No one wants to visit an auto repair shop that’s

shabby or in a disarray. If you run an auto repair shop, keep your workplace clean, organised, with a fresh coat of paint and clean uniforms.
Customer Loyalty: Customers appreciate honest and knowledgeable mechanics and auto shops. Having a customer loyalty plan with small facilities like tire storage, drop and pick up, payment plans, etc. will keep the customers happy and returning.
A friendly customer waiting area is always a plus. Moreover, encouraging referral is a good way to drive new business in.
Online Marketing: Positive online reviews, easy and friendly website with strong Search Engine Optimization and published pricing will attract customers and project an image of quality and

transparency.
Relationships with Suppliers and Insurance Companies: Good suppliers will help business owners to keep costs low, and insurance direct repair programmes will keep the revenue consistent.
Moreover, this could work well as a route for recurrent business. In conclusion, we can say that the demand for auto repair shops will never run out. This is one of the few businesses that is almost recession-proof.
This business is built on the oldest currencies known to man. Trust and Transparency. If you can run a simple but honest operation, customers that need you will keep coming back and bring in friend search time.
(The writer is a member of the International Press Association)

MSM WEEKLY REVIEW

MSM closes lower led by financial sector companies

MSM 30 Index ended the week down by 1.64 per cent. All Sectors ended positively except Financial. The Financial Index ended down 2.23 per cent. Industrial Index was higher by 1.56 per cent and the services Index was up by 0.17 per cent. MSM Shariah Index declined by 1.18 per cent.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO), in collaboration with Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Labour, has mandated that banks operating in the Sultanate provide a seamless mechanism for transferring salaries and recurring payments (bulk payments) of all government and private agencies/ companies through electronic banking services.

This corporate banking channel is safe and secure. It aims to stop using any methods that do not meet the safety and security standards. The move also aims to avoid expensive methods that consume a lot of time and effort.

Muscat Gases Company signed an agreement with Al Aman Industrial & House Company to acquire the 100 per cent share capital of Al Aman, including all LPG filling stations owned by them in Oman. Objective of the acquisition are to diversify the investments for enhancing the Company's position and to create better growth opportunities in the future to create value for shareholder's equity.

The Capital Market Authority has approved the main prospectus of Mudharabah Sukuk of Takaful Oman Insurance for the offer of perpetual Sukuk worth RO 25m.

The Oman-based

Oman Telecom Subscriber Data

Category	Oct-20	Nov-20
Fixed Line Subscribers	~1,000,000	~1,000,000
Total Mobile Subscribers	~6,000,000	~6,000,000
Active Mobile Broadband Subscribers	~4,000,000	~4,000,000

Source: NCSI

Sharia-compliant insurance provider Takaful Oman has announced in the prospectus the first issuance of RO 6m in a private placement at an issue price of RO 1.020 for each Sukuk unit made up of RO 1 nominal value in addition to 20 bais a for the issue costs. The minimum limit of subscription in the first issuance is 100,000 Sukuk to commence on January 17.

As per the recent data by NCSI, fixed line subscribers were up 1.1 per cent m-o-m to 591,316 in November 2020 compared to 584,894 in October 2020 and 592,196 in December 2019. Mobile subscribers were higher by 2.1 per cent m-o-m to 6.222m in November 2020 compared to 6.096m in October 2020 and 6.383m in December 2019.

Within mobile segment, prepaid as well as post-paid both subscribers increased as well.

Post paid subscribers were higher by 5.9 per cent m-o-m to 0.976m in November 2020 compared to 0.922m in October 2020 and 0.78m in December 2019. While prepaid subscribers were higher by 1.4 per cent m-o-m to 5.245m in November 2020 compared to 5.173m in October 2020 and 5.60m in December 2019.

Active mobile broadband subscribers were higher significantly by 3.6 per cent m-o-m to 5.312m in November 2020 compared to

5.127m in October 2020 while the fixed broadband subscribers were also higher by 2.2 per cent to 0.506m in November 2020 compared to 0.495m in October 2020.

The total Oman population was 4.481m compared to 4.445m at the end of September 2020, growth of 0.8 per cent.

The inflation rate in the Sultanate, measured by movement in the average Consumer Price Index (CPI), fell by 1.42 per cent in December 2020 compared to the same month of 2019, according to the latest data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) on consumer prices' index. According to the report, the inflation rate in December fell by 0.18 per cent compared to November 2020.

However, the transport fell by 0.59 per cent; miscellaneous goods and services by 0.13 per cent; food & non-alcoholic beverages by 0.09 per cent; and furnishings, household equipment, and routine household maintenance by 0.01 per cent in December 2020 compared to November 2020.

In contrast, the prices of restaurants and hotels group increased by 0.05 per cent, and the prices of housing groups, water, electricity and other fuels, health, communication, recreation and culture, and education were stable.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Registration of intellectual property can now be done online

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 16



Individuals and organisations in the Sultanate can apply online to register their intellectual property via the electronic Invest Easy portal of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).
The Intellectual Property Department at MoCIIP emphasised that the launch of the application aims at facilitating procedures, reducing time and efforts of service seekers, providing faster services, in addition to providing accuracy in data and ensuring the investor's seriousness in complying with intellectual property standards.
The ministry explained that applicants can submit their applications easily and conveniently by logging on to the website of “Invest Easy” portal <https://www.business.gov.om>, choosing Business

Administration from the list of services, followed by choosing the service of request application ‘To file an Intellectual property document’.
This is followed by logging in through the electronically attested ID card or through the phone number supported by the electronic authentication feature, and then clicking on Register a new intellectual property, reading the instructions and clicking agree by the terms & conditions and the disclaimer of the service.
The users can then click start

the service and choose “File an Intellectual property document “and fill in the application data for each by clicking on the button corresponding to each.
The application is reviewed and the data is corrected before submitting the application. The users can then pay the service fee and upload the payment receipt.
All requests can be followed up and their status displayed by logging into: Services — Business Administration — Intellectual Property Applications.

Bank Muscat posts 2020 net profit of RO 163.36 million

FROM PAGE 13
“The increase was mainly on account of precautionary and collective provisions made in the first half of 2020, on a forward looking basis given the emerging stress in the economic and business conditions as a result of the impact of COVID-19 and the continued pressure on oil prices,” the bank stated.
Net Loans and advances including Islamic financing receivables increased marginally by 0.5 per cent to RO 8,918 million, as against RO 8,878 million for 2019.
Customer deposits including Islamic Customer deposits increased by 4.2 per cent to RO 8,377 million as against RO 8,043 million in 2019.
The full results for the year ended December 31, 2020 along with the complete set of unaudited financial statements will be released following the approval of the Board of Directors of the bank at its meeting scheduled later during January 2021, it added.

1,613 firms electronically update civil status of foreign investors

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 16

As many as 1,613 commercial establishments in the Sultanate applied to renew investment and residency cards of foreign investors electronically during the period from June to December 2020, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).
This follows the decision of the ministry to halt all inspection visits to commercial establishments in line with COVID-19 safety guidelines.
Following the expiry of the investment and residency cards of several investors, the ministry

coordinated with the concerned authorities, including the Royal Oman Police and Ministry of Labour the introduction of electronic processing of card renewals. The Department of Auditing and Supervision of Commercial Establishments at the MoCIIP pointed out that the foreign capital investment law contributes to providing an attractive investment environment for investors and creating appropriate conditions for investment in light of international competition to attract investments by granting incentives, privileges and guarantees that contribute to the stability of foreign investments.



US retail sales fall while manufacturing shines

WASHINGTON: US retail sales fell for a third straight month in December as renewed measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 triggered job losses, further evidence that the wounded economy lost considerable speed at the end of 2020.

The downturn in sales reported by the Commerce Department on Friday is, however, unlikely to push the economy back into recession, with other data showing production at factories accelerating last month.

There is also cautious optimism that nearly \$900 billion in additional pandemic relief provided by the government at the end of December will offer a backstop.

The ebbing economic momentum, which appears to have spilled over into the new year, could persuade the US Congress to agree to President-elect Joe Biden's ambitious \$1.9 trillion fiscal stimulus plan, which includes bolstering the



People are seen shopping inside Walmart department store in New York. — Reuters

response to the virus and direct relief to households and small businesses.

"That should make Congress more willing to deal on Biden's

wish list", said Steven Blitz, chief US economist at TS Lombard in New York.

"Critical to Biden's story is that the virus itself is creating the

downturn, not any fundamental problems with the economy, and this is what needs to be done to address it."

Retail sales dropped 0.7

The ebbing economic momentum could persuade the US Congress to agree to President-elect Joe Biden's ambitious \$1.9 trillion fiscal stimulus plan, which includes bolstering the response to the virus and direct relief to households and small businesses

per cent last month. Data for November was revised down to show sales tumbling 1.4 per cent instead of 1.1 per cent as previously reported. Sales rose 2.9 per cent on a year-on-year basis. The monthly decline in sales was led by a 4.5 per cent plunge at restaurants and bars after many authorities banned indoor dining over the holiday season.

Online sales tumbled

5.8 per cent. Receipts at electronics and appliance stores dropped 4.9 per cent. Consumers also cut back spending at sporting goods, hobby, musical instrument and book stores as well as beverage stores.

That offset a 1.9 per cent rebound in sales at auto dealerships and a 2.4 per cent increase in receipts at clothing stores. There were also gains in sales at building material stores as well as health and personal care outlets.

Excluding automobiles, gasoline, building materials and food services, retail sales tumbled 1.9 per cent last month after a downwardly revised 1.1 per cent decline in November. These so-called core retail sales correspond most closely with the consumer spending component of gross domestic product. They were previously estimated to have decreased 0.5 per cent in November. — Reuters

Canada's Couche-Tard drops \$20 billion Carrefour takeover plan

LONDON/PARIS: Canada's Alimentation Couche-Tard has dropped its 16.2 billion euro (\$19.6 billion) bid to acquire European retailer Carrefour SA after the takeover plan ran into stiff opposition from the French government, two sources familiar with the matter said on Friday.

The decision to end merger talks came after a meeting on Friday between French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire and Couche-Tard's founder and chairman, Alain Bouchard, the sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity as the matter is confidential.

France ruled out any sale of grocer Carrefour on food security grounds, prompting the Canadian firm and its allies to mount a last-ditch attempt to salvage the deal. "Food security is strategic for our country so that's why we don't sell a big French retailer.

My answer is extremely clear: We are not in favour of the deal. The no is polite but it's a clear and final no", Le Maire said.

Couche-Tard was hoping to win the government's blessing by offering commitments on both jobs and France's food supply chain and by keeping the merged entity listed in both Paris and Toronto, with Carrefour boss Alexandre Bompard and his



A shopper pushes a trolley at a Carrefour supermarket in Singapore. — Reuters

Couche-Tard counterpart Brian Hannasch leading it as co-CEOs, one of the sources said.

The plan included a pledge to keep the new entity's global strategic operations in France and having French nationals on its board, he said.

Couche-Tard, advised by Rothschild, was also going to pump about 3 billion euros of investments into the French retailer which was working on the deal with Lazard.

The proposal was widely backed by Carrefour which employs 105,000 workers in France, its largest market, making it the country's biggest private-sector employer.

France's rejection of the deal less than 24 hours after talks were confirmed sparked grumbling in some business circles over how French President Emmanuel Macron, a former investment banker, is turning away foreign investment.

Some politicians and bankers said the pushback could tarnish Macron's pro-business image, while others highlighted that the COVID-19 crisis had forced more than one country to redefine its strategic national interests.

Amid a trans-Atlantic flurry of lobbying, Couche-Tard's Bouchard — who started his convenience store operations in 1980 — flew to Paris to explain

France ruled out any sale of grocer Carrefour on food security grounds, prompting the Canadian firm and its allies to mount a last-ditch attempt to salvage the deal

the merits of the deal to Le Maire, the source said.

But the finance minister reiterated his opposition without listening to the terms of the transaction and said any such deal should not be revisited before France's presidential elections in 2022, the sources said.

Couche-Tard initially explored the possibility of pursuing its offer despite the government's stance on the deal, but later decided to raise the white flag and avoid a political storm, one of the sources said.

One government official said that while it was understandable that the French government did not want the country's largest employer to pass into foreign hands for political reasons, "one cannot accuse a Canadian flagship like Couche-Tard of endangering the entire country's food sovereignty." — Reuters

Stellantis is born as Peugeot and Fiat complete their merger

PARIS: The merger of France's PSA and US-Italian rival Fiat Chrysler becomes official on Saturday, creating Stellantis, the world's fourth-biggest automaker by volume.

The long-awaited 50/50 tie-up, which was delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic, is seen as crucial for the two groups to undertake the investment necessary to transition to clean car technology.

The new company will bring together producers such as Peugeot, Citroen, Fiat, Chrysler, Jeep, Alfa Romeo and Maserati, each of which will continue under their own brand names.

The 14 Stellantis brands will account for about nine

per cent of the global auto market. Together they produced eight million vehicles in 2019.

Ranking behind global rivals such as Volkswagen, Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi and Toyota, Stellantis will be the fourth-largest automaker by volume and the third-largest by revenue, with a workforce of over 400,000.

John Elkann, Fiat chairman and scion of Italy's storied Agnelli family, will retain his role at Stellantis in what he has called "a challenging era". "The coming decade will redefine mobility: We are intent on playing a leading role in building this new future", Elkann said.

— Reuters



Logos of Peugeot and Fiat are seen in this illustration picture. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

SEOUL

BoK holds fire on rates as financial risks emerge

South Korea kept official interest rates unchanged on Friday as the policy focus shifted away from an urgent need to support the economic recovery to growing risks from a hot stock market rally and booming household debt.

Governor Lee Ju-Yeol gave few clues about the timing or direction of the next policy change but warned he was now closely watching the investor borrowing that had partly fuelled a doubling in the benchmark



Kospi index since March last year.

The BoK kept the base rate steady at a historic low of 0.5 per cent in an unanimous decision at its policy meeting. — Reuters

KUALA LUMPUR

Malaysia takes WTO legal action against EU

Malaysia is taking legal action at the global trade watchdog against the European Union and member states France and Lithuania for restricting palm oil-based biofuels.

The world's second largest palm oil producer, which has called a EU renewable-energy directive "discriminatory action", is seeking consultations under the WTO's Dispute Settlement Mechanism, the Plantation Industries Ministry said.

Minister Mohd Khairuddin

Aman Razali said the EU proceeded with implementing the directive without considering Malaysia's commitment and views, even after Malaysia gave feedback and sent economic and technical missions to Europe.

The EU directive "will mean the use of palm oil as biofuel in the EU cannot be taken into account in the calculation of renewable energy targets and in turn create undue trade restrictions to the country's palm oil industry." — AFP

LONDON

Taiwan asks exporters to spread out forex sales

Taiwan's central bank began meeting this week with major exporters to ask them to spread out sales of foreign currency, four sources with direct knowledge of the matter said, as it continues to try to rein in the soaring local currency.

The Taiwan dollar's 5.6 per cent gain against the greenback last year was among the strongest in Asia.

It is up nearly 2 per cent this year. Even though exports in 2020 hit a record high by value,



the currency's strength has vexed the government as it risks making shipments from its manufacturing economy less competitive. — Reuters

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

أوربت ORBIT
Car Rental & Lease

Classifieds

Observer

For Advertisements
Please Contact with our Team:

Head Office
Muscat Al Rashdi 9942200
m.alrashdi@omandaily.com

Salalah Office
Salalah Al Rashdi 9942200
s.alrashdi@omandaily.com

Al Al Maashari
Muscat Al Rashdi 9942200
a.almashari@omandaily.com

Sohar Office
Sohar Al Rashdi 9942200
s.alrashdi@omandaily.com

Observer Classified Section

SUNDAY JANUARY 17, 2021 JUMADA AL THANIA 3, 1442 AH

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

Ali al Maashari: 99639264
a.almashari@omandaily.com

Saada al Rashdi
95919344

94501166
24649593
24649595

FOR RENT SIT. VACANT SIT. WANTED FOR SALE/RENT RENT A CAR SERVICES

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.

GOOD flat, one room with hall, one bathroom and kitchen, 2 split ACs, Ruwi and Al Khuwair and Wadi Al Kabir contact: 99358589 or 97079146 or 95570288.

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.

To Let 2&3 bedroom flat, 18th November Road above Almandi Plate Restaurant, Ghubra south. 99024949/ 96002226.

LOOKING for experienced house keeper for an English family. Contact 99888143.

FINANCE/ PARTNERSHIP Required for a running Beauty Parlour in Muscat. Interested can call/ Whatsapp: 79860425.

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

SIT. WANTED

SMART Indian, excellent English, Arabic speaker, 17 years Oman experience in Airport, Hospital, Media EPC seeks Admin/ Hr/ Project coordinator/ Operations. 99283938.

CIVIL engineer/QS engineer, 11 years in UAE, freelance & Oman driving licence available, looking for full-time or part-time job 97299165.

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.

INDIAN Female Structural/Civil Engineer (B-Tech Civil), 18 years Gulf experience is seeking for suitable placement. Having valid visa and driving license. Ready to join immediately with necessary documents. Contact: 79858363.

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.

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

INDIAN driver with 10-year experience in sales, Rent A Car tours with own car needs suitable job. Well versed with Muscat routes in Oman and knowledge of Arabic English, Hindi, Malayalam. Kindly contact GSM 95037759

EXPERIENCE in outdoor Sales & Operations with Oman driving license, looking for suitable job opportunities in Sales/ Operations. Mobile: 79857155.

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

FOR SALE

INSTITUTION Licence contact 95595512.

FULLY equipped private clinic run by expat family physician for over 30 years, for immediate sale in Darsait. Instruments include: autoclave, defibrillator, ECG machine, reflowtron, nebulizer, etc. Call 99470858.

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

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

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

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

DECLARATION

Dar Al Aman Automotive Services Center, registered with Commercial Register Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion under No. 1206937 does hereby declare that it will change its legal form from ASSTD to LLC as per Article 30 of Commercial Companies Law No. 18/2019 as amended. Hence, each interested party shall be notified of such amendment and whoever objects to such amendment shall submit its objection grounds to the Commercial Register Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within thirty days as of the date of publishing this declaration.

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.

INVESTMENT

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

MANPOWER

MANPOWER from Philippines. Whatsapp: 91206344.

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.

FOR SALE OR LEASE

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

BUYING

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

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

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

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 565, Al Wadi Al Kabir 117, Sultanate of Oman

NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT BY BRIDEGROOM/BRIDE FOR MARRIAGE AT EMBASSY OF INDIA, MUSCAT

I Mohammed Abraar Iqbal (holder of Indian Passport No. J6420507 S/o C N Saquib Iqbal having permanent residence in No 30 Dr Omer Shariff Road, Basvangudi, Bangalore, Karnataka 560004 (complete postal address in India and presently residing at Muscat, Al Khuwair, Post Box No 112, Postal Code 133, Sultanate of Oman (Complete postal address in Sultanate of Oman), intend to marry Ms Samiya Parveen Rauf Shaik (Holder of Indian Passport bearing No. N 8151941 D/o Rauf Shaik at Embassy of India, Muscat. I swear that I am marrying him/her at my own free will and not under any duress and intimidation. Any objection towards this marriage may please be communicated to Embassy of India, Muscat, Diplomatic Quarters, Al Khuwair, P. O. Box No. 1727, Postal Code No. 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman within 30 (thirty) days of publication of this newspaper

RHC
مركز 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 الاسبوع

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

لتواصل والاستفسار : Communication and Enquiries +968 94429896 +968 24162332



To receive news updates from Oman Observer, WhatsApp <your name> to 96473232

features



Tapping into Oman's fondness for luxury scent

The main goal for this emerging fragrance powerhouse was to present the scents of Oman in a luxurious way. Inspired by the heritage and traditions of Oman, here's why OmanLuxury is worth checking out... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

HUMAN INTEREST



NIGER MUSEUM IS ECLECTIC NATIONAL 'MIRROR'

There can be few museums in the world to rival the National Museum of Niger. It has displays covering art, history, dinosaurs, nuclear energy, craftwork and music as well as live animals, for it is also a zoo... **Story on Page 20**

CHANGING WORLD



ROBOTS ARE THE 'HEROES' IN THE PANDEMIC

Robots that helped people survive and stay safe over the past year are touting their value at the tech industry's annual extravaganza amid a pandemic which has given fresh momentum to the robotics sector... **Story on Page 19**

READ



DISGRACE

BY J. M. COETZEE

Set in modern South Africa, the book explores what it's like to personally confront deep prejudices. Prejudices of gender, sexuality, class and race.

ENTERTAINMENT



70 STAR-PACKED 2021 FILMS

Already the master of 2020's pandemic-era movie landscape, Netflix on Tuesday offered a preview of upcoming 2021 releases, a list with no fewer than 70 star-studded feature films... **Story on Page 19**

TRAVEL TALES



AMSTERDAM MAYOR SEEKS TO BAN TOURISTS FROM 'COFFEE SHOPS'

Amsterdam's ecologist mayor proposed banning tourists from the Dutch city's famous cannabis "coffee shops". A large part of the rising number of tourists visiting Amsterdam every year were coming merely to consume the drug and such "cannabis tourists" had become a nuisance.



Tapping into Oman's fondness for luxury scent

BY RUQAYA AL KINDI

OmanLuxury tells you a story where you can see, sense and smell. Each bottle reflects a sensation of elegance felt in every scent, therefore, the brand's slogan is "A scent of elegance".

"Since our entry into the world of perfumery in 2012, we were keen to embody value, uniqueness, elegance, and beauty in a fragrance bottle", said Muatasim al Hinai, The company's CEO.

"Our passion and inspiration were to create an international fragrance brand that is unique in every aspect that reflects Oman in a fragrance bottle. Our start was humble during college days and worked on improvements, step by step from 2012 till today. Our main goal was to be an international brand which we managed to achieve by 2017 and 2018 when we successfully managed to exhibit in Italy. Since then, the continuous improvements and passion towards more success never stopped since we have set high standards for our brand", Al Hinai shared.

The founders chose the name from the very beginning since their inspiration is mainly from Oman and since they wanted to present luxuriously. "We combined the two words Oman and Luxury in one word "OmanLuxury" he noted.

The Royal incense and Khanjar, for example, both

are inspired by the Omani culture. Where, as he explained, the Royal Incense reflects the heritage of trading incense and spices, thousands of years ago in the southern part of Oman. K h a n j a r reflects an iconic symbol of formality and unique identity of the Omani identity.

"The inspiration leads us into creating a fragrance with an essence that truly represents the idea into a bespoke perfume", he added.

OmanLuxury is not the only brand in the market in the field of perfumes, but what distinguishes it and may makes it a favourite choice of the Omani consumer, as Al Hinai believes, the brand's history, success story, quality standards, unique product and brand value and taste.

As an Omani brand, he confirmed that 100 per cent of the manufacturing process is done in Muscat, Oman. Only the raw materials are imported from various countries in Europe and Asia.

The year 2021 marks a new chapter in the history of the brand.

"Our current project is finalising the new image and identity of OmanLuxury, where our vision is to achieve a recognisable brand positioning among the leading fragrance brands around the world. We wanted to introduce our brand in a

new image that has a modern touch and keeping the authenticity and the spirit of the brand. We now present our self in a new image that truly reflects the quality we are aiming to achieve", he said.

He mentioned that Omanluxury is currently based in Oman through it's two official stores in Muscat Mall and very soon in Salalah Grand Mall. "We are also present in Dubai, Doha, London, Paris, all over Italy, Bucharest and Copenhagen", he added.

The positive reinforcement and acceptance of people to their brand boosted their confidence. "Throughout the years, we have successfully gained a unique segment of returning clients since our main objective was to provide a good quality product with a good service", he shared.

The OmanLuxury brand has won many awards that reflect its excellence. It managed to win two awards pre-

sent-ed by the Fragrance Foundation Arabia for the perfume of the year and the best marketing campaign of the year (in 2017), followed by the late HM Sultan Qaboos Award for the best enterprise in the commercial sector (in 2018). "We also managed to feature our brand and present it in two consecutive international fragrance exhibitions held in Italy", he added.

They are more than just a brand that specialises in making perfumes. "We have set obligations to benefit the local economy by hiring Omani nationals in our company. On other terms, we promote Oman in our campaigns to show our inspirations and our brand spirit and thus it promotes Oman in terms of tourism and culture", he confirmed.



EXTREME ADVENTURE

Australians head to sea cliffs for adrenalin-pumping sport



A DOZEN friends have gathered atop a cliff some 60 metres (196 feet) above the ocean at Currarong, a town in eastern New South Wales state, to free-fall to the ocean's surface while tied to a rope.

They wear a harness with a rope attached to another line that is strung between two cliffs, one on either side of the jumper.

Rope free-flying, or rope jumping, was born in the 90s and grew in popularity in the past decade, looks like bungee jumping crossed with abseiling and includes dizzying rope swings.



But with rope jumping, the free-fall tends to be longer than with bungee jumping, and the jumpers themselves often install their own ropes on cliffs, mountains or skyscrapers.

The highest recorded free-fall jump was set in 2017 in a 571 metre (1,873 ft) jump that included free-falling 424.8 metres in Norway's majestic Kjerag mountain.



Upon taking the leap, 24-year-old Daisy Allen free falls most of the way down towards the ocean's surface, before being grabbed by the tension of the rope to which she is attached, which then goes taut and swings her over the sea.

"There's a lot of fear that comes up... for me it's a matter of just calming down, centering myself, really focusing in on my breathing", Allen said.

"The moment I jump off, it's just going to be an exhilarating, thrilling rush of adrenaline."

After the leap and swings, Allen is hauled back up the cliff face on the taut rope by her friends at the top. A half dozen people work to bring their friend back up from the abyss below.

"It's mostly about the people... it's like an informal tribe", said Allen's partner Tom Oliver. "There's so much trust and faith put in each other... it's just special. — Reuters



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

INSTAGRAM TOP PICKS



noufal_om • Follow

Wadi Dayqah Dam and Reservoir, Quriyat, Muscat



ayesha_clickss • Follow

Sur Bridge, Oman



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**.



CHANGING WORLD

Get full stories online at www.omanobserver.om



Robots are the 'heroes' in the Pandemic

Robots that helped people survive and stay safe over the past year are touting their value at the tech industry's annual extravaganza amid a pandemic which has given fresh momentum to the robotics sector.

The Consumer Electronics Show, which is being held online this year due to the global crisis, includes robots that have become "heroes" for many during the coronavirus pandemic.

Among those taking the virtual stage at CES are robot companions, concierges, cooks, delivery drones, medical assistants and those handling the perilous tasks of sanitising workplaces and medical facilities.

Robot companions saw surging demand in recent months as pandemic lockdowns intensified problems of isolation, especially for people in senior living homes.

Amid a strict virus lockdown in France, the companion robot Cutii became a star

in senior facilities.

"The pandemic completely changed our business model," said Antoine Bataille, chief executive of Cutii.

"We had envisioned Cutii at people's homes. But today we are dealing with isolation on a collective level."

The startup based in the northern French city Roubaix delivered 30 robots for free to senior facilities during the lockdowns and used the experience to improve the technology and train its teams.

'FRIENDLY' ROBOTS

Robots have taken on a new role in the workplace and in medical facilities in the era of social distancing.

Misty Robotics, which produces a robot platform open to outside developers, last year launched its own temperature screening app for workplaces and medical facilities, while also working with partners which can make the robot a companion or digital assistant.

The pandemic has made it easier for people to view

robots as non-threatening and as friends, said Misty Robotics chief executive Tim Enwall.

"The elderly don't have contact and the elderly are certainly very afraid of viruses that can come from contact and there's loneliness and isolation," Enwall said.

In an office environment, robots like Misty can become a virtual "concierge" which eliminates the need for risky person-to-person contact, Enwall added.

IN THE KITCHEN

Automated kitchen technology has been gaining interest in recent years, and that has been accelerated by the pandemic, said Alex Barseghian, CEO of startup RoboEatz which began in Latvia and is now headquartered in Canada.

RoboEatz is launching its artificial intelligence-powered autonomous robotic kitchen system that prepares, cooks and serves an array of hot and cold food dishes from soups to salads to meal bowls.

The robotic system, designed for food services operations in corporate offices, campuses and hospitals as well as quick-serve restaurants, takes over some of the tedious food prep tasks while improving food safety and eliminating infection risks from crowded kitchens.

Barseghian said the idea of robotic food prep, which can cut food waste and labour costs, has gained traction as a result of the pandemic.

"For a lot of restaurants, efficiency is important," he said. "Every millimetre in the kitchen is measured. They didn't think about social distancing, so automating the kitchen really solves that problem."

RoboEatz plans to launch its own restaurant in Latvia this month as it markets its "turnkey" kitchen in North America.

Even after the pandemic fades, Barseghian said he expects a continued focus on health and safety in kitchens: "I don't think it will ever be the same again." — **AFP**

ENTERTAINMENT

70 star-packed 2021 films



ALREADY THE master of 2020's pandemic-era movie landscape, Netflix on Tuesday offered a preview of upcoming 2021 releases, a list with no fewer than 70 star-studded feature films.

The sneak peek is unusual for the streaming giant, which historically has dropped news of only one film at a time — a testament to its clout as it easily surpasses the release volume

er's website — was accompanied by a short video presented by "Wonder Woman" star Gal Gadot, "Jumanji" lead Dwayne Johnson and "Deadpool" actor Ryan Reynolds.

The video also features Regina King, Adrien Brody, Meryl Streep, Sandra Bullock, Octavia Spencer, Jeremy Irons — even Leonardo DiCaprio and Jennifer Lawrence — show-



of every Hollywood studio.

From drama, comedy and science fiction to horror and even Westerns, the slate will take in every major film genre before the year is out, with some releases poised as potential competition for major awards.

Among the most-anticipated titles is "Don't Look Up," from film-maker Adam McKay of "The Big Short" and "Vice" fame and starring Leonardo DiCaprio.

"The Harder They Fall," a Western co-produced by Jay-Z and with a primarily Black cast including Regina King and Idris Elba, also promises to be one to look out for.

But the list included premier dates for only 10 of the titles — from early January to mid-March.

The announcement — via a brochure on the stream-

casing the several Oscar winners Netflix has snagged for their 2021 season.

The directors featured on the slate include notable names such as Jane Campion for "The Power of the Dog," Halle Berry and Lin-Manuel Miranda in both of their first spins behind the camera.

Johnson, Gadot and Reynolds will appear in "Red Notice," an action film with a \$160 million budget, according to US media.

Netflix did not respond to an AFP query about which — if any — of its 2021 films would also receive theatrical releases.

The preview came as Warner Bros. dropped its own slate, revealing that it would release all 17 of its 2021 titles simultaneously in theaters and on HBO MAX. — **AFP**



Niger museum is eclectic national ‘mirror’

There can be few museums in the world to rival the National Museum of Niger.

It has displays covering art, history, dinosaurs, nuclear energy, craftwork and music as well as live animals, for it is also a zoo.

Its clientele is similarly diverse, encompassing visitors who have trekked to the capital Niamey from across the country, school groups, well-heeled foreign tourists and street urchins.

The cultural gem of the world's poorest country, the 24-hectare (59-acre) museum survives on a budget that for rich counterparts is the equivalent to money found down the back of the sofa.

Yet it charges a rock-bottom entrance fee — around 10 US cents — so that even the most impoverished can walk in and have access to exceptional things... including wild animals. “Fauna and culture,” as the museum says.

“It's Niger's mirror, its social and cultural reflection,” said its director, Haladou Mamane, proudly ticking off its strengths in culture, history, archaeology, palaeontology... not forgetting the zoo section, “part of a multi-disciplinary tradition.”

“Here, every Nigerian, regardless of their background, can gain insights about the country,” said Mamane, noting that many people in Niger have never been to school.

Hot and arid, located in the heart of the Sahel, Niger ranks the lowest among 189 countries on the UN's Human Development Index. Per capita income is just \$1,040 (855 euros) per year — just over \$2.5 per day, according to the World Bank.

Adding to the burden is a crippling militant insurgency. Two, in fact — one coming from the southeast, from Nigeria, and one from the southwest, from Mali.

The state provides the museum with an annual subsidy of 327 million CFA francs (\$610,000 or 500,000 euros), and



income from the meagre entrance fee of 50 CFA francs covers just about a third of costs.

Street kids' museum
Before the pandemic, it received more than 100,000 visitors per year, many of them so-called talibe children.

These are children who are unique to West Africa — their parents hand them to a type of Islamic school, where they are supposed to learn the Koran.

But they typically spend their days begging in the dusty streets with a

metal receptacle strung around their neck, and many find the museum is a wonderful escape.

One such was 12-year-old Ismael Mariama, who after

playing on the slides and seesaws watched a large lion taking an afternoon nap.

“I came to see the animals. I paid 50 francs,” he said, clad in worn, grubby clothes.

“I came from Yantala,” a run-down district in northwestern Niamey, “to come and see the animals, the monkey, the lions, the crocodiles,” he said.

“I've seen everything,” said the lad, before putting his hand between the bars of a cage to give a biscuit to the monkeys.

He added that he had been to the museum's section on Nigerian craftwork and was interested in the leather shoes.

Mamane said he was especially proud of the craftwork area — a place that provides a shop window for sculptors, painters, potters and leatherworkers, who can sell what they produce.

The artisans come from all over this ethnically diverse country — a sign of “national unity,” said Mamane.

“It's a bit hard with the coronavirus, but the museum is a good thing for us,” said Ali Abdoulaye, a leatherworker.

“These days, artisans are losing out to cheaper Chinese products — but you buy a (Chinese) handbag, and it falls apart after a couple of days.”

A few metres (yards) from the museum's main hall is a star attraction — the skeletal remains of three monsters from the Age of the Dinosaurs.

They include *Sarcosuchus* imperator, an 11m (36-feet)-long crocodile, whose fossil was discovered in the Agadez region by a French palaeontologist, Philippe Taquet.

—AFP

