

His Majesty's greetings conveyed to Jordan King

King Abdallah II of Jordan received at Basman Palace on Sunday Shaikh Hilal bin Marhoon al Maamari who presented his credentials as the Sultanate's Ambassador to Jordan. The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with his best wishes of good health and well-being to King Abdallah II and the Jordanian people further progress and prosperity. **DETAILS ON P2**



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MORATA SPEARHEADS JUVENTUS FIGHTBACK TO CLOSE GAP AT TOP



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OVER 70 PER CENT FEWER FLIGHTS OPERATED LAST YEAR DUE TO PANDEMIC IMPACTS



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THE CAMEL SOUQ: THE OUTDOOR SHOPPING MALL FOR AFFICIONADOS



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

HONOURABLE LADY HAILS WOMEN'S ROLE IN NATION BUILDING

The Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, gave a message of greetings on the occasion of the International Women's Day, which falls on March 8 every year, as follows: "On this day, the world celebrates the International Women's Day as a gesture to highlight woman's prominent status, recognise her original role in nation building and reaffirming common determination to continue to support and enable women in all spheres." "Today, as we share this global experience, we would like to express our pride and delight at the accomplishments made for Omani women and by Omani women, as well as the high status accorded to them locally and internationally. This, indeed, reflects a progressive and advanced national vision.

"We would like to recall, with solemn respect, the great efforts exerted by women in Oman and the fact that they join hands with womenfolk worldwide in building, developing and supporting their families and communities.

"Our sincere commendation goes to women for their eventful and impactful contribution to global human issues — their contribution being influenced by a high sense of responsibility that has been an innate part of woman's character throughout the ages. "Hail women in our dear country Oman! Hail women everywhere in the world!" — ONA



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POPE PRAYS FOR 'VICTIMS OF WAR' IN NORTH IRAQ

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BIDEN COVID RESCUE PLAN CLEARS SENATE HURDLE

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DHOFAR CLAIM HISTORIC 10TH HM CUP



Dhofar clinched a record 10th HM Cup title after thumping Al Suwaiq 5-1 in a one-sided summit clash at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Sunday. Oman's star forward Khalid al Hajri slammed a hat-trick and goals from Bekai Lawsen and Yaseen al Shiyabi rounded off an overwhelming performance from Dhofar, while Omran al Hedi's goal was the only consolation for a disjointed Suwaiq outfit. The final match was attended by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, top dignitaries and officials. Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, the chief guest, handed over Dhofar players the gold medals and the coveted cup, while Al Suwaiq's players received the silver medals. **DETAILS ON P10**

Oman to get more vaccines

MUSCAT: The Sultanate is expected to receive 200,000 doses of Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccines by the end of June or the beginning of July.

This was stated by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, in a statement to Oman News Agency.

The minister said that coordination is under way among governments of the world to regulate the distribution of vaccines and that by the end of this month Oman is likely to receive thousands of doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

Through the 190-strong international vaccine alliance of states, more than 240,000 doses of different vaccines are scheduled to arrive in the Sultanate from mid-March to the beginning of May.

The Ministry of Health is exerting efforts to receive one million doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, said Dr Al Saeedi, noting that a contract will be signed to add 500,000 more doses of Pfizer-BioNTech. He also pointed out that the



The delay in receiving Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is beyond the control of the Ministry of Health. It is a global delay

DR AL SAEEDI
Minister of Health

biggest hurdle towards receiving vaccines is not the financial position, but rather the delay from vaccine producing countries. The Sultanate has so far received a total of 180,000 doses, of which 80,000 were Pfizer-

BioNTech and 100,000 Oxford-AstraZeneca.

"Vaccine supply is a common challenge to all countries of the world", said the minister, adding that the Sultanate has approached many international companies, but it will not endorse any vaccine before checking its validity, safety and efficiency.

VACCINATION

Regretting the fact that some have shunned vaccination with Oxford-AstraZeneca, he reaffirmed that the Sultanate will not receive any vaccine or drug before checking that it is safe and secure for humans.

"The delay in receiving Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is beyond the control of the Ministry of Health. It is a global delay which has occurred when the company opted to expand one of its European factories", he said.

He exhorted citizens, residents and health workers to come forward and take the vaccines which, he said, are effective and secure.

TURN TO P3

Changes in end-of-service benefits for expatriates

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

Dr Mahad bin Said al Baowain, Minister of Labour, has issued a decision amending some provisions of the executive regulations of the Civil Service Law.

Article 1 of the decision stipulates that the text of Article 8 of Appendix No 10 of the executive regulations of the aforementioned Civil Service Law be

replaced by the following text.

The second party (expatriate employee) is entitled upon the termination of his service a grant of one month's salary for each year of his service, up to a maximum of 10 months for those in Grades 1 to 6 and 12 months for Grades 7 to 14.

BENEFITS

These benefits are based on the last salary drawn by the second

party, so that its value does not exceed RO 12,000.

The employee is not entitled to the aforementioned grant if his service period is less than 5 years, unless the termination of service is due to death or inability to work or if he is punished with dismissal from service or if his service is terminated or sentenced to a felony or a punishment for a crime involving dishonour or dishonesty.

TURN TO P3



ABOVE 50% POPULATION OVERWEIGHT

MUSCAT: The Sultanate faces a growing rise in obesity among its population as more than half of the Omani population are now overweight or obese with 30 per cent of the population having a BMI of more than 30. These figures show a rise in the prevalence of obesity in the country since the last survey in 2008, especially among women.

This was stated by Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health while launching a book.

Coinciding with the marking of World Obesity Day, Oman Obesity Briefing Book titled 'Obesity in Oman, a Major Public Health Challenge' was launched on Sunday at the Ministry of Health headquarters. The launch took place through a virtual event held under the auspices of Dr Al Saeedi. This important document has been developed in collaboration between the

National Diabetes and Endocrine Centre (NDEC), the Department of Non-Communicable Disease, the Department of Nutrition, the Oman Diabetes Association and Novo Nordisk, a Danish multinational pharmaceutical company.

He said that there is an increasing recognition worldwide that overweight and obesity are not only problems of individuals but also for the society.

In his address, Dr Al Saeedi said: "The causes of obesity are complex, but one of the key drivers is in the way we eat and how much we move, which is changing dramatically. As a result of change in our environment, unhealthy processed food and the technology that promote sedentary lifestyles has become more readily available. Unfortunately, convenience has led us to adopt an unhealthy lifestyle, which in turn has led to obesity."

TURN TO P3

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 29°C Min 21°C SALALAH: Max 34°C Min 22°C NIZWA: Max 35°C Min 20°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:23 FAJR: 05:08 DHUHR: 12:23 ASR: 15:46 MAGHRIB: 18:18 ISHA: 19:28



Sultanate's Ambassador to Jordan presents credentials

AMMAN: King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein of the sisterly Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan received at Basman Palace on Sunday Shaikh Hilal bin Marhoon bin Salim al Maamari who presented his credentials as the Sultanate's Ambassador to Jordan. The ambassador conveyed the greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik along with his best wishes of good health and wellbeing to his brother King Abdullah II and the Jordanian people further progress and prosperity. King Abdullah II asked the ambassador to convey his greetings and best wishes of good health and wellbeing to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, and the Omani people more progress and prosperity. – ONA

Online lessons to continue in full swing till weekend

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The second semester of the current academic year (2020-2021) in public schools started with distance learning mode on Sunday. The online learning mode will continue till March 11.

The Supreme Committee said it will evaluate developments of the epidemiological situation in the Sultanate during this period and accordingly decide whether to continue online mode or return to blended education.

With the decision, students continue to receive lessons in public schools by distance learning, which is aimed at assuring the continuation of the educational process and maintaining health and safety of students and parents, especially with the seriousness of this stage of Covid-19 in which the

Students continue to receive lessons in public schools by distance learning, which is aimed at assuring the continuation of the educational process and maintaining health and safety of students and parents

disease is spreading at local and global levels.

In the middle of January, the Supreme Committee allowed a gradual return to schools through blended education. This decision was based on many justifications, the most important being the positive results in the application of health protocol in schools, decrease in cases, and also to



increase empowerment of first-stage students with basic skills in reading, writing, mathematical skills, besides the new curricula.

The return was restricted to

the first, fourth, fifth, ninth and eleventh grades, according to the announcement of the Ministry of Education at that time.

Faisal bin Ali al Busaidy,

Assistant Director-General of Information Technology at the Ministry of Education, confirmed that the Sultanate's schools will continue to activate the educational

platforms in the remote education system for various classes through the two platforms, Google Classroom and Mandhara.

He also noted there will be synchronous and asynchronous lessons to complement the efforts made in this aspect during the first semester.

He pointed out that the indicators of the use of educational platforms during the first semester for the various grades were high and very good, whether through sync and async lessons, uploading educational files, assignments, and educational evaluation questions.

Till January the rate of use of educational platforms by schools has exceeded more than 70 million MB. There are more than 150,000 virtual operational classrooms, more than 300,000 daily active users in concurrent classes, and more than 3 million participants.

A mask for special people

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Just as face masks have become a part of life during the pandemic, efforts are on to design unique masks for those special people who are either dumb or deaf or mentally or physically challenged.

Masks for special people are already there in many countries and having them in the Sultanate can help boost those who come under this category.

"The idea of masks for special people during these difficult times of the pandemic is necessitated because they cannot read lips nor can they hear the noise which makes it very difficult for them to communicate. We hope to have similar masks in Oman because it's useful for them and one can easily recognise the deaf people from the logo," said Hamed al Amri, sign language News Reader and translator at Oman TV.

A distinguishable logo indicates that the person who wears the mask is either deaf or dumb or wears a hearing aid or is facing any challenge in terms of physical or mental capabilities.

"Only a very few people know



Hamed al Amri

what this sign means. It's now that we need to look out for people wearing this logo on their

masks," he said.

He further said the deaf also face a challenge when they go to a hospital or a bank or seek any service from any company the staff of which can't understand their language.

"Nowadays, a mask is necessary to be worn everywhere and I think it will be helpful for such challenged people. The GCC countries have started sticking this sign on cars and going the extra mile, we are doing it here with a mask," adds Al Amri.

Expatriate workers' permit fees hike to curb hidden trade

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The decision to increase permit fees of expatriates will help regulate the labour market in the country by curbing the hidden trade also create job opportunities for Omanis in supervisory positions, the government said on Sunday.

The Youth and Human Resources Committee of Majlis Ash'shura discussed on Sunday the implications of the Ministry of Labour's decision to increase the expatriate worker's permit fees and their impact on small and medium enterprises, and the ministerial decision to change the requirements regarding small and medium enterprises.

Majlis Ash'shura hosted Shaikh Nasr bin Amer al Hosani, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour for Labour, and Halima bint Rashid al Zarea, Chair of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority, to seek their opinion.

During the meeting, the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Labour confirmed the decision to increase the fees for a foreign

The decision will work to Omanise the number of technical and specialised jobs, such as engineering specialties. It will also provide facilities for small and medium enterprises, help regulate the labour market, and fight the hidden trade

worker's permit for specified categories and jobs, including leadership and supervisory positions, technical and specialised jobs.

He said that the decision is in the interest of the citizens as it allows them to compete in leadership and supervisory positions in private institutions, and this is one of the recommendations of the Majlis Ash'shura following its study on the Omanisation of supervisory and leadership positions.

He added the decision will

work to Omanise the number of technical and specialised jobs, such as engineering specialties. It will also provide facilities for small and medium enterprises, help regulate the labour market, and fight the hidden trade.

The Chair of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority said the facilities and incentives provided to small and medium enterprises would support these institutions and ensure their sustainability by creating a stimulating environment for enterprises and entrepreneurs.

She said that the decision to increase the fees for an expatriate worker's permit has been studied to ensure that it does not pose a challenge to the owners of small and medium enterprises.

She also talked about the Entrepreneur Card that the authority grants to entrepreneurs who meet the conditions to obtain various facilities and give them priority in awarding tenders and purchases. During her discussion, she dealt with the reasons and justifications for the conditions pertaining to the age of the institution and its owner.

FROM PAGE 1

New cases cross 1,000-mark again

MUSCAT: For the first time since November 1, the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported over 1,000 cases in a single day.

Even if the fact that no cases are reported in Oman during the weekend, the 1,059 reported yesterday was above average for Sundays in the last few months.

The total number of cases registered in the Sultanate is 143,955. MoH reported eight Covid-19-related deaths, taking the death toll to 1,591.

The total recovery cases reached 134,314, or 93.3 per cent of the total cases reported.

Thirty-one were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 217, including 77 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, called on citizens, residents, and workers in the health sector to demand vaccination and the availability of vaccines.

The Minister of Health said that by the end of April, the vaccine will be provided in the private sector for those who wish to receive the vaccination.



Above 50% population overweight

“Even though there is no simple or single solution to the obesity epidemic, if we are to fight this escalating crisis in our societies, a coordinated response that goes beyond the health sector is crucial. Only through the engagement in multi-sector dialogue and relentless commitment to work together on reducing the burden of obesity we can promote health and prevent disease.

“The importance of population-based changes in the socio-environmental variables that influence energy intake and expenditure cannot be stressed enough. Marketing restrictions, dietary guidelines, policies that focus on improving environments like schools and workplaces are only but some of the many interventions that should stop the drastic spreading of obesity,” the minister added.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Noor al Busaidy, Director of National Diabetes and Endocrine Centre, gave an in-depth view of the Oman Obesity Briefing book and said: “This book seeks to inform policymakers, healthcare professionals and the



Coinciding with the celebrations of World Obesity Day, Oman Obesity briefing book titled “Obesity in Oman, a Major Public Health Challenge” was launched on Sunday at the Ministry of Health.

general public of the serious and widespread health challenge of obesity in Oman by highlighting its impact on society and individuals.

“The book also aims to emphasise opportunities for the prevention and management of obesity as a disease as well as showcasing initiatives that have been introduced in Oman to address this issue.”

It is worth mentioning that in 2019, Oman hosted the World Obesity Regional Conference on Women and Child First, and the

Gulf Obesity Surgical Society's sixth annual obesity conference. These events signal that the health community in Oman is committed to addressing the issue of obesity for vulnerable groups and ensuring treatment for people with severe obesity.

However, until obesity is recognised as a serious chronic disease, treatment options are likely to remain limited, despite the substantial impact that obesity can have on the quality of life for individuals and the capacity of healthcare systems. — ONA

Changes in end-of-service benefits for expats

Article 2 of the decision also stipulates that this amendment applies to new expatriate employees and those who have not completed ten years in service.

Article 3 stipulates the cancellation of everything that contradicts this decision or contravenes its provisions.

Appendix 10 of the executive regulations of the Civil Service Law relates to a contract of employment for expatriates to

occupy permanent jobs.

Article 8 before the amendment reads that the second party is entitled upon the end of his service a grant in the amount of one month's salary for each year of his service, up to a maximum of 12 months, calculated on the basis of the last salary he was receiving and deducted from it corresponding to the days that are granted to him as leave without pay.

The second party is not entitled to the aforementioned grant in the following cases if his service period is less than two full years unless the termination of service is due to a reason related to loneliness, death, or lack of health fitness or if his service is terminated due to the issuance of a final judgment against him for a felony or a penalty for a crime involving dishonour or dishonesty.

Sultanate to get more vaccines

From page 1

He reaffirmed that no serious side-effects were registered in the Sultanate or elsewhere in the world so far from Covid-19 vaccines. The minister deplored unfounded rumours and wrong information in circulation via social media about the vaccines.

The minister also expressed his dismay at some health workers' favouring some vaccines over others, noting that such opinions are not based on any scientific evidence.

Dr Al Saeedi asserted that after Oxford-AstraZeneca was administered to scores of millions of people, studies showed that this vaccine — even though it might not be the best — has been equally efficient as other vaccines. In this context, the minister referred to the experience of one of the countries that administered Oxford-AstraZeneca to 140,000 people and found out that it adds extra protection from acute infection and contributes to shorter hospitalisation and cutting down death rates by more than 94 per cent, compared to the products of other companies that have registered only 84 per cent in similar cases (of infections and death).

Dr Al Saeedi underscored the fact that there is scientifically and practically no difference between PfizerBioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines, though one of the two might be available

in more numbers than the other at a certain time.

“New segments of society will be given priority to vaccination,” said the minister, noting that the age limit of target groups will be brought down and that Oman hopes to cover 60 per cent of citizens and residents by the end of this year.

The minister said that the vaccines of some international companies have not yet been given the approval by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and that such companies use the vaccines in their respective regions, but the Sultanate will not accept any vaccine not endorsed by the WHO.

Oman began its National Immunisation Campaign against Covid-19 late last December (2020) at a time the turnout of citizens was initially slow and when Health Ministry officials, governors and walis were in constant contact with citizens to encourage them to join the immunisation drive, said Dr Al Saeedi.

As for the private sector, the supply of vaccines will be made after the ministry has been able to cover the target social segment set by the technical team, said the minister, who explained that this segment, which constitutes 20 per cent or less (of the population), is highly vulnerable to infection and its full coverage is likely to take place during or before the end of April. Then, the vaccines will be made available in the private sector for those wishing to be vaccinated, said the minister. — ONA

Relief from heat likely for next two days

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There will be brief weather relief for the next two days even as some parts of Oman saw a sudden temperature rise.

On March 10 the temperature is expected to rise in the high 30s. During the weekend Suwaiq, Khabourah, Wadi al Maawil, and Suhar touched 40 degrees Celsius.

There will be a drop in temperature during the next two days and will rise again, said weather forecaster at Oman Met Office.

Meanwhile, the desert and



open areas of Dhakhiliyah and North Sharqiyah experienced dusty winds for the last three days. It is likely to stabilise now. The north-westerly winds are

also having an impact on the weather in Oman currently.

“Currently there is clear sky but there are chances of late night and early morning low-level clouds or fog patches in Al Buraimi, North and South Sharqiyah, and parts of Al Wusta,” said the weather forecaster.

The sea state is expected to be moderate at the coast of Musandam and Oman Sea with a maximum height of two meters due to the northwesterly winds, while it is expected to be slender along the Arabian Sea coasts with a maximum wave height of 1.25 metres.

Beware! Fraudsters issuing bogus job letters from abroad

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Companies operating in Oman need to be careful as a new brand of cheats are issuing bogus appointment letters from a foreign land by forging letterheads, seals and other relevant documents of Omani companies.

One such case came to light recently when the top officials of an Omani company started receiving calls from ‘candidates’ who started asking for the modalities of their arrival in Oman to join the ‘new

jobs’.

To the management's utter surprise, the candidates were sent offer letters on the company's letterhead with office seal and signature. All these documents were found to be forged as the company in question did not have any plan to do hiring for any of those positions.

The fraudsters advertised for the positions, did interview and issued offer letters by using forged official stationary of the Oman Construction and Engineering Company.

The company's Managing Director, Rakesh Jha, came to know about the fraud when he received the first call from a ‘shortlisted candidate’ who was keen to know about the job modalities, office location, and other job-related things.

“And from then calls from many other ‘candidates’ came. Not less than 100 calls and mostly from the young job aspirants, who sounded happy about the job, but were very upset when we cleared our stand that we did not advertise any jobs in India and someone did

The fraudsters advertised for the positions, did interview and issued offer letters by using forged official stationary of the Oman Construction and Engineering Company

fraud in our company's name,” said Rakesh Jha.

A total of 774 positions were announced in the advertisement with salaries ranging from RO 190 to 250. The fake job advertisement had all possible details like, “period of employment: 11 months; place of employment: Sultanate of Oman; Working hours: 8 hours, probation period: 1 month; company-owned medical, accommodation, transport, food, and visa for joining. It also had mention of four-hour over-time policy of the company.”

The most surprising element for the Oman Construction and Engineering Company management was the announcement of foreign contact details in the advertisement, which were active.

“At a time when we are fighting the slowdown caused by the Covid-19, this new problem has put us on our toes. We raised the issue at all possible forums and still looking for options so that people involved behind the act are caught and innocent job-seekers are not cheated,” said Rakesh Jha.

CONTROL THE VOLUME

“We ignore or do not notice subtle changes to hearing or small hearing loss. In newborns, if it is not detected at birth, it can create major difficulties for them at school and play.” And for adults, he said, “They may face difficulties in daily lives and still not go to the doctor, which may lead to advanced hearing loss and living in humiliation.”

Hearing impairment also causes problems related to communication, concentration, and job performance. It is a contributing factor to workplace accidents and injuries and may have a negative impact on a worker’s overall abilities.

According to WHO, nearly 700 million of these people will require access to ear and hearing care and other rehabilitation services unless action is taken, the WHO said in its first World Report on Hearing released on March 3. The report outlines efforts to prevent and address hearing loss.

“The point is we know how to prevent this, or at least a lot of it,” WHO expert Shelly Chadha said.

“Untreated hearing loss can have a devastating impact on people’s ability to communicate, to study, and to earn a living,” WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

The WHO estimates that 1.1 billion young people (aged 12-35 years) are at risk of hearing loss due to exposure to noise in recreational settings. Strategic clinical screening can ensure that any loss of hearing and ear diseases can be identified as early as possible.

Once diagnosed, early intervention is key. Medical and surgical treatment can cure most ear diseases while hearing technology like hearing aids and cochlear implants are effective and cost-effective, according to the report. In children, almost 60 per cent of hearing

It also warned that loud sounds and noise may cause hearing loss, including those sounds emanating from personal audio devices such as smartphones, fireworks, and headphones used for long periods and sounds from machines at workplaces.

“The solution is to use personal audio devices or earphones very carefully when listening to music and ensure that volume levels are set to medium limits and only for limited periods of the day,” MoH said.

It also added that the first years in life are the ideal period for the development of speech and language. “Hearing loss has the greatest impact on babies who are born with this condition or are affected soon after birth.”

Workplace noise and vibrations occur at a high level or continue for an extended period, workers are at higher risk of experiencing temporary or permanent hearing loss. Among those at high risk include industrial workers who are exposed to potentially damaging, high-noise situations in factories and even garages.

Noise-induced hearing loss can also cause a wide range of mental disorders, such as irritability, sleep disturbances, anxiety, depression, isolation, and hostility.

Speaking to the *Observer*, a senior ENT specialist at a leading private hospital said,

loss can be prevented through immunisation against rubella and meningitis, improved maternal and neonatal care, and screening for inflammatory diseases of the middle ear. In adults, noise control, safe listening, and good ear hygiene can help maintain good hearing and reduce the potential for hearing loss.

THE HEALTH experts have sounded alarm that many people must be suffering from some sort of hearing loss or other, either undetected or untreated. Nearly 2.5 billion people — or around a quarter of the global population — are projected to have some degree of hearing loss by 2050, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned in its recent report.

Oman’s Ministry of Health (MoH) has urged citizens and residents not to ignore issues related to hearing and ears. “They should not avoid visiting the doctor to examine the ear if required.”

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SOUNDS EMANATING FROM
PERSONAL AUDIO DEVICES SUCH
AS SMARTPHONES, FIREWORKS,
AND HEADPHONES USED
FOR LONG PERIODS CAN
INDUCE HEARING LOSS



Nearly 2.5 billion people – or around a quarter of the global population – are projected to have some degree of hearing loss by 2050



New tools for Covid patients

MUSCAT: The Covid-19 Research Programme of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, has showcased many research projects on the coronavirus pandemic. 'Using clinical ontologies to build a knowledge based clinical decision support system for novel coronavirus (Covid-19) with the adoption of teleconferencing for the primary health centres' by co-principal investigator Dr Sherimon P C from Arab Open

University is among the many research projects funded by the programme.

Dr Sherimon P C and his research team have developed a clinical decision support system (CDSS)/expert system with the adoption of telemedicine for the primary health centres/satellite clinics of Royal Oman Police (ROP) hospitals in Oman to support coronavirus patients.

They also developed an artificial intelligence-based Symp-

tom checker, which can be used by any citizen from home to check for suitable recommendation based on their current symptoms.

The team used ontologies to represent the clinical protocol available to combat Covid-19. Ontologies include concepts (related to medical knowledge), attributes and semantic relationships between these concepts. They also established their own WebRTC based telemedicine application, which is

integrated into the CDSS. They tested the system with sample data, and it was found that the system provides the recommendations and medications as similar to the doctors.

While the medical domain has lot of expert systems to assist health practitioners in diagnosing various diseases, Dr Sherimon P C states that the proposed CDSS for this project is different since the team incorporated artificial intelligence.

SQU signs cooperation programme

MUSCAT: A joint cooperation programme was signed on Sunday between Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit. The programme aims to follow up implementation of Oman Vision 2040 goals, indicators of the university's performance on targets sought to be realised, find incentive work environment to execute programmes pertaining to education and research within the Vision, in addition to devising solutions to tackle obstacles facing such programmes. — ONA



NOTICE

With reference to Nama Holding's Tender Announcement, appeared on Sunday, 7 March 2021 on Oman Daily Observer (Page 7), we kindly ask the bidders to ignore the Tender No.: (EHC/2021/12) with the Tender Name: (VAT Tax Advisory Services for Nama Group).

USED CONSTRUCTION PLANT & EQUIPMENT FOR SALE

Sealed offers are invited by Bahwan Engineering Group for one of their joint ventures for Purchase of Used Construction Plant, Equipment & Material on 'As is where is' basis in Muscat.

Skid Steer Loader (New Holland)	1 no.
Concrete Mixer Machine	2 nos.
Ice Cube Machine	2 nos.
Block Cutting Machine	2 nos.
Step Down Transformer 110v - 5KVA/10kVA	13 nos.
High Pressure Washing Pump	1 no.
Floor Saw Machine (Asphalt/Concrete)	1 no.
Jack Hammer	2 nos.
Air Conditioner (Window) - 1.5T	28 nos.
Air Conditioner (Split) - 1.5T/2T/2.5T	26 nos.
Main Distribution Board (MDB) 1600Amp	1 no.
Sub Main Distribution Board (SMDB) 800Amp	3 nos.
Distribution Board (DB) 16 Way TPN	30 nos.
Feeder Pillar 1600Amp	2 nos.
Portable Ventilator Fan - 12" / 16" with Duct	4 nos.
Concrete Breaker, Drill Machine, Rotary Hammer, Angle Grinder	1 Lot
Concrete Cube Fiber Tub	2 nos.

Interested parties may inspect the materials by contacting Ankit Porwal (95290631)

The Offers shall be deposited in the tender box at purchase department of Bahwan Engineering Company LLC, Ghubra latest by 16th March 2021. Successful bidder will be invited for further action.

Women healthcare workers honoured



STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, MAR 7

As many as 21 frontline warriors, healthcare workers including nurses and other paramedics, have been honoured by Sri Sanjaysai Sewa Organisation International — Oman Chapter.

The medics included 16 lady doctors and 21 nurses from different hospitals across the Sultanate were honoured for their contribution in the face of the pandemic.

Doctors were conferred with 'Jyoti Ratna' award while paramedics were

bestowed with 'Prema Ratna' awards for the year 2021.

The awards were presented by the committee members in different places.

"With supreme kindness risking their lives with duty consciousness the health sector has worked tirelessly to protect humane race from perils which is still continuing. Service to human is service to God and that's what we have been experiencing. May our prayers be on all and may the pandemic end soon," Chitra Narayan, representative of the Oman Chapter, said.

E-service launched for education certificate issuance

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, has launched an electronic service whereby applicants can get their certificates attested. The e-copy, to be applied for online, will substitute the paper copy that was issued by the ministry earlier. The service is a step forward in the government's efforts to shift to electronic transformation and provide a satisfactory user experience through the streamlining of procedures.

Data from the annual report of the Department of Qualification Equivalence and Accreditation 2020 shows that the ministry's electronic system (Asas) received about 12,321 attestation applications for the verification of qualifications obtained abroad, less by 24.1pc compared to such applications filed in 2019 (which stood at 16,235).

— ONA



Call for Ordinary Annual General Meeting (AGM) (Super International SAOC)

The Board of Directors of Super International S.A.O.C. inviting Its Shareholders to attend the AGM Meeting at the given date time and venue.

The Agenda and terms of the meeting are attached to the Shareholder reports. The shareholder has the right to appoint any other person on his behalf to attend the meeting and vote on his behalf on the decisions taken by the Board.

You are requested to be at least half an hour ahead of time in the meeting.

Any enquiry on the agenda can be answered by

Mr. Younis Al Namani GSM # 92949673.

Meeting Date: 24th March 2021.

Time: 12:00 Noon.

Venue: Super Plaza – 2nd Floor. Way No. 4805 – Al Azaeba Muscat – Sultanate of Oman

MAJIS INDUSTRIAL SERVICES SAOC (Majis) TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT



Majis Industrial Services SAOC (Majis) is a closely held joint stock company fully owned by the Government of Oman. Majis is engaged in providing various water utility services at the Sohar Industrial Port Area, Sohar Free Zone and Madayan.

Tenders are invited from the similarly experienced local companies for the following tender:

Sl. No.	Tender No.	Tender Description	Bids less In R.O.	Last date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Last date for tender Submission
1.	Majis/5/2021	CCWS LV Power Supply Upgradation at Sohar Industrial Port area	125/-	18th March 2021	18th April 2021
2.	Majis/6/2021	RO Plant VFD 1 & 2 Upgradation for Process water Train at Sohar Industrial Port area	125/-	18th March 2021	18th April 2021

Bidders who have made electronic transfer of bid fee will be emailed soft copy of the tender document on the Thursday 18th March 2021. The companies participating must be registered with Majis' in e-tendering system (<http://tendering.majis.com/VendorLogin.aspx>) during the tendering stage. The payment of bid fee should be made by direct transfer to the following bank account of Majis. (Account Name: Majis Industrial Services SAOC, Bank : Bank Muscat SAOG, Account Number: 0423010783830018).

While making payment by direct bank transfer name of the firm should be clearly mentioned and an email sent to tender@miscoman.com with a copy of the money transmittal advice. Tender documents will be emailed to such firms only.

The Tender should be delivered in sealed envelopes, addressed to the Management Committee, Majis Industrial Service SAOC, P.O. Box No. 553, Falaj Al Qabail, Postal Code 322, Sultanate of Oman (at Majis's reception).

Tenderers must not display their identities on envelopes. Majis is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Questions regarding this procurement process shall be directed to tender@miscoman.com.



Taghleef Industries SAOC

P.O. Box 38, PC 327, Sohar Industrial Estate, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 26751823/24, Fax: 26751822

Invitation and Agenda of the Annual Ordinary General Meeting of Taghleef Industries SAOC 24th March 2021

The Board of Directors of Taghleef Industries SAOC is pleased to invite the shareholders to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting to be held on **Wednesday, 24th March 2021 at 4.30PM** via the electronic platform for general meetings which may be accessed through Muscat Clearing and Depository's website (www.mcd.gov.om). In the event that the quorum to convene the Annual General Meeting is not complete, the second general meeting will be convened on **Tuesday, 30th March 2021 at 4.30pm** to discuss the following agenda:

- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the activities of the Company and its financial status for the financial year ended on 31 December 2020.
- To consider and approve the Board of Directors' Report on the organization and management of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2020.
- To consider the Auditor's Report on the financial statements of the Company for the financial year ended on 31 December 2020.
- To notify the general assembly of the related party transactions entered into by the Company during the financial year ended on 31 December 2020.
- To consider and approve the related party transactions which will be entered into by the Company during the financial year ending on 31 December 2021.
- To consider and approve the proposal to distribute cash dividends (by the date of AGM) for the financial year ended on 31 December 2020 at the rate of RO 0.500 Baizas for each share from retained earnings to the shareholders.
- To appoint Auditors for the Financial Year ended 31 December 2021 and specify their fees.

Pursuant to the Articles of Association of the Company and the Rules for Convening General Meetings of Closed Joint Stock Companies issued by the Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, we would like to bring your attention to the following:

- Only juristic persons shall have the right to appoint a proxy to attend the Annual Ordinary General Meeting and vote on their behalf via electronic means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.
- Voting on any of the items on the agenda shall commence no more than three days before the date of the general meeting and until the voting process ends on the day of the meeting. If a shareholder's balance is increased or decreased, the voting process will be cancelled, and the shareholder must cast his vote again on the day of the general meeting.

To prevent delay in starting the meeting, shareholders are requested to attend the meeting at least half an hour before the scheduled meeting time.

For any clarification regarding the matters mentioned in the above agenda, please contact Mr. Khaled Kharousi on 26650229 OR Mr. Zacharias Chacko on 26650268.

Chairman



Ministry of Interior
Governor of Al-Batinah North

Advertisement

Companies specialized in the field of this Tender may obtain tender documents for the following tenders, on any working day between 8:00 a.m. and 1:00 Noon, from Quantity Surveying & Contracts Office, Suhar Municipality Building on payment of non-refundable tender fee as noted below:

Tender No.	Description of Work	Tender Fee (non refundable)	Start Date for Selling Tender	Last Date for Selling Tender	Site Visit Date	Return Date
PRS/20/001 (Re-Tender)	Drilling of New Bore Well at Al-One's Park	R.O. 25	Monday 08/03/2021	Wednesday 17/03/2021	Thursday 18/03/2021	Monday 22/03/2021
PRS/20/023 (Re-Tender)	Cleaning of Buildings	R.O. 90	Monday 08/03/2021	Wednesday 17/03/2021	Thursday 18/03/2021	Monday 22/03/2021
PRS/21/001	Supply of Maintenance Materials	R.O. 35	Sunday 14/03/2021	Thursday 08/04/2021	-	Wednesday 14/04/2021
PRS/21/002	Re-Location of Electrical Utilities at Suhar	R.O. 35	Monday 08/03/2021	Wednesday 17/03/2021	Thursday 18/03/2021	Monday 22/03/2021
PRS/21/003	Dismantling and Convert of Existing Vehicle Body (Refuse Collector)	R.O. 25	Monday 08/03/2021	Thursday 01/04/2021	Sunday 04/04/2021	Wednesday 07/04/2021
PRS/21/004	Construction of Associate Buildings (Carwash & Office Rooms) Different Locations	R.O. 25	Monday 08/03/2021	Thursday 01/04/2021	Sunday 04/04/2021	Wednesday 07/04/2021
PRS/21/005	Supply of Camcorder and Accessories	R.O. 25	Monday 08/03/2021	Thursday 01/04/2021	-	Wednesday 07/04/2021

The Form of Tender (in small envelope) under wax sealed cover shall be placed in the tender box location in our Quantity Surveying & Contracts Office, by 10.00 a.m. All envelopes are to be clearly marked with the name of the Governor of Al-Batinah North and no other marks.

The Tenderers shall submit with Form of the Tender (Financial Offer) a Certified Cheque or Tender Bond in the sum of 1% of the tender value valid for 90 days, issued by a locally registered bank in the Sultanate of Oman. Tenders without such bond shall be rejected.

Comments:

- has the right to distribution items or works or quantities there of between more than one contractor without giving reasons to the bidder.
- The Tender Committee is not obliged to accept the lowest or any tender that may



www.sm.gov.om



@Suhar_Mun



Hotline: 80000007

Pope prays for ‘victims of war’



Young women dressed in traditional Kurdish clothing wait for the arrival of Pope Francis at the Franso Hariri Stadium in Arbil. – AFP



Pope Francis arrives to hold a mass at the Grand Immaculate Church in Qaraqosh. – Reuters

MOSUL: Pope Francis prayed on Sunday for “victims of war” in northern Iraq, where the IS group ravaged one of the world’s oldest Christian communities until the fighters defeat three years ago.

With the partially collapsed walls of the centuries-old Al Tahera (Immaculate Conception) Church behind him, Pope Francis pleaded for Christians in Iraq and the Middle East to stay in their homelands.

The 84-year-old pontiff said the “tragic” exodus of Christians from Iraq and the wider region “does incalculable harm not just to the individuals and communities concerned, but also to the society they leave behind”.

The IS onslaught forced hundreds of thousands of Christians in northern Iraq’s Nineveh province to flee. The

country’s Christian population has shrunk to fewer than 400,000 from around 1.5 million before the US-led invasion of 2003.

The faithful had gathered on Sunday in the courtyard of the Al Tahera Church, whose roof collapsed during fighting against IS in 2017. It is one of the oldest of at least 14 churches in Nineveh province that were destroyed by fighters.

The heaviest deployment of security personnel yet has been mobilised to protect Francis in northern Iraq on what is perhaps the riskiest day of his historic trip to a country where state forces are still hunting IS sleeper cells.

But the Pope appeared not to be fazed, as he was driven around Mosul’s historic Old City — largely razed during the grinding fight to dislodge the fighters — in

Pope’s trip to Iraq as a ‘pilgrim of peace’ aims to reassure the country’s dwindling Christian community, but also to expand his dialogue with other religions

a golf cart.

The visit to the north embodies a cause close to the Pope’s heart: Iraq’s traumatised Christian community.

Watching from afar as IS swept across Nineveh in 2014, Pope Francis said at the time he was ready to come and meet the displaced and other victims of war in a show of solidarity.

He finally fulfilled his promise

on Sunday, holding a prayer service in Qaraqosh, whose ancient church — named Al Tahera, like the one in Mosul — was torched by the fighters, who largely also destroyed the town itself.

Residents of Qaraqosh have since rebuilt their homes with little government help and Al Tahera too has been refurbished, its imposing marble floors and internal colonnades buffed to host its most important guest yet.

Dressed in traditional embroidered robes, hundreds of the faithful — who speak a modern dialect of Aramaic, the language spoken by Jesus Christ — welcomed the pontiff with hymns and olive branches.

“Do not stop dreaming! Do not give up! Do not lose hope!” Francis urged those gathered.

Abbas battles party discord ahead of elections

RAMALLAH: Facing elections for the first time in 15 years, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is battling a growing rift within his powerful Fatah party that poses a new threat to his dominance over Palestinian politics.

A breakaway bid by one of Abbas’s party allies has intensified speculation he might cancel a presidential vote planned for July, fearing a potential challenge by Marwan Barghouti, a popular Palestinian leader jailed by Israel.

Abbas’s office denies he has plans to delay or scrub the presidential vote.

Barghouti, now 61, was a driving force in Palestinians’ 2000-2005 uprising in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. He was sentenced by an Israeli court in 2004 to life imprisonment after being convicted over multiple lethal attacks on Israelis by Palestinian activists. Barghouti has always denied the charges.

Abbas, 85, has ruled the Palestinian Authority (PA) in self-rule areas of the West Bank by decree for over a decade. In January, he announced presidential and legislative ballots - a move largely seen as a response



Nasser al Qudwa speaks during an interview in Ramallah. – Reuters

to domestic and Western criticism of his presidency’s democratic legitimacy.

Adding to that criticism is Nasser al Qudwa, a longtime member of Fatah’s top Central Committee who last week announced he was forming a new list that would run separately from Fatah in the legislative election, in May.

“(Palestinians) are fed up with the current situation ... internal behaviour or misbehaviour, things like the absence of the rule of the law, the absence of equality, the absence of fairness,” Qudwa, a nephew of late Fatah founder and Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat, said.

It is rare for leaders on the 19-member Central Committee members to publicly break with Abbas.

— AFP

Gaza girl dons 3D-printed mask to heal burnt face

NUSEIRAT, Palestinian Territories: The moment Maram al Amawi gets back from school, she slips on the 3D-printed mask that covers her face and treats her severe burns from a blaze at a Gaza bakery. But she doesn’t go out in the streets for fear of being made fun of.

Eight-year-old Maram was severely burned a year ago in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nuseirat, in the central Gaza Strip.

The inferno, which local authorities said was caused by a gas leak, left 25 dead and dozens injured, and ravaged several shops.

Today, she and her mother, who was also seriously injured on

the face and hands, wear transparent plastic masks developed by medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF).

The 3D-printed mask puts pressure on the face and advances the healing process, explains Firas Suergo, head of physiotherapy for MSF in Gaza. The patient’s face is copied using a 3D scanner, which then allows the printing of a customised plastic mask.

Since the launch of the project in April 2020, which has also been run in Jordan and Haiti, around 20 people have been fitted in Gaza, an enclave of two million Palestinians wedged between Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea.



Palestinian Izdihar al Amawi combs her daughter Maram’s hair at home in Gaza City. – AFP

The fitted mask, with adjustable straps to hold onto the face, has to be worn for between six months and a year, depending on the severity of the lesions.

Even though her mask is transparent and fits perfectly with the contours of her soft face, Maram is afraid of being pointed at in the playground.

“The mask has made my burns better, but I’m afraid people will laugh at me if I wear it outside the house,” the girl shyly confesses, dressed in the black-and-white striped lace uniform of her school, which is run by the UN agency for Palestinian refugees.

“I put it on as soon as I get

home from classes.” In fact, she wears it eight hours a day.

As for her mother Izdihar al Amawi, 31, she keeps her mask on for 16 hours, only removing it during the day to eat.

At night, she wears another mask, and she also has special gloves for burns on her hands.

“Our wounds have improved thanks to the mask,” says Izdihar, who now manages to go about household chores like before the accident.

“We were waiting for the taxi after shopping and we suddenly heard a big explosion, then saw fire everywhere,” she recalls. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ALGIERS

Seven dead in Algeria torrential floods

At least seven people died and three were unaccounted for after floods caused by torrential rains in northwestern Algeria, the country’s civil protection agency said.

Three men, two women, a five-year-old boy and a girl of 12 died after vehicles they were travelling in were swept away in the Chlef region on Saturday, the agency said.

Rescue workers said they were still looking for three other people, including one child, who



had been travelling in one of the vehicles.

The national meteorological office predicted more torrential rain will hit the north of the country. — AFP

GAZA CITY

Explosion kills three fishermen off Gaza

Three Palestinian fishermen were killed when their boat exploded off Gaza’s coast in the Mediterranean Sea, the fishermen’s union said, with the cause of the blast unknown. Israel’s army said it was “not responsible for the incident”.

“According to our information, the cause of the explosion came from the Gaza Strip,” the army said on Twitter.

Nizar Ayyash, head of Gaza’s fishermen union, confirmed



the deaths 15 nautical miles off the coast of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza. Ayyash said the deaths were caused by “shells of unknown origin (striking) their boat”. — AFP

DUBAI

Iran frees aid worker Zaghari-Ratcliffe

Iran has released British-Iranian aid worker Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, her lawyer Hojjat Kermani told Iranian website Emtedad, after her five-year prison sentence for plotting to overthrow the clerical establishment.

“She was pardoned by Iran’s Supreme Leader last year, but spent the last year of her term under house arrest with electronic shackles tied to her feet. Now they’re cast off,” Kermani told the website. “She has been freed.”



Kermani was quoted as saying that “a hearing for Zaghari’s second case has been scheduled at branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court of Tehran” according to the website.

— Reuters

In brief

■ KATHMANDU

NEPAL SIGNS
HISTORIC PEACE
DEAL WITH REBELS

An outlawed Maoist group accused of staging several attacks signed a peace deal with Nepal's communist government, bringing an end to the country's only active insurgency. Jubilant Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli hailed the deal as "historic" at a gathering with the group's leader Netra Bikram Chand, who came out of hiding for the signing.

Nepal has enjoyed relative peace since 2006, when a decade-long civil war ended and most rebels joined mainstream politics.

But some hardline guerrillas formed a new Communist Party of Nepal, accusing their former leaders of betraying their revolutionary cause. — AFP

■ COLOMBO

LANKA DEMANDS
ACTION ON EASTER
BOMBINGS PROBE

The leader of Sri Lanka's Catholics demanded that the government find the perpetrators of deadly Easter attacks two years ago, as black-clad worshippers held silent protests outside the capital's churches.

No one has been prosecuted over the bombings at three hotels and three churches in Colombo that killed 279 people on April 21, 2019, although a local investigation found that followers of a group were behind them. — AFP

Unions call for strike in Myanmar

YANGON: Myanmar's major trade unions called on members to shut down the economy from Monday to support a campaign against last month's coup, turning up the pressure on the junta as security forces cracked down on demonstrators staging widespread protests.

"To continue economic and business activities as usual...will only benefit the military as they repress the energy of the Myanmar people," an alliance of nine unions said.

"The time to take action in defence of our democracy is now. We call for...the full extended shutdown of the Myanmar economy," they said in a joint statement.

A spokesman for the military did not answer calls seeking comment. The call by the unions came as an official from the party of deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi died overnight in police custody. The cause of death of National League for Democracy official Khin Maung Latt was not known.

Ba Myo Thein, a member of the upper house of parliament which was dissolved after the coup, said reports of bruising to Khin Maung Latt's head and body raised suspicions that he had been abused.

"It seems that he was arrested at night and tortured severely," he said. "This is totally unacceptable."



Myanmar migrants in Thailand at a protest against the military coup in their home country, in front of the United Nations ESCAP building in Bangkok. — AFP

Police in Pabedan, the Yangon district where Khin Maung Latt was arrested, declined to comment.

Some of the biggest protests in recent weeks were staged on Sunday. Police fired stun grenades and tear gas to break up a sit-in by tens of thousands of people in Mandalay, the Myanmar Now media group said. At least 70 people were arrested.

Police also launched tear gas

One of the biggest
days of protest since
February 1 coup, over
50 people killed by
security forces so far

and stun grenades in the direction of protesters in Yangon and in the town of Lashio in the northern Shan region, videos posted on Facebook showed.

A witness said police opened fire to break up a protest in the historic temple town of Bagan and several residents said in social media posts that live bullets were used.

Video posted by Myanmar Now showed soldiers beating up men in Yangon, where at least three protests were held despite overnight raids by security forces on campaign leaders and opposition activists. — Reuters

US defence
chief Austin
likely to visit
India soon

NEW DELHI: US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin is likely to visit India next week, an Indian government source said on Sunday, as the two allies seek to deepen military ties to counter the growing power of China in the Asia-Pacific region.

The first person visit by a top official of the new US President Joe Biden's administration will focus on enhancing cooperation, said the source, who declined to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Austin plans to meet Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during his visit some time in the week of March 15, the official added.

The first Black US defence chief will join Secretary of State Antony Blinken on a visit to Japan and South Korea, sources said on Thursday.

It was not immediately clear if Blinken will also visit India.

The US Embassy in New Delhi referred a request for comment to the Defence Department, which could not be reached outside regular business hours. — Reuters

Giant clam shells worth \$3.3m seized in Philippine raid

MANILA: Philippine authorities have seized illegally harvested giant clam shells worth \$3.3 million as smugglers turn to the endangered creatures as a substitute for the illicit ivory trade.

In one of the biggest operations of its kind in the country, 80 tonnes of the tropical species were discovered in a village on a remote island in the western archipelago of Palawan, officials said on Friday.



The Philippine Coast Guard seized a total of 324 pieces of giant clam shells weighing 80 tonnes.

The Philippines is home to most of the world's giant tropical clam species, which are considered threatened in the country as poaching surges.

Conservationists say their shells are used as an alternative material for products ranging from earrings to chandeliers as ivory becomes scarce amid a global crackdown on the illegal trade in elephant tusks.

Marine troops, the coastguard and local

conservation officials raided local homes on Johnson Island on Wednesday, unearthing more than 300 clam shells with a value of around \$3.3 million on the black market.

Among them was the *Tridacna gigas*, the world's largest clam, which can grow a shell up to 4.6 feet long.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature considers *Tridacna gigas* a "vulnerable" species. — AFP

S Korea, US scale back military drill

SEOUL: South Korea and the United States will conduct its springtime military exercise this week, but the joint drill will be smaller than usual because of the coronavirus pandemic, Seoul said on Sunday.

The allies will begin a nine day "computer-simulated command post exercise" on Monday, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

South Korea and the United States decided to move forward with the drills after "comprehensively taking into consideration the Covid-19 situation, the maintenance of the combat readiness posture, the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and the establishment of peace," the JCS said, noting that the exercise is "defensive" in nature.

The drills will not include outdoor manoeuvres, which have been carried out throughout the year, and the number of troops and equipment will be minimised due to the pandemic, Yonhap news agency reported.

The exercises also provide a



South Korean Navy's special forces participating in a military drill.

— AFP File Photo

chance to assess South Korea's readiness to take over wartime operational control (OPCON), and the series of scaled back drills could complicate President Moon Jae-in's drive to complete the transfer before his term ends in 2022.

Even before the pandemic the drills had been reduced to facilitate US negotiations aimed

at dismantling Pyongyang's nuclear programmes.

The combined drills are closely monitored by North Korea which calls them a "rehearsal for war". While Pyongyang has sometimes responded to such drills with its own shows of military force, it may be unlikely to do so this time, said Chad O'Carroll,

CEO of Korea Risk Group, which monitors North Korea.

"I think there's too much on the domestic agenda going wrong to risk any significant tit-for-tat escalation," he said on Twitter. "And this is a government which tends to focus most of its resources on dealing with one key issue at a time." — AFP



الشركة المتحدة للتمويل ش.م.ع.
United Finance Company SAOG

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The Board of Directors of the United Finance Co. SAOG (UFC) is pleased to invite the shareholders of the company to attend Annual Ordinary General Meeting of UFC scheduled to be held on Monday, 22nd March 2021 at 3.00 PM. Via the electronic platform to hold general meetings which can be accessed through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, the second Annual Ordinary General Meeting will be held at 3:00 pm on Monday 29/3/2021 to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31.12.2020.
2. To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended on 31.12.2020.
3. To consider the Statutory Auditor's Report and approve the audited Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account for the financial year ended on 31.12.2020.
4. Approve the sitting fees paid to the Board of Directors for attending the Board and the Board Committee meetings for the financial year 2020 and to approve the sitting fees for the current financial year 2021 (as per annexure).
5. To notify the meeting with the related parties transactions during the financial year ended 31.12.2020 (as per the annexure attached).
6. To appoint Statutory Auditors for the financial year 2021 and specify their fees

According to the Company's Articles of Associations and the controls for holding General Meetings using electronic platform issued by the CMA, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Juristic person, only has the right to appoint a natural person as a proxy to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCD.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

In case of any enquiry please contact **Mr. Ali bin Jaffar bin Mohammad** on (968) 24577373, Mobile No: (968) 99245088, Fax No. (968) 24560885.

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Advisor

Biden’s Covid rescue plan clears Senate

WASHINGTON: The US Senate on Saturday passed President Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief plan in a party-line vote after an all-night session that was delayed repeatedly as the Republican minority tried but failed to push through around three dozen amendments.

The plan passed in a 50-49 vote with the support of every Democrat but no Republicans. It is one of the largest stimulus bills in US history and gives Biden his first major legislative victory since taking office in January.

The partisan victory was made possible by Democrats winning two Senate seats in Georgia special elections in January, giving them narrow control of the chamber.

Biden said on Saturday he hoped for quick passage of the revised bill by the House of Representatives so he could sign it and start sending \$1,400 direct payments to Americans.

“This plan will get checks out the door starting this month to the American people, who so desperately need the help,” Biden said at the White House after the vote. The final bill includes \$400 billion in one-time payments of \$1,400 to many Americans, with a phase-out starting for those with annual incomes above \$75,000.

It also includes \$300 a week in extended jobless benefits for the 9.5 million people thrown out of work in the crisis.



Members of the National Guard walk past the US Capitol after the Senate passed President Biden’s \$1.9 trillion Covid-19 relief plan in a party-line vote in Washington, US. — Reuters

Democrats agreed to reduce those benefits from \$400 a week in order to secure passage in the Senate. They want the bill signed into law before current unemployment benefits expire on March 15.

About \$350 billion in aid was also set aside for state and local governments that have seen the pandemic blow a hole in their budgets.

House of Representatives Majority Leader Steny Hoyer said on Twitter that the House will vote

on Tuesday on the Senate-passed bill.

Democrats broke out in applause amid passage of the bill in the Senate on Saturday and liberal independent Senator Bernie Sanders fist-bumped Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

Schumer said the bill would help the country get the upper hand against a pandemic that has killed more than 520,000 people across the United States and upended most aspects of daily life. “I want the American people

to know that we’re going to get through this and someday soon our businesses will reopen, our economy will reopen and life will reopen,” Schumer said.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, however, had harsh words about the measure. “The Senate has never spent \$2 trillion in a more haphazard way or through a less rigorous process,” he said.

Republicans had sought a new round of aid about one-third the size of Biden’s plan.



Biden said he hoped for quick passage of the revised bill by the House of Representatives so he could sign it

McConnell argued that even without this legislation, “2021 is already set to be our comeback year” because of relief bills enacted last year.

The measure comes as an increasing number of states have relaxed restrictions designed to curb the pandemic.

Texas earlier this week allowed most businesses to operate at full capacity and California saying it would soon allow Disneyland and other theme parks as well as sports stadiums to reopen at limited capacity.

But even as more and more Americans get vaccinated against Covid-19, top infectious disease official Dr Anthony Fauci has said that “now is not the time to pull back.” — Reuters

Oppn claims victory as Ivory Coast counts votes

ABIDJAN: Ivory Coast’s main opposition party on Sunday claimed victory in legislative elections in the West African nation, alleging that preliminary results were riddled with irregularities.

“We think we have around 128 seats with our allies” in the 255-seat National Assembly, top party official Niamkey Koffi told a news conference in the economic capital Abidjan the day after the polls.

“Our concern is that the results may be manipulated,” said Koffi of the centre-right Ivory Coast Democratic Party (PDCI), warning the government against “any attempt to falsify” them.

The statement came after the independent electoral commission announced early provisional results, which Koffi said were “strewn with fraud, tampering and manipulation”.

Saturday’s elections were a key test of stability four months after the violence before and after a presidential vote claimed 87 lives in the former French colony. — AFP

Pressure mounts on Senegal’s president after deadly protests

DAKAR: Senegalese President Macky Sall faced mounting pressure to speak out after a wave of deadly violence rocked the country.

Five people including a schoolboy have been killed in days of clashes that erupted after the arrest of an opposition leader, the worst violence in years in a country usually seen as a beacon of stability in a volatile region.

People torched cars, looted shops and hurled stones at police during the protests, which have highlighted longstanding grievances over living standards and economic exclusion in the West African state.

The unrest has alarmed the United Nations and Senegal’s neighbours, which have appealed for all sides to show restraint.

Senegal’s government ombudsman Alioune Badara Cisse also urged Sall to respond to the violence, as the country braced for a new round of opposition protests from



A young boy collects food and drinks from a burnt down and looted Auchan supermarket in the up-market area of Almadies in Dakar. — AFP

Monday.

“Senegalese people want to hear you,” Cisse said at a press conference in the capital Dakar. “Why the devil wouldn’t you talk to them?”

“Do it before it’s too late,” added Cisse, who formerly served as a foreign minister under Sall but whose role as ombudsman is to mediate between government institutions and to safeguard human rights. — AFP

Boris expresses gratitude to health workers

LONDON: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson expressed his gratitude on Sunday to health workers, responding to criticism over his government’s pay proposal by saying he had tried to give the service as much as he could.

Johnson, who himself was treated in hospital last year when he became severely ill with Covid-19, has come under fire for failing to meet his promise to look after health workers who have been fighting a coronavirus pandemic for more than a year by proposing a 1 per cent pay increase for the National Health Service.

Earlier, Britain’s opposition Labour Party stepped up its criticism of the government’s budget, calling the pay offer to health workers “reprehensible” and pledging to vote against its freeze on income tax thresholds.

But Johnson defended his government by saying it was investing in the National Health Service and that “we have tried to give the NHS as much as we



Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson bumps elbows with a member of the public during a visit to a Covid-19 vaccination centre at a church in north London. — AFP

possibly can”.

Last week, his government set out its plans to help the economy weather the Covid-19 crisis, with Finance Minister Rishi Sunak promising to do “whatever it takes to support the British people and businesses”.

And while Johnson enjoys a

large majority in the lower house of parliament, his Conservative government’s plans have come under fire for what some say is its targeting of lower- and middle-income earners and not being generous enough to health workers, after a year of battling the coronavirus pandemic.

The opposition Labour Party has stepped up its criticism of the budget, calling the pay offer to health workers ‘reprehensible’

Johnson, who was the face of Britain’s campaign to leave the European Union in a 2016 referendum, promoted what has become a disputed promise that Brexit would free up an extra £350 million a week for the NHS.

But in the budget, the government proposed the 1 per cent pay rise for NHS workers, an offer one nurses union, the Royal College of Nursing, called “pitiful” and has threatened to strike over.

Labour, which is flagging in opinion polls despite criticism of Johnson’s uneven handling of the pandemic, has called on the government to stand by what it said was an earlier commitment to hand NHS workers a 2.1 per cent pay increase. — Reuters

ROME

Mayor accused of vaccine queue-jumping resigns

A town mayor in Italy’s Sicily region said he was stepping down after coming under fire for jumping the queue for coronavirus vaccinations. “I spent a sleepless night thinking about this decision and I concluded that it is right for me to resign,” Nicolo Nicolosi, 78, told the ANSA news agency.

Nicolosi, mayor of Corleone, a small town near Palermo, said he was quitting “even if I insist that I made the right choice in getting vaccines for me and city



councillors.” Press reports said police were investigating the mayor and other members of the municipal government, and had reported the case to local prosecutors. — AFP

LONDON

Brexit campaigner Nigel withdraws from politics

British politician and Brexit campaigner Nigel Farage has announced he is retiring from politics and stepping down from his role as chairman of the Reform UK party. Brexit is done and there is no going back on that, Farage told the *Telegraph* newspaper.

Farage, a populist who led the campaign to take Britain out of the European Union, said he had planned to retire a few times before, but this time he really was leaving the political stage.



His previous party, the UK Independence Party (Ukip), was considered a driving force behind Britain’s departure from the EU following the 2016 referendum.

— dpa

PRAGUE

Virus on rise as Czech govt warns of ‘most critical’ week

The Czech Republic is bracing for a rise in the number of patients with Covid-19 who require intensive care, as Health Minister Jan Blatny warned next week “will be the most critical.”

Blatny, speaking on broadcaster CT on Sunday, said that he expected up to 300 doctors and 1,000 nurses from outpatient services to have to work in hospitals in order to deal with the expected increase.

Nearly 7,900 people were being treated in hospital on



Sunday, 1,700 of whom were in serious condition or required a ventilator. As a way to stem the rising figures, lockdown measures were recently tightened in the country. — dpa

Finding a job in times of pandemic!

Throughout lifetime, people experience various challenges that are not only puzzling, but frightening too. Some obstacles are like scary nightmares chasing people and irritating them all the time. Getting a job to make a living probably comes on top of the list of those challenges being faced by many. Thousands of youth, especially fresh graduates, are driven crazy by the nightmarish job-seeking mission. Today, getting a job is becoming a disappointing dream to hunt for many!

Undoubtedly, getting a job is highly significant as it leads other life priorities. Having a job is more than just about making a living; it satisfies one's dignity and personal interests too. It brings to people a sense of self-respect and self-worth instead of being dependent on others like family for instance. For men, particularly, getting a source of income is significantly essential and a priority, otherwise, they feel useless and hopeless.

Making a living is a hard personal necessity and job hunting is becoming a mission impossible nowadays. With the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic, it has become even harder for job-seekers to get employed. Lockdowns and decline in business, which could lead to bankruptcy sometimes, are shrinking job opportunities. Rather it was a cause to sack employees from



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WITH THE
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EVEN HARDER
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SEEKERS TO GET
EMPLOYED

their jobs. Such sad outcomes have affected the lives of many families and individuals alike.

Unfortunately, the common excuse that most employers are attributing to is the Covid-19 pandemic and its challenges. This had been an excuse even for none or less affected employers! Nobody knows whether recruitment process had been stopped during the pandemic or it was limited to skilled people! Regardless, the market has been recovering as this pandemic has lasted for over a year now. Thus, definitely there would be some job openings every now and then. Likewise, some businesses have been recovering over the time and could accommodate some job-seekers.

Unluckily, what happens is that preference in jobs is sometime given to expats rather than Omanis. This could take place in different public and private companies. Possibly, this might happen for the sake of getting the expertise of expats or having an advantage of their low wages compared to locals. However, this is not always the case as the expertise sometime could be obtained from skilful Omanis. In some cases, Omanis are not given the chance to prove themselves or even show their expertise.

The competition is extremely challenging among job-seekers due to a shortfall in jobs. Another factor

that makes the competition is even harder for Omanis is the increase in employed expats. There is no harm in having expat colleagues from whom we can learn due to their expertise and proficiency. However, the competition should always be fair, although Omanis must be accorded priority in contributing in building the future of their country.

Accordingly, the replacement drive, which the government has last year called for in all government bodies and corporates will have a good impact to solve the employment issue in the Sultanate. More job opportunities will be offered to Omani job-seekers. Thanks to the wise policies of the government for taking this call and looking forward for more initiatives in regard to overcoming the employment dilemma in the country.

However, it is the role of all private and government bodies to truly work towards putting this direction in place. It is time now to join forces of government or private employers to support Omani youth by providing them all possible opportunities. New openings should be created to enrol youth in all sectors and allow them play their role in building the nation. If it is seriously implemented, then many job-seekers will come out of their nightmare and start making their dreams come true.

WRITE FOR US

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

THINK BIG

Can Biden get infrastructure done?

ELI STOKOLS

When president Barack Obama outlined plans to overhaul the nation's infrastructure, Republicans blocked them. President Donald Trump declared it to be "infrastructure week" so often that the phrase became a running joke, yet he failed to follow through with legislation.

Now President Joe Biden, eager to act boldly, believes he can succeed where his predecessors did not.

Holding his second meeting in a month on the subject last Thursday, Biden made clear

that he intends to focus on another multi-trillion dollar legislative package after Congress sends the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan to his desk this month — the next one a massive infrastructure initiative along the lines of FDR's federal works projects of the 1930s.

It not only creates jobs, but it makes us a hell of a lot more competitive around the world if we have the best infrastructure in the world

JOE BIDEN
US President

"It not only creates jobs, but it makes us a hell of a lot more competitive around the world if we have the best infrastructure in the world", Biden said at the outset of The Oval Office meeting with Vice President Kamala Harris, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and a bipartisan group of lawmakers.

Leaving the White House afterwards, the Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Representative Peter A DeFazio, D-Oregon, told reporters that the president "wants to move as quickly as possible."

"He wants it to be very big, and he feels that this is the key to the recovery package", DeFazio said.

As with the pandemic relief package, Biden plans to promote an infrastructure plan by emphasising the urgent need for ambitious actions to help the country recover economically and compete with China.

For years, both major parties have called for modernising the country's highways, roads, airports, rail lines, broadband networks and power grids. Last month's power crisis in Texas, which left millions of people in the cold without running water or electricity, underscored the need for action. And last week, the American Society of Civil Engineers released its analysis of the nation's infrastructure, giving it a C-minus — an improvement, actually, from last year's D — and signalling again that a major federal investment is long overdue.

"We're at a crossroads. Inaction will only worsen the suffering that working people have weathered over the past year", said Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO. "But if we commit to rebuilding our communities on an unprecedented scale, we can get through this crisis stronger than before." — dpa

HEARTBROKEN

A decade after the Fukushima disaster, evacuees still feel adrift

TAKEHIKO KAMBAYASHI

On a recent snowy day, Harue Sanpei returned briefly to her abandoned house in a hilly area of Fukushima prefecture, where residents are still barred from living because of extensive radioactive contamination from Japan's worst nuclear disaster a decade ago.

Her family's two-storey traditional wooden house has been left untouched since their evacuation, so it has huge, gaping holes in ceilings, with tatami mats caving in and mouldy chests.

Sanpei says she is heartbroken by the house, which is full of fond memories of her four-generation family of 10, being in such disorder. She also says local residents have a profound attachment to their land — the Tsushima district in Namie Town, about 30 km north-west of the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station.

"Tsushima is full of natural riches. We used to enjoy a cherry blossom viewing party together, collect edible wild vegetables and mushrooms and catch fish in a local river", Sanpei recalls.

However, the close-knit community was ripped apart by the 2011 triple meltdown at the plant, run by Tokyo Electric Power. The nuclear emergency was triggered by a magnitude-9 earthquake and subsequent tsunami. Then, winds sent a plume of radiation north-westward towards Tsushima.

"It is very sad that we lost our hometown because of the nuclear disaster", says Sachiko Mashio, who used to run a restaurant in Tsushima.



A woman holds a placard as she takes part in an anti-nuclear protest outside the Parliament building in Tokyo on Sunday. — AFP

TEN YEARS ON,
HIGH LEVELS OF
RADIATION HAVE
PREVENTED MANY
FORMER RESIDENTS
FROM RETURNING
HOME

"Tsushima was a healing place surrounded by mountains. We used to enjoy seeing its breathtaking autumn foliage", Mashio says. The Tsushima district is now designated as a "difficult to return" zone, and its residents have no idea as to when they would be able to return home.

Meanwhile, the central government once again wants to emphasise Fukushima's "recovery" on the 10th anniversary of the nuclear disaster on Thursday. It lifted evacuation orders in many of the affected areas, including central parts of Namie Town, near the nuclear plant, allowing residents to return to their homes.

However, a vast majority of

them have not done so due to few job opportunities and concerns about radioactive contamination, though government officials stressed decontamination work was completed.

"Even though the government lifted the evacuation orders, locals still cannot grow rice and vegetables. They cannot eat fish they catch in a river", Sanpei says.

"I wonder whether Tokyo Electric employees and government officials could live there with their children and grandchildren even after the evacuation order was lifted", she says. "I urge the government to be far more careful when they lift an evacuation order." — dpa

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HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth attending the HM's Cup final match. – Thani Abdullah



Dhofar players receive the trophy. – Mohammed Mahjoub



Dhofar's Khalid al Hajri celebrates a goal. – OFA

Dhofar clinch record 10th HM Cup in style

KHALID AL HAJRI HAT-TRICK POWERS SALALAH GIANTS AGAINST HAPLESS SUWAIQ

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

Khalid al Hajri's hat-trick and goals from Bekai Lawsen and Yaseen al Shiyabi sealed a historic tenth HM Cup crown for Dhofar as they thumped Suwaiq 5-1 in the 2020/2021 HM Cup Football final on Sunday night at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The victory meant the Salalah giants snatched the second crown in a row within four months and the tenth title in history after triumphs in 1976, 1980, 1981, 1990, 1999, 2004, 2006, 2011 and 2020 editions.

The champions' goals were struck by Khalid al Hajri, Bekai

Lawsen and Yaseen al Shiyabi while the consolation goal of Al Suwaiq was scored by Omran al Hedi.

Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, the chief guest handed over Dhofar players the gold medals and the coveted cup while Al Suwaiq's players received the silver medals. The final match was attended by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, the Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, top dignitaries and officials.

Same as the finals, both coaches began the match assuring full protection of the defence side to avoid receiving any early goals. In the fifteen minutes, Rasheed

Jaber's men were the best through their active movements in the ground and reaching to Mazin al Kasbi zone.

Dhofar attempted to open their account as Bekai Lawsen, Khalid al Hajri and Abdulla Fawaz made penetrative manoeuvres but Al Suwaiq's defence was awake to break all the moves on a couple of occasions.

After a series of movements towards Suwaiq's net, the national team striker Khalid al Hajri managed to score the opening goal in the 19th minute after sending a strong ball to the net.

Despite leading the Salalah giants, coach Haleem Shaker's battalion remained quiet and

returned back while Dhofar players pressed hard to score the second goal and increase the chances of winning the game.

OPPORTUNITY

Omar al Malki had another scoring opportunity to increase the margin but his shot was saved by Mazin al Kasbi in the 32nd minute. Seven minutes later, Al Suwaiq registered their first appearance in the match as Yaseen al Shiyadi sent a long ball to Al Abd al Noufli who converted header and returned back to Omran al Hedi who slotted the ball into the net and equalised the result to 1-1.

Al Suwaiq's joy did not last for

long as Lawsen Bikai netted the second goal for Dhofar in the dying minutes of the first half which ended with the Salalah giants leading 2-1.

Coach Hakeem Shaker commenced the second half with three substitutions respectively as Mohammed al Ghassani, Yousef al Malki and Philip Ackah replaced Hassan al Saadi, Hatim al Hamhami and Khalil al Alawi.

Dhofar's tough defensive line denied all of Suwaiq's forward attempts and close all the spaces for penetration into the scoring zone.

Khalid al Hajri powered Dhofar's lead as he struck the third goal in the 62nd minute

after conversion of the long ball pass from Motaz Saleh through a strong header into the net.

Dhofar cemented their domination of the game through well monitoring in the centre and creating more attacks to the front side.

Khalid al Hajri confirmed Dhofar's victory as he struck the fourth goal for the team and a third personal goal in the match in the 85th minute.

In the closing minutes of the match, the substitute Yaseen al Sheikh showed Dhofar's credentials as well-deserving champions as he struck the fifth goal which ended the match 5-1 in favour of Dhofar.

In brief

GLASGOW



RANGERS WIN SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP FOR FIRST TIME IN 10 YEARS

Rangers' first Scottish Premiership title for 10 years was confirmed on Sunday after Celtic's 0-0 draw at Dundee United left them 20 points behind their Glasgow rivals with six games left to play. Steven Gerrard's men have stormed to the title without losing a game to end Celtic's stranglehold of a record-equalling nine consecutive Scottish league titles.

Rangers were not even in the top-flight for four of those seasons after the club was demoted to the fourth tier after being liquidated in 2012 due to financial troubles.

DOHA



KVITOVA CLAIMS SECOND QATAR OPEN TITLE

Petra Kvitová thrashed Garbine Muguruza 6-2, 6-1 to win her second Qatar Open title on Saturday. The fourth-seeded Czech needed just over an hour to see off her fellow two-time Grand Slam winner.

It was Kvitová's 28th career title from 38 finals played. "It's been a great run — tough conditions," said Kvitová after her victory. It followed her Doha title of 2018, which also came at the expense of Muguruza. "I'm sorry for the second time, I hope we can meet somewhere else," she added, nodding towards her vanquished rival. Muguruza had the benefit of a full rest day on Friday.

THE HAGUE



RUBLEV BEATS TSITSIPAS TO REACH ROTTERDAM FINAL

Andrey Rublev beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) on Saturday to advance to the final in Rotterdam and extend his winning run in ATP 500 events to 19 matches. Fourth seed Rublev broke Tsitsipas twice in the opening set and put the second-seeded Greek away with a dominant tie-break to secure victory in 97 minutes.

Rublev will face Marton Fucsovics on Sunday after the qualifier from Hungary swept past Borna Coric 6-4, 6-1.

World number eight Rublev is bidding for his eighth career title. The Russian holds a 7-2 record in tour-level finals.

"(I play tennis) to play at the best level, to play at the best tournaments, to try to compete, then to go deep and to try to win them," Rublev said.

Kohli sets sights on 'one big game' to win WTC



India's captain Virat Kohli holds the trophy as his team members applaud. — Reuters

AHMEDABAD, INDIA: Skipper Virat Kohli said India were "relieved" to make the inaugural World Test Championship final and would now focus on that "one big game" against New Zealand in June after seeing off England.

India crushed Joe Root's side inside three days in the fourth Test in Ahmedabad on Saturday to clinch the series 3-1 and finish top of the Test Championship table ahead of New Zealand.

India had led the standings until November, when a change in the points system because of coronavirus disruptions promoted Australia to top spot.

"We are relieved that now we have made it to the final," Kohli told BCCI TV. "Probably if you look at the last two-and-half years

how we have played, we deserve to be in that final. "Now it's just about getting together as a group again and focusing on that one big game which is quite exciting for all of us."

New Zealand's spot in the final was secured when the Test series between South Africa and Australia was postponed last month.

'UNDER PRESSURE'

India coach Ravi Shastri questioned the decision of the International Cricket Council to change the points system midway into the Test Championship.

The new method, based on percentage of points instead of total points, left India needing to win the Test series away in Australia and the one at home

“Probably if you look at the last two-and-half years how we have played, we deserve to be in that final. Now it's just about getting together as a group again and focusing on that one big game which is quite exciting for all of us

VIRAT KOHLI
Indian captain

against England to make the final.

"Please don't shift the goalposts midstream," Shastri told reporters when asked about the next World Test Championship, describing the points system change as abrupt. But he added: "I cannot say how proud I am of my Indian cricket team. Going through this tough period and qualifying against all odds when you go from number one to number three."

Kohli had maintained that the championship race was merely a "distraction" for his team, who did not need any further incentive to win Test matches. India made the final after bouncing back from opening losses in two series — winning 2-1 Down Under and beating England 3-1 at home.

— AFP

Unbeaten Muscat inch closer to T20 title

MUSCAT: Sandeep Goud's golden arm continued to fetch vital wickets while Jatinder Singh started middling the ball with the effortless ease again as Muscat CT stretched their unbeaten run to eight games with emphatic wins over Renaissance and Arm Alpha in Premier Division T20 League at OC Turf 1 in Amerat over the weekend.

Muscat, which have 16 points, may still win the title even if they lose the remaining two matches. Second-placed Renaissance have 12 points but played out their 10 games while IT Works carry 10 points from 8 matches so far.

On Saturday, Renaissance were bundled out for 88 with Sandeep picking up 3 for 5. Spinners Samay Shrivastava and Wasim Ali bowled well too, taking two wickets each. Rafi Ullah top-scored with 28. Jatinder led the chase with a strokeful 48 not out as Muscat surpassed the total in only 12.2 overs, scoring 92 for 2. Shoaib Khan contributed a fluent 28.

SHOAIB STARS IN MUSCAT WIN

Earlier on Friday, Shoaib Khan's sparkling 69 was the highlight of Muscat's 161 for 6 against Arm



Jatinder Singh of Muscat CT

Alpha. Sanuth Ebrahim and Bilal Khan bagged two wickets each.

Alpha failed to bat well against Muscat's in-form bowlers, folding up for a dismal 76 in 15.1 overs. Leg-spinner Samay Shrivastava was the pick of Muscat bowlers, taking 3 for 5 whereas Wasim Ali and Sandeep Goud claimed two wickets each in impressive spells.

IT WORKS ROUT RENAISSANCE

Oman all-rounder Khawar Ali was instrumental in IT Works' vital 4-wicket win over Renaissance, setting up what could well be a Premier Division 50-over League's title clash against table-toppers Muscat CT in their 10th and final game on Friday,



Shoaib Khan of Muscat CT

March 12.

While Muscat have 16 points from 9 games with 8 wins, an emphatic victory on Friday could result in second-placed IT Works, who have 14 points from 9 games with 7 wins, walk away with the trophy on better net run-rate if Renaissance upset third-placed Al Turki NMC the next day. If Al Turki, who also have 14 points from 9 matches with 7 wins, prevail with a big margin, the title winner would be decided on net run-rate. However, the T20 winner's trophy goes to Muscat if they beat IT Works, taking their tally to unsurpassable 18 points.

Renaissance were dismissed for 110 in 36 overs, Shakeel Ahmed taking 3 for 8 with Khawar Ali and



Jay Odedara and Twinkal Bhandari of Al Turki NMC

Muhammed Nadeem claiming two wickets each. Khawar is now the tournament's leading bowler with 20 wickets followed by Nadeem who has taken 19 wickets so far.

It took IT Works only 19.1 overs to seal the win, scoring 113 for 6. Zeeshan Maqsood struck 38, while Khawar contributed 25.

TWINKAL STARS IN AL TURKI WIN

Leading from the front, Twinkal Bhandari slammed a sparkling 81 not out to steer Al Turki NMC to a vital 5-wicket victory against AER on Saturday.

AER was restricted to 151 for 9 as Jay Odedara picked up 3 for 14 in his 10-over spell that included six maiden overs. Afzal Khan

remained not out at 58 off 111 balls. Al Turki secured victory in the 23rd over, scoring 154 for 5 thanks to Twinkal's superb knock. Amanpreet Singh and Muzahir Raza bagged two wickets each.

BRIEF SCORES

Premier Division T20 League

Renaissance 88 all out in 16.4 overs (Rafi Ullah 28 - 4x4, 2x6. Sandeep Goud 3-05, Samay Shrivastava 2-12, Wasim Ali 2-21) lost to Muscat CT 92 for 2 in 12.2 overs (Jatinder Singh 48 not out - 6x4, 1x6, Shoaib Khan 28 - 3x4) by 8 wickets. Muscat CT 161 for 6 in 20 overs (Shoaib Khan 69 - 8x4, 1x6, Sanuth Ebrahim 2-21, Bilal Khan 2-26) beat Arm Alpha 76 all out in 15.1 overs (Nalinda Prasad 32 - 6x4, 1x6, Samay Shrivastava 3-05, Wasim Ali 2-07, Sandeep Goud 2-15) by 85 runs.

Premier Division 50-over League

Renaissance 110 all out in 36 overs (Abdul Rauf 24 - 2x4, 1x6, Shubo Pal 24 - 4x4. Shakeel Ahmad 3-08, Muhammed Nadeem 2-20, Khawar Ali 2-26, Imran Muhammad 2-31) lost to IT Works 113 for 6 in 19.1 overs (Zeeshan Maqsood 38 - 6x4, 1x6, Khawar Ali 25 - 3x4, Asif Khan 3-7, Muhammad Bilal 3-33) by 4 wickets. AER 150 for 9 in 50 overs (Afzal Khan 58 not out - 8x4, Muzahir Raza 19 - 3x4, Jay Odedara 3-14, Hemalkumar Tandel 2-52) lost to Al Turki NMC 154 for 5 in 22.5 overs (Twinkal Bhandari 81 not out - 11x4, 1x6, Akshaykumar Patel 21 - 1x4, 2x6. Amanpreet Singh 2-29, Muzahir Raza 2-34) by 5 wickets.



IPL returns to India with no crowds initially

NEW DELHI: The popular Indian Premier League will begin on April 9, the country's cricket board said on Sunday, with organisers set to eschew crowds initially as coronavirus cases rise in India.

The world's richest Twenty20 tournament was held in the United Arab Emirates in 2020, but its 14th edition this year will be played across six Indian venues.

"The IPL this year at home will be played behind closed doors to begin with and a call on allowing spectators will be taken at a later stage of the tournament," Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary Jay Shah said in a statement.

India, which has recorded more than 11.2 million coronavirus infections so far in a population of 1.3 billion, launched a mass vaccination drive in mid-January. The Narendra Modi stadium — the world's biggest cricket venue that recently hosted England — in Ahmedabad will host the playoffs as well as the final on May 30. — AFP

Morata spearheads Juventus fightback to close gap at top

MILAN: Alvaro Morata scored twice and set up another as Juventus warmed up for next week's Champions League game against Porto with a 3-1 comeback win over Lazio on Saturday to close the gap on the Milan teams in Serie A.

Cristiano Ronaldo started on the bench before next week's key last 16, second leg game against the Portuguese in Turin with Juventus trailing 2-1.

Champions Juventus fell behind to an early Joaquin Correa goal following a Dejan Kulusevski passing error midfield.

But Morata set up Adrien Rabiot to pull the hosts level before the break with the Spaniard scoring twice in a three-minute spell before the hour mark.

Andrea Pirlo's side are third, seven points behind leaders Inter who host Atalanta on Monday, and one point adrift of AC Milan who play Hellas Verona on Sunday. "Today we started the game 20 minutes late but it was normal because many were out of position and many returned (from injury)," said Pirlo.

"But there was a great reaction, we didn't get down and despite the many absences we played an excellent match.

"For us it was a final, an important match for the standings and we're happy."

Paulo Dybala remains out injured along with defender Giorgio Chiellini and midfielder Matthijs de Ligt, while Rodrigo Bentancur positive for coronavirus.

But Juan Cuadrado started after missing three league games with Arthur and Leonardo Bonucci also returning off the bench in the second half.

Morata started up front alongside Kulusevski, with Ciro Immobile leading the Lazio attack alongside Correa.

And the Argentine pounced after quarter of an hour after Kulusevski gave the ball away, shaking off Merih Demiral to beat Wojciech Szczesny in the Juventus goal. Szczesny denied Luis Alberto a second eight minutes later.

Rabiot pulled a goal back six minutes before the break, picking up a Morata through ball to fire in a powerful left footed angled drive over Pepe Reina.

IMMOBILE DRAWS A BLANK

Both sides had chances after the break with Reina denying Federico Chiesa, Szczesny clearing from Correa and a Sergej Milinkovic-Savic header rattling the bar.

Chiesa set up Morata for the second after 57 minutes with the Spaniard completing a brace from the penalty spot three minutes later after Milinkovic-Savic brought down Aaron Ramsey in the box.

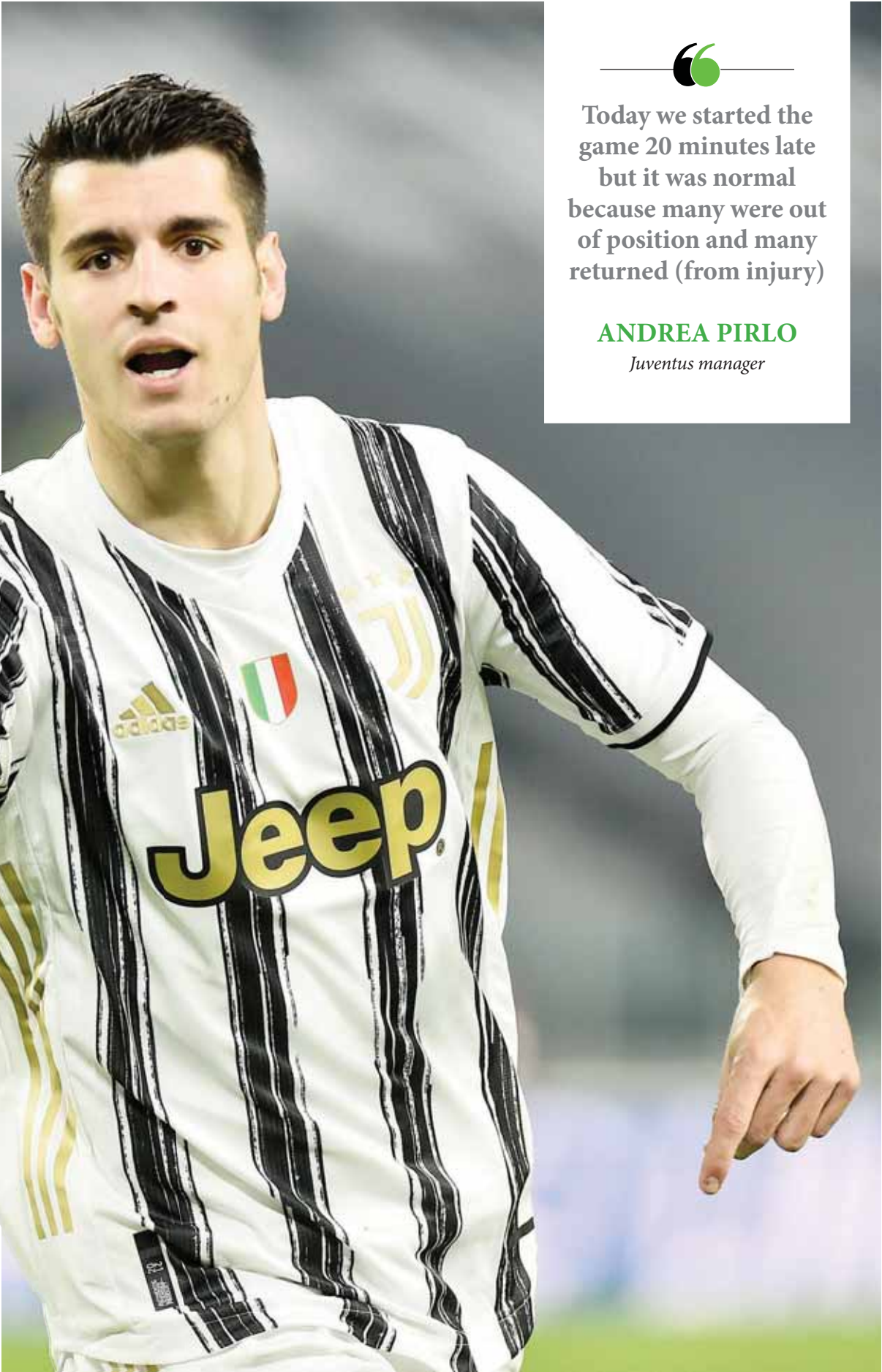
Morata made way for Ronaldo for the last 20 minutes with Arthur and Weston McKennie also coming off the bench in place of Ramsey and Cuadrado with Bonucci coming on for the final eight minutes.

Lazio's top striker Immobile threatened but was unable to add to his 14 goals this campaign, drawing a blank for a fourth straight game as the Romans fell to their third defeat in four matches.

"It's a defeat that hurts," said Lazio coach Simone Inzaghi whose side's hopes of Champions League football next season took a knock they sit seventh, six points adrift of Atalanta in fourth place.

"We compromised the game alone, giving away an avoidable penalty. We made some mistakes and at Juventus, with some mistakes you don't win."

Sassuolo's Europa League hopes further dwindled with a 2-0 loss at midtable rivals Udinese stretching their winless run to three games. — AFP



“Today we started the game 20 minutes late but it was normal because many were out of position and many returned (from injury)”

ANDREA PIRLO
Juventus manager

ITALIAN SERIE A TABLE AFTER SUNDAY'S EARLY MATCH (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):

Inter Milan	25	18	5	2	62	25	59
AC Milan	25	16	5	4	48	30	53
Juventus	25	15	7	3	51	21	52
Roma	26	15	5	6	51	38	50
Atalanta	25	14	7	4	60	32	49
Napoli	24	14	2	8	52	28	44
Lazio	25	13	4	8	39	35	43
Hellas Verona	25	10	8	7	34	27	38
Sassuolo	25	9	9	7	40	39	36
Udinese	26	8	8	10	29	34	32
Sampdoria	25	9	4	12	34	37	31
Bologna	25	7	7	11	32	38	28
Genoa	26	6	9	11	27	38	27
Spezia	26	6	8	12	33	47	26
Benevento	26	6	8	12	26	48	26
Fiorentina	25	6	7	12	26	38	25
Cagliari	25	5	6	14	27	41	21
Torino	23	3	11	9	33	41	20
Parma	25	2	9	14	20	49	15
Crotone	25	3	3	19	24	62	12

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS

On Sunday

AS Roma 1 (Mancini 24)	Genoa 0
------------------------	---------

On Saturday

Spezia 1 (Verde 71)	Benevento 1 (Gaich 24)
Udinese 2 (Llorente 42, Pereyra 90+3)	Sassuolo 0
Juventus 3 (Rabiot 39, Morata 57, 60-pen)	Lazio 1 (Correa 14)

Djokovic bags record for longest reign as number one

MUMBAI: Novak Djokovic will realise one of his long-cherished goals on Monday when he eclipses Roger Federer's all-time record for most weeks as the men's world number one, holding the top ranking for the 311th week.

The 33-year-old Serbian climbed to the top of the ATP rankings for the first time in July, 2011 and had the Swiss maestro's record of 310 weeks spent as the highest-ranked man in the sport on his radar.

"This is one of my two biggest professional goals," Djokovic said last year. "To reach the record of, (and) surpass Roger's record for longest No 1 and win as many (Grand) Slams as possible."

Djokovic is currently in his fifth stint as number one, having reclaimed the top spot from Spaniard Rafael Nadal in February last year.

The Serbian finished 2020 as the year-end number one for the sixth time, tying the record set by American great Pete Sampras, and won his 18th major title last

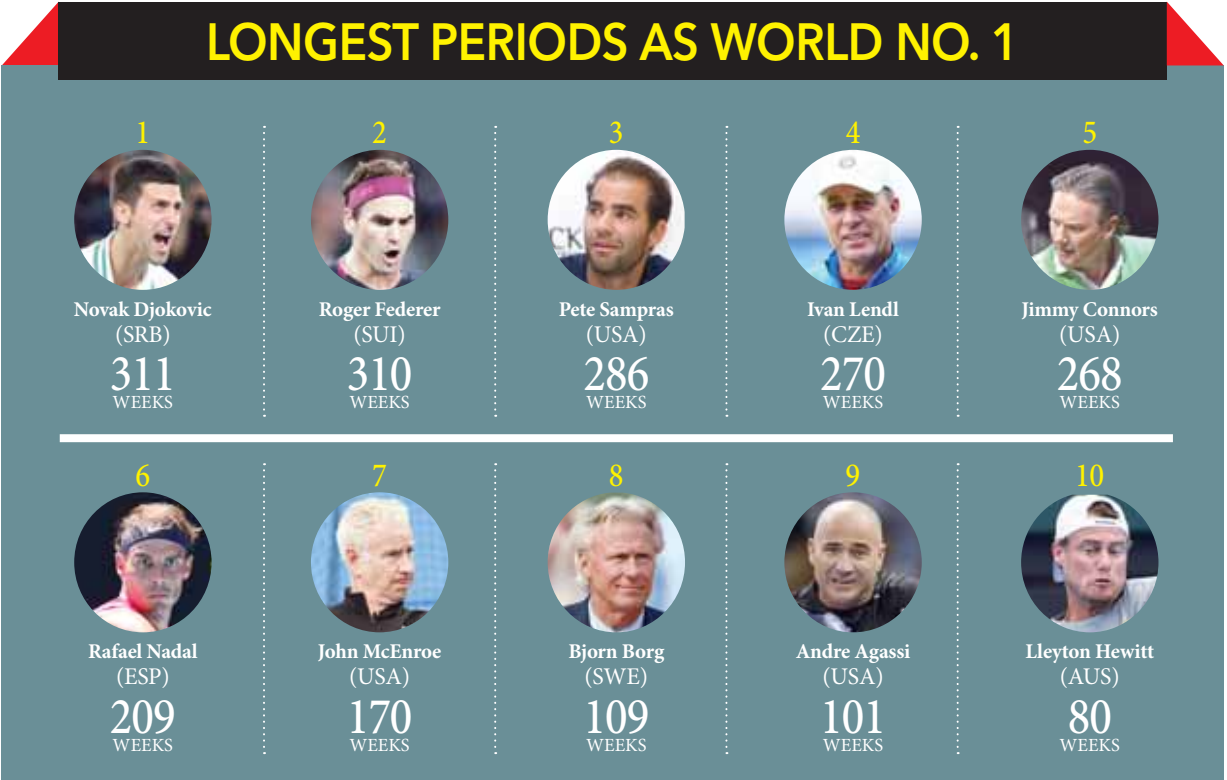
“And most of my attention and my energy from this day forward, until I retire from tennis, is going to be directed at majors, trying to win more major trophies

NOVAK DJOKOVIC
Serbian World No. 1

month at the Australian Open.

His record-extending ninth triumph at Melbourne Park meant he was just two short of the men's record of 20 Grand Slam titles, jointly held by Federer and Nadal.

Djokovic has made it clear that his only focus will now be on winning more Grand Slams and said he will make necessary adjustments to his playing schedule to achieve that goal.



MORE MAJORS

"Whether I think about winning more slams and breaking records? Of course, I do," the Serbian said after his Australian Open triumph.

"And most of my attention and my energy from this day forward, until I retire from tennis, is going to be directed at majors, trying to win more major trophies."

Federer, who will turn 40 in

August, has not played since losing to Djokovic in the semi-finals of the 2020 Australian Open and will make his return in Doha this week after undergoing two knee surgeries last year.

The Swiss said he enjoyed competing against Djokovic and felt they brought the best out of each other. "Against the best players you know you have to bring your best game. Otherwise, it will not be enough," Federer said during an Instagram Live session with Qatar Tennis on Saturday.

"Especially against somebody like Novak, who can go into a mode where he is not going to miss. He can defend very well and be aggressive, he has a very good balance. That's why he is one of the greatest players ever.

"It has been a pleasure to play against him and he's one of the players who have made me a better player. It's great to have him in the game."

While Djokovic has a firm grip on top spot, there will be a new number two on March 15 in Russian Daniil Medvedev, who will climb one place to his career-best ranking to replace Nadal, who has not played since the Australian Open due to a back injury. — Reuters

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Omanis made up 76 per cent of hotel guests in January



MUSCAT: The total number of guests in hotel properties of the 3 to 5-star category in the Sultanate fell 49.5 per to 78,451 in January 2021, compared to 155,488 guests for the same period of 2020.

Meanwhile, the occupancy rate slumped to 27 per cent, according the latest monthly statistics released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Total revenues of these hotels also fell to RO 6.231 million in January 2021, compared to RO 21.026 million during the same period of the previous year.

Omanis accounted for 76 per cent of total guests (59,735), followed by visitors from Asian countries (7,435), Europe (3,482), non-GCC Arab countries (2,242) and GCC (1,468).

Guests from the Americas totalled 1,437, followed by Oceania (708), African countries (377) and other regions (1,567). — ONA

Over 70 per cent fewer flights operated last year due to pandemic impacts

SHARP DECLINES: Steep drop in passenger numbers recorded at Muscat, Salalah, Suhar and Duqm airports in 2020

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

A complete picture of the devastating impact that the pandemic and associated lockdowns have had on air traffic movements in the Sultanate last year is now evident from newly published data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

According to the Centre's latest bulletin, air traffic movements recorded at Muscat International Airport – both arriving and departing on the domestic and international sectors – totalled 35,093 over the course of 2020, representing a staggering 70.2 per cent decline in comparison with the previous year's tally of 117,842 movements.

Likewise, air traffic movements at Salalah International Airport (arriving and departing on the international and domestic sectors) tumbled 71.2 per cent to 3,398 last year, down from 11,812 in 2019.

Oman's international



airports in Muscat and Salalah had remained shuttered for passenger aircraft for several months at the height of the pandemic last year as airlines around the world grounded their fleets as a precaution against the spread of Covid-19.

National carrier Oman Air, among other regional and international airlines, resumed limited operations starting in July last year.

Most scheduled commercial flights continue to remain suspended in response to new

waves of the infection that swept across several parts of the world.

The lockdowns had a disproportionately higher impact on international flights, according to the report. A total of 31,102 air traffic movements were recorded on the international sector at Muscat International Airport last year, down a hefty 71.1 per cent from the 2019 tally of 107,451 arrivals and departures.

On the domestic sector of the same gateway, air traffic

movements totalled 3,991 – representing a 61.6 per cent decline from the previous year's tally of 10,391 arrivals and departures.

There was a corresponding slump in passenger numbers handled at the Sultanate's premier international air gateway as well. On the international sector, the total number of arriving and departing passengers plummeted to 3.695 million last year, versus 14.904 million in 2019.

Air traffic movements recorded at Muscat International Airport – both arriving and departing on the domestic and international sectors – totalled 35,093 over the course of 2020, representing a staggering 70.2 per cent decline in comparison with the previous year's tally of 117,842 movements

Departing passengers accounted for a slightly higher percentage of the total, which is perhaps attributable to the sharp uptick in the outgo of expatriates and their families who were casualties of the turmoil wreaked by the pandemic on local businesses.

On the domestic sectors, only around 390k passengers travelled last year, down 65.1 per cent the previous year's total of 1.117 million passengers handled by the airport.

In all, 32,911 flights were handled at Muscat, Salalah, Suhar and Duqm airports last year, carrying a total of 4.566 million passengers (arriving and departing), the report added.

Oman set to be a regional hub for leadership programming

Executive Education: University of Arizona partners with Omani government on Leadership Development Programme

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

A recent partnership agreement signed by the Omani government with the University of Arizona will help establish the Sultanate and its prestigious Institute of Public Administration as a regional hub for leadership programming, thought leadership and research.

The Eller College of Management's Executive Education programme at the University of Arizona has been awarded a contract through the Omani Ministry of Finance's Tawazun Programme to provide the government of Oman with leadership development services.

The initial phase of the project

will focus on the development of leadership and management capabilities for mid-level public sector employees across the Omani government.

"Oman is a booming, growing country with a large population under the age of 25, and the Institute of Public Administration plays an important role in advancing the competitiveness of its economy," said Joe Carella, assistant dean for Eller Executive Education.

"This programme will ensure public sector employees have the right capabilities to develop the infrastructure of the country moving forward."

The partnership between Eller Executive Education and the Institute of Public Administration is expected to last five years and involve three key components: a Leadership Preparation Programme, a Train-the-Trainer Programme and a Leadership Development Centre.

The ultimate goal is to establish a long-term partnership,



designed to create a space where government employees can learn from one another and test new ideas.

Oman selected the Eller College of Management from 25 academic institutions that had proposed taking part in the partnership.

The opportunity was jointly pursued by Eller Executive Education and UArizona's Research, Innovation and Impact's Defence Offset Programmes team. The new agreement expands the university's current relationship with governments in the Middle East.

Oman is a booming, growing country with a large population under the age of 25, and the Institute of Public Administration plays an important role in advancing the competitiveness of its economy

JOE CARELLA
Assistant dean for Eller Executive Education

In 2018, UArizona was awarded a \$3.9 million contract to support Oman's One Million Date Palm Trees Project, which aims to increase sustainable date production in the country.

"Countries such as Oman

that have offset programmes create an opportunity for University of Arizona faculty to implement knowledge or technology transfer projects with international partners such as the Institute of Public Administration, thereby creating new capabilities in the partner country and extending the University of Arizona's relationships in a meaningful sponsored structure," said Todd Shallcross, director of RII Defence Offset Programmes.

"We are grateful to have this opportunity to participate in Oman's Partnership for Development Programme," Carella said.

"We are confident we have designed the right balance of academic and practical methodological approaches delivered by experts and experienced professionals that will deliver an impactful learning journey that Oman's middle managers can apply immediately upon returning to their jobs."

High quality award-winning GAC Motor range with benefits



MUSCAT: GAC Motor is offering customers exclusive benefits across the range. The GS4 has an EMI of RO 108, the GS8 has an EMI of RO 193, the GN8 has an EMI of RO 176, the GA4 has an EMI of RO 96, and the GA8 has an EMI of RO 156. The GS3 is available for RO 4999/-.

The first 100 walk-ins at the GAC Motor showroom at Wattayah test-driving any GAC Motor vehicle along with their family will get an assured gift – food and beverage vouchers. (Terms and conditions apply. Visit a GAC Motor showroom for details).

The GAC Motor range has the latest 2021 models available. All the GAC Motor vehicles have a manufacturer's warranty of 5 years or 1,50,000 kms. GAC Motor vehicles are painstakingly designed and engineered to offer customers some of the finest experiences in the automotive world.

GAC Motor International is devoted to the production and sales of world-class vehicles, engines, auto parts and car accessories as well as R&D of automobile engineering technology. In Oman GAC Motor vehicles are distributed by New World Autos and backed by Saud Bahwan Group.

Ministerial delegation tours Oman's sole industrial bakery

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

A high-level ministerial delegation comprising Qais bin Mohammed al Yousef, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; and Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning, visited the factory of Atyab Food Industries, which owns and operates an industrial-scale bakery – the only one of its kind in the Sultanate.

The Atyab Food Industry, known as Atyab Bakery, is one of the investments of Oman Flour Mills company affiliated to the Oman Food Investment Holding Company. It runs its manufacturing operations from its bakery located in Barka.

The delegation was received by Shaikh Salah bin Hilal al Mawali, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Flour Mills company, and Haitham bin Mohammed al Fannah, Chief Executive Officer of Oman Flour Mills Company.

They went around the complex and commended the use of modern technologies in the baking processes.

Shaikh Salah bin Hilal al Mawali, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Oman Flour Mills, said Atyab Bakery was set up as a national project to support Oman's food security goals. Rated



among the top bakeries in the Middle East, the plant operates to international standards.

Its products are distributed not only within Oman, but the wider Gulf region and internationally as well. Haitham bin Mohammed al Fannah, CEO of Oman Flour Mills, said that Atyab Food Industries produces

various fresh and frozen baked products, such as all types of bread, cakes, butter croissants, pies, sweets, puffs, and various other forms of bread, as well as healthy bread products such as sliced bread, high-protein omega-3 bread, fibre bread etc. These products — part of a portfolio of 300 items —

are available in the market under the brand name "Gold", "Atyab" and "Bon Vivant". The company utilises the best non-hydrogenated oils in its operations.

The factory has top quality and food safety certificates, including HACCP and ISO 22000 and FSSC 22000. The bakery is also regularly audited by internationally established food safety and hygiene experts.

It has consistently achieved high rankings. Atyab Food Industries supplies its fresh and frozen products to a number of government organisations in the Sultanate, as well as supermarkets and fast-food restaurants, including McDonald's, Kentucky's, Hardee's, Burger King, Costa cafe, Starbucks, and so on.

Meeting Point Hotels deflags Kairaba Mirbat Resort



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 7

Two years after entering the Oman market with a new brand of Kairaba Hotels & Resorts in Mirbat, Meeting Point Hotel Management and Dhofar Tourism, have reached an amicable agreement to exit the destination as of March 11, 2021.

The transfer of management back to the owning company took place on October 31, 2020. "Keeping our partners, clients and teams as the main priority, we have been working closely together with the owning company to ensure a smooth and seamless transition of the hotel," explained Wael Rashed, CEO MP Hotels.

"Meeting Point Oman will continue to support partners for all Oman related enquiries and bookings," concluded Rashed.

The hotel operated as an ultra-all-inclusive, 5-star beachfront property, since October 1, 2018, with 237 high-end rooms, suites and villas. As well as a varied collection of onsite restaurants, great facilities and services.

Opec+ spikes oil while most commodities fret fresh yield rise

OLE S HANSEN

The almost synchronised commodity rally seen during the past few months continues to be challenged by an ongoing rise in US bond yields causing risk aversion and a stronger dollar. Metals of most colours, including copper, traded lower while Saudi Arabia's push for higher prices helped drive crude oil to the highest level since last January.

The February 25 spike in US bond yields led to our warning in last week's update that the commodity sector, led by precious metals, was facing a challenging period.

Not due to a sudden change in the fundamental outlook which remains supportive across the commodity space, but more due to the risk that rising yields could trigger a period of deleveraging, that may also expose the record speculative long-held by hedge funds across energy, metals and agriculture.

An appearance from Fed Chair Powell on Thursday, one week after the first spike, failed to show sufficient concern about rising yields, even if Powell emphasised the intent to keep the policy rate low for now. The bond market threw another tantrum, sending



US long-end yields to their highest daily close for the cycle.

Risk sentiment cratered and equity markets went into a tailspin while the dollar found a fresh bid, thereby creating a headwind for several dollar and rate-sensitive commodities, such as gold.

Crude oil jumped 5 per cent after Opec+ decided to tighten the oil market further by deferring a planned production increase, basically gambling that US shale producers are more focused on dividends than increasing production.

Thereby keeping speculators happy at the expense of the global consumer while adding further fuel to the risk of higher inflation. In order to defend the 80 per cent rally since early November, the group decided to roll over for one month the 0.5 million barrels/day

that was up for discussion.

In addition, Saudi Arabia extended its unilateral 1 million barrel/day cut, thereby risking overtightening the market as the global pandemic fades and mobility picks up.

Several banks responded by raising their Q3 price forecasts towards the \$75 to \$80/b area and any short-term risk to oil is now primarily associated with the mentioned deleveraging risks spreading from other markets.

In defence of the group's surprise decision to maintain production at current levels could also simply be that it's the result of conflicting signals from the market. In the so-called paper market a rising backwardation in the Brent and WTI crude oil futures contracts have for weeks now been signalling market

tightness.

Part of this development being driven by speculative buying which tends to be concentrated in the front-month contracts, the most liquid part of the curve.

However, the situation in the physical market looks a lot loser with traders saying there are plenty of cargoes available, especially for delivery to the top-importing region of Asia.

Having seen and weighed the level of refinery demand for April, the group may have concluded that demand was not strong enough to raise production before May and beyond. Gold dropped to a fresh nine-month low below \$1,700 as the dollar strengthened in response to another Powell-led bond market tantrum after the Fed Chair refrained from pushing back against the recent surge in bond yields, especially real yields which together with the dollar remain two of the most important indicators driving the ebb and flow of demand for gold and precious metals in general.

Silver meanwhile dropped even harder in response to the mentioned selling which has hit industrial metals such as copper and not least nickel, which has slumped 20 per cent from its February peak. [The writer is Head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank]

PRESS RELEASE

OMAN ARAB BANK'S INNOVATION HUB RETURNS IN ITS SECOND EDITION VIRTUALLY

Following the huge success of its first Innovation Hub, OAB announced the launch of the second edition of the hackathon, which will be the first-of-its-kind to take place virtually in Oman on April 2, 2021.

The 24-hour challenge will provide a remarkable opportunity for participants from three categories, namely students, fintech/professionals and OAB employees, to showcase their capabilities and innovative ideas.

The first Innovation Hub was launched successfully in 2019 and saw the participation of more than 350 participants across 70 teams. Nine of the participating students joined the Bank's innovation internship for a period of six months and four of



them were offered employment opportunities at OAB.

Rashad al Musafir, CEO of OAB, stated, "The world is very dynamic and it is our responsibility, as an established financial institution that is passionate about innovation, to pave the way for future generations. By enabling young people to turn their ideas into practical solutions, together with the support of experts in the field, we open a world of opportunity."

SOHAR INTERNATIONAL'S VIEWPOINTS TO HOST SIR RANULPH FIENNES VIA ZOOM

Reiterating its position as an active player in contributing positively to the society it serves, Sohar International's Chairman forum-Viewpoints invites you to its 11th edition on Tuesday, March 9, 2021 starting at 7:30 pm, on the Zoom platform.

Continuing to bring global learning and perspective to locally relevant topics, the upcoming session of Viewpoints, titled 'Conquering Human Limitations', will host Sir Ranulph Fiennes (pictured), a famous British explorer, UK Army Officer and travel writer - also named as 'the world's greatest living explorer' by Guinness Book of World Records.

In this ever-changing world, human beings have been bounded by socio-economic

restrictions – particularly in a situation like the current crisis which has limited the movement of mankind.

These limitations can and have been conquered through venturing and pushing the edge of mankind's capabilities and adapting resilience to cope with the difficulties and to bridge the gap. In light of these considerations, Sir Ranulph Fiennes will offer perspectives on the complexities that imply for human capabilities and limitations based on his groundbreaking expeditions.



China export growth spikes to highest in decades

BEIJING: China's export growth jumped to the highest in over two decades, official data showed on Sunday, with imports also surging in a sharp bounceback from the coronavirus outbreak that had brought activity to a near halt.

Electronics and textile exports such as masks contributed to the spike in outbound shipments, as demand for work-from-home supplies and protective gear against the virus outbreak soared during the pandemic.

Exports spiked 60.6 per cent on-year in the January-February period, well above analysts' expectations, while imports rose 22.2 per cent, official data showed on Sunday.

The latest figures stand in stark contrast to last year's fall of around 17 per cent in exports and 4 per cent drop in imports. The country struggled to contain the spread of Covid-19 early on, with consumers staying home and businesses seeing a slow return to operations.

The customs administration said comparison to last year is also likely to have bolstered the latest figures, saying in a statement that the "low base is one of the reasons for the larger increase this year."

On Sunday, official data showed that electronics exports rose 54.1 per cent, while textiles including masks rose 50.2 per cent. China's overall trade surplus came in at \$103.3 billion, its customs administration said.



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

Meanwhile, the country's trade surplus with the US — a key point of contention during the trade war pursued by former president Donald Trump — doubled from the same period last year to \$51.3 billion.

Chinese authorities started combining January and February trade data last year, while it battled the coronavirus outbreak.

This is in line with how some other indicators are released, to smooth over distortions from the Lunar New Year holiday, which can fall in either month.

China's foreign trade data

remained strong despite the "off-season", the customs authority said on Sunday.

Trade was also high due to a recovery in production and consumption in major economies such as Europe and the United States amid the coronavirus pandemic, as well as improvements in domestic consumption.

Although business activity usually falls during the Lunar New Year period when workers return to their hometowns, official appeals to avoid travelling this year to keep the Covid-19 outbreak in check supported production, the

customs administration added.

"Many enterprises in major foreign trade provinces such as Guangdong and Zhejiang maintained production during the Lunar New Year", it said.

"Market demand is expected to rebound further." Some companies have also been stocking up on goods such as integrated circuits, iron ore and crude oil imports.

"Global electronics demand has risen strongly due to the global shift to remote working and online shopping", said Rajiv Biswas, Asia-Pacific chief economist for IHS Markit.

China still 30 years away from becoming manufacturing 'power'

BEIJING: China is at least 30 years away from becoming a manufacturing nation of "great power", a former industry minister said on Sunday, despite boasting the world's most complete industrial supply chains.

In recent years, China has become the world's top manufacturing nation, accounting for over a third of global output, driven by domestic demand to produce everything from motor vehicles to industrial machinery. But its industries' heavy dependence on US high-tech products such as semiconductors constituted a strategic weakness.



"Basic capabilities are still weak, core technologies are in the hands of others, and the risk of 'being hit in the throat' and having 'a slipped bike chain' has significantly increased", said Miao Wei (pictured), who was Minister of Industry and Information Technology for a decade before stepping down last year.

— Reuters

This had driven demand for electronics products such as laptops, mobile phones and wearables, he said. Meanwhile, the strong import growth also reflected a "normalisation of consumer spending" in China, he said, after a severe slump due to lockdowns. Analysts have warned the demand boom for protective equipment supporting Chinese exports could fade as pandemic controls

improve globally, although this may not happen too soon.

"The pandemic might have already changed people's behaviour. I think this kind of demand will still be in place for some time," said ANZ Research China economist Betty Wang.

But Chinese authorities cautioned on Sunday that, given global uncertainties, there is "a long way to go towards steady growth in foreign trade". — AFP

Sunak 'looking at ways to tax online retail giants'

LONDON: British Chancellor of the Exchequer Rishi Sunak says he is seeking support from Britain's allies for a new way to tax online retail giants like Amazon.

Days after delivering the Budget, the Chancellor is looking ahead to the G7 summit in Cornwall in June to meet his finance minister counterparts as he attempts to level the playing field for Britain's struggling high streets.

"One of my priorities in the G7 this year, which I've already started work on, is to try to get international agreement on a new way to tax these companies", Sunak told *The Sun*. "I spend a lot of time talking to my finance minister colleagues around the world about this."

Sunak last year brought in a digital services tax, but there have been concerns that online retailers are passing on the cost to independent sellers.

Conservative MP Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) suggested during a debate in the Commons that the Treasury should look at "wholesale reform" of business rates to help protect city centres and high streets. — dpa



An Amazon logo is seen at the centre in Darlington, County Durham, Britain. — Reuters

Deliveroo to offer £50 million of stocks to customers

LONDON: Deliveroo said shares worth £50 million (\$69 million) would be earmarked for customers in its upcoming flotation, with the offer branded "Great food with a side of shares".

The Amazon-backed food delivery firm announced plans on Thursday to list in London, with a potential value of \$7 billion making it the biggest market debut in Britain for three years.

Founder and Chief Executive Will Shu said Deliveroo's customers had supported the firm's growth and he wanted to give them the chance to share in the next stage of its journey.



A Deliveroo worker cycles along a pedestrianised road in Liverpool, UK. — Reuters

"Far too often, normal people are locked out of IPOs, and the only participants are the

institutional investors," he said on Sunday.

"I wanted to give as many

customers as possible the chance to become shareholders, which is why we're making £50 million of shares available to them, alongside our restaurant partners and riders."

Deliveroo said any customer who had placed an order would be able to register their interest via the company's app from Monday. Each would be able to apply for up to £1,000 of shares, it said, adding that loyal customers would be prioritised if the offer were oversubscribed.

Russ Mould, Investment Director at online platform AJ Bell, said a year of lockdowns had fuelled demand for companies

like Deliveroo and there was an expectation that habits formed during the pandemic would remain long into the recovery. "All this suggests there is likely to be a bun fight for the £50 million worth of customer shares in Deliveroo at the IPO offer", he said.

Deliveroo said it would also recognise the role played by its delivery riders in its success with a £16 million reward programme to be launched on the day of listing. Cash rewards from £10,000 to £200 will be available to riders in Deliveroo's 21 markets based on the number of orders delivered.

— Reuters

Shake off your ill will, UK tells EU over trade

LONDON: The European Union should shake off its ill will and build a good relationship with Britain as sovereign equals, Britain's top EU adviser David Frost said on Sunday, promising to stand up for the country's interests.

Writing in the *Sunday Telegraph*, Frost again defended Britain's unilateral move to smooth post-Brexit trade between Britain and Northern Ireland, over which the EU has promised to launch legal action for breaching the terms of the Brexit deal.

Since Britain left the EU last year, relations between the two have soured, with both sides accusing the other of acting in bad faith in relation to part of their trade agreement that covers goods movements to Northern Ireland.

Frost, who led Britain's

negotiations to secure a trade deal with the bloc, was appointed as a minister and Prime Minister Boris Johnson's main point man for future ties with the EU earlier this year and looks set to take a firmer approach.

"I hope they will shake off any remaining ill will towards us for leaving and instead build a friendly relationship, between sovereign equals", he wrote in an opinion piece.

"That is what I will be working towards, acting constructively when we can, standing up for our interests when we must — as a sovereign country in full control of our own destiny."

He again defended the British government's extension of a grace period for checks on some food products imported by retailers to Northern Ireland as being



"lawful and consistent with the progressive and good faith implementation" of part of the post-Brexit trade deal called the Northern Ireland protocol.

But he added: "Without this threat of disruption, we can continue our discussions with the EU to resolve difficulties arising from the protocol constructively — and we aim to do so."

Without this threat of disruption, we can continue our discussions with the EU to resolve difficulties arising from the protocol constructively — and we aim to do so

DAVID FROST

Britain's top EU adviser

Northern Ireland's future was bitterly contested during the Brexit negotiations. London ultimately agreed to leave the British-ruled province aligned to the EU's single market for goods to avoid

a hard border between Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland, fearing it could be detrimental to the 1998 peace agreement that ended decades of conflict in the province.

This has required checks on some items arriving in Northern Ireland from elsewhere in the United Kingdom, which some businesses say has made it difficult to bring in supplies.

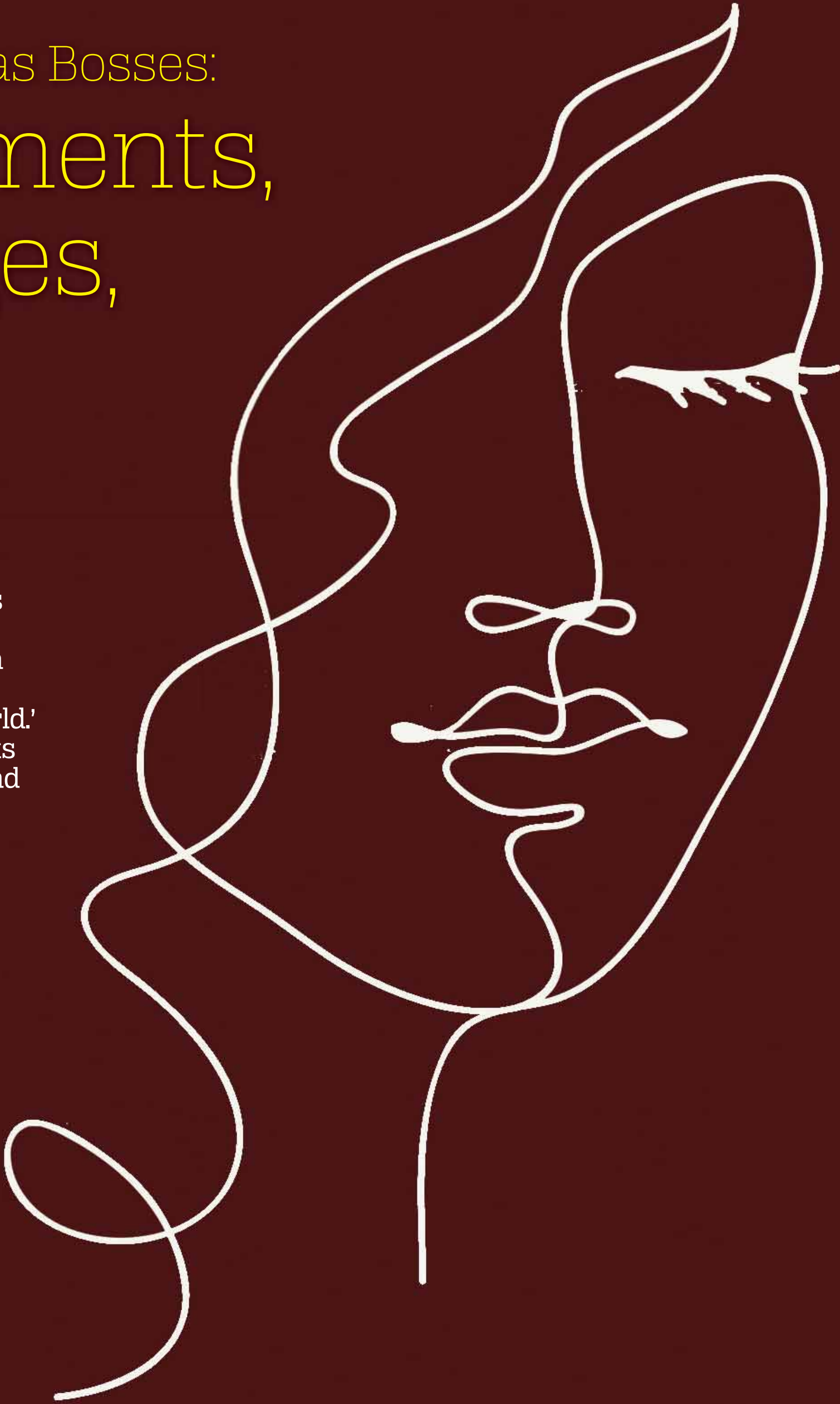
To address that issue, the British government extended the grace period for some checks until October 1.

The EU disputes that the grace period extension was in line with the agreement, saying London should honour what it signed up to. It has promised to launch legal action, or a so-called "infringement procedure" against Britain. — Reuters

features

Women in Oman as Bosses: Achievements, Challenges, and the Future

March 8 is celebrated globally as the International Women’s Day and this year’s theme focuses on ‘Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a Covid-19 world.’ We asked several women, experts in their fields, three questions and here are their answers... **P20**



INSIDE STORIES

LOCAL SCENE



THE CAMEL SOUQ: THE OUTDOOR SHOPPING MALL FOR AFFICIONADOS

Adjacent to every major camel racing event or training centre, you can find a camel souq, where all manner of goods from souvenirs to stock-food, halwa to henna, clothing to coffee and leather-goods to lucerne... **Story on P18**

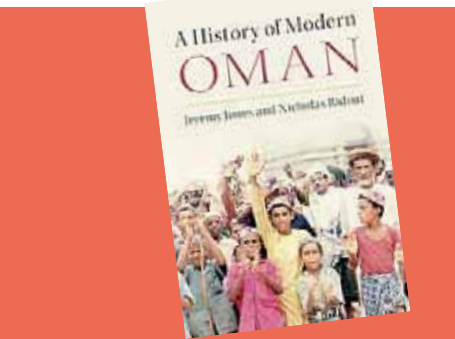
ART



BRITISH GRAFFITI ARTIST BANKSY CONFIRMS NEW ARTWORK AS HIS

Mysterious graffiti artist Banksy has claimed a new piece of artwork on the side of a former prison site in Britain as his own... **Story on P19**

READ



A HISTORY OF MODERN OMAN

BY JEREMY JONES, NICHOLAS RIDOUT

This book combines the most recent scholarship on Omani history with insights drawn from a close analysis of the politics and international relations of contemporary Oman.

FASHION



MILAN FASHION WEEK: OPTIMISTIC TRENDS FOR NEXT WINTER

The curtain fell on Monday on another Milan fashion week – or at least the screen went dark on this season’s all-digital affair, in which designers looked ahead to better times... **Story on P19**

CONSERVATION



GALAPAGOS ISLAND GETS 36 ENDANGERED GIANT TORTOISES

Three dozen endangered giant tortoises, born and raised in captivity, have been released into the wild on one of the Galapagos islands, where their kind is from **Story on P19**



Observer
THE ARABIAN ORYX

The Arabian oryx or white oryx is the national animal of Oman and a medium-sized antelope with a distinct shoulder bump, long, straight horns, and a tufted tail.



It is a bovid, and the smallest member of the genus Oryx, native to desert and steppe areas of the Arabian Peninsula.



the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary was listed in the World Heritage List by the UNESCO.



The Arabian oryx was extinct in the wild by the early 1970s, but was saved in zoos and private preserves, and was reintroduced into the wild starting in 1980



The Camel Souq: The Outdoor Shopping Mall for Afficionados



BY RAY PETERSEN

Adjacent to every major camel racing event or training centre, you can find a camel souq, where all manner of goods from souvenirs to stock-food, halwa to henna, clothing to coffee and leather-goods to lucerne. All the supplies and accoutrements to keep the camel trainer, his staff and animals, fed, healthy and happy.

Several trucks and utility vehicles were parked adjacent to the road near the roundabout at the entrance to the complex, and here a diverse assortment of camel feeds could be purchased, but the most evident form of feed was the lucerne, or alfalfa, either in bales as hay or as freshly cut, in smaller bales. Alfalfa is a clover type legume, that has been used as stock fodder for over 2500 years, since the days of the prime Iranian and Hellenic Greek civilisations.

Known more widely as lucerne in Europe, it is prized as a thoroughbred horse feed offering a notable nutritional boost through quick release, and its complete absorption. Further, like clover, it is a low calorie, nutrient high, vitamins C and K and traces elements, protein rich 'superfood.' It grows well in arid climates, and because it has fast growth and re-growth, with short turnaround harvests, it can be cut and made to hay four times a year. Salim al Junaibi offered to sell me some and roared with laughter when I told him my cat doesn't eat it, and I don't have a camel. "Don't worry", he said, "I sell you camel too!" He is probably still chuckling.

Hamdan bin Salim al Wahaibi, from Bidiya, has a colourful stall at the Al Bashayer Camel Racing Festival, at which he offers Lambskin Water Carriers, Woven Lambswool Purses, Belts, Bags and high-quality Camel Sticks. He attends all major racing events but has a thriving made-to-order business as well. From the same region, but her home in Ibri, a cheerful Afra Al Darai focuses on souvenirs and hand-crafts.

Just 50 metres up the row, Hamed al Wahaibi and his wife, Moza al Wahaibi, from Mahout, have their extensive tented stall, which they insist is "smaller than our big one", that appears to have everything conceivable for outfitting a camel in training, saddles, bridles, covers and charms are all part of their 'travelling road-show' which can be found at camel racing events and festivals throughout the GCC, while they still have a significant shop at Mahout. Their business has been going for more than 20 years, and they proudly display certificates of commendation from numerous camel racing authorities.

The pandemic has severely affected the trade of the souq vendors this year, as there are no tourists and few spectators are attending events, yet one and all retain their cheery nature and traditional charm. I'm guessing this trading sector has had no help in negotiating Covid, and the 'rainy day money', is probably gone by now, but I never heard a murmur or saw a glimmer of discontent in all my discussions with the traders, whose pragmatism could well be mirrored in many global environments as an exercise in tolerance, understanding. A positive side issue was that it appears that the pandemic messages are 'getting through', as mask compliance across the entire campus of the event was excellent!



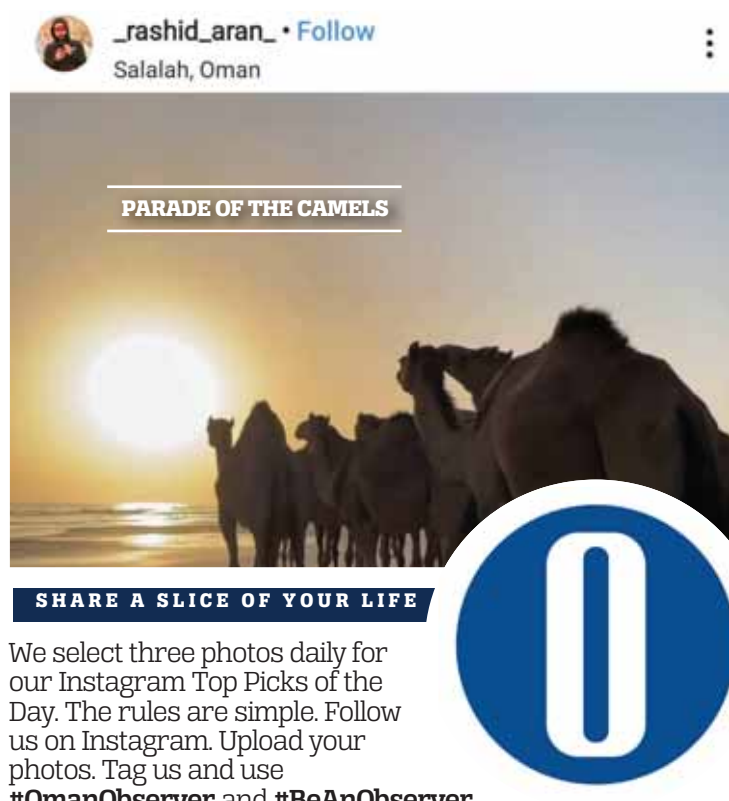
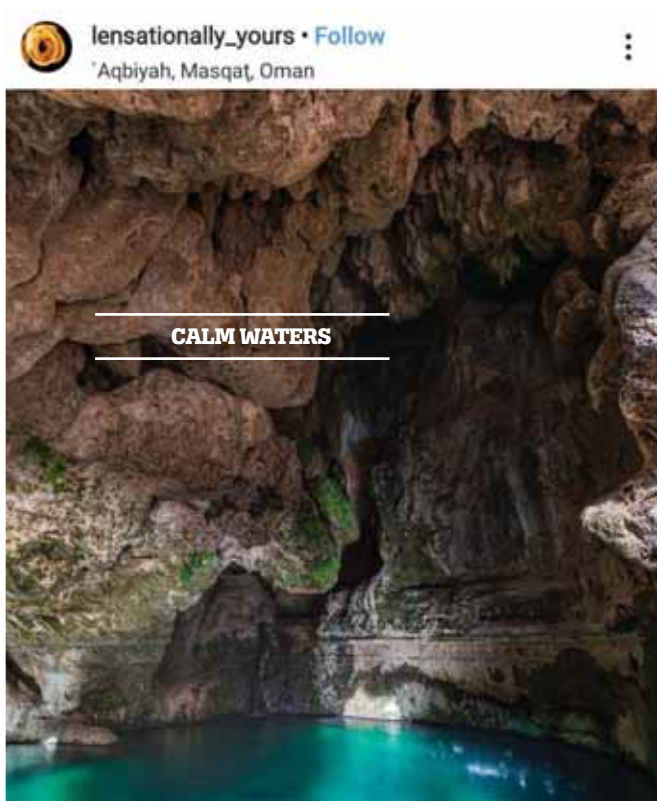


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British graffiti artist Banksy confirms new artwork as his

MYSTERIOUS GRAFFITI artist Banksy has claimed a new piece of artwork on the side of a former prison site in Britain as his own.

In a video published on his Instagram site on Thursday, Banksy posted footage of him creating the artwork on the side of Reading prison under the cover of darkness.

The artwork shows a prisoner escaping down the side of a wall on a rope made of bedsheets tied to a typewriter.

The footage also features an episode of the Joy of Painting with late American painter, Bob Ross.

Throughout the video, Ross narrates how to create a painting while Banksy works on his own piece.

Banksy called the work "Create Escape." There has been a campaign for several years to turn the former jail - which is protected under British heritage rules - into an arts centre.

Last year a deal was negotiated by Britain's Ministry of Justice to sell it to a property developer, prompting fears it would be turned into flats.

However, the deal fell through, according to local publication Berkshire Live.

The prison, formerly known as Reading Gaol, was first opened in 1844 and subsequently closed in 2014.

Over the years it had a number of famous inmates, including author Oscar Wilde.

Upon his release he wrote a poem called The Ballad of Reading Gaol.

Several stars over the years have backed a campaign to prevent the prison being sold for housing.

Actress Dame Judi Dench and actor and author Stephen Fry are some of the stars who have supported it, Berkshire Live reported. — **dpa**

Milan Fashion Week: Optimistic trends for next winter



THE CURTAIN fell on Monday on another Milan fashion week — or at least the screen went dark on this season's all-digital affair, in which designers looked ahead to better times.

The autumn/winter 2021-2022 collections had an air of hope for when coronavirus is banished or at least brought under control: for when home clothes are shed and new outfits see the light of day, for when life simply returns to a semblance of normal.

Sequins, glitter and frills
Sequins set the tone for an irresistibly festive mood, with the standard set by Prada.

Raf Simons and Miuccia Prada used them for a sparkling lining of a large faux fur stole.

Elsewhere they were more full-on, entirely covering an otherwise straight-cut coat, or on skirts, bags and shoes.

At Valentino, Pierpaolo Piccioli used sequins on a skin-coloured dress, or a shimmering floor-length cape.

They were inserted into knitwear at Missoni or Brunello Cucinelli, while at Armani, sequins invaded a black tuxedo jacket, the effect completed with ruffles and gemstones.

INSIDE OUTSIDE

After months cooped up indoors, intimate wear was given an outing: dresses with thin straps in silk, lace or voile were on the catwalks of all the major houses.

At Fendi, there were fluid silk dresses, extended to the neck with the incorporation of long scarves.

New artistic director Kim Jones also used silk for trousers and tops, as if the working girl had transformed her silk pyjamas into an ultra-chic urban outfit.

Valentino's nets and laces revealed more than they hid, and MM6 Maison Margiela had camisoles with thin straps in a collection where everything was backwards, where underneath was on top.

BOMBER JACKETS

Bomber jackets brought a hint of G.I.

Jane to the collections, although more in the vein of Marilyn Monroe visiting the Marines than Demi Moore's shaved head.

At Prada, the nylon jackets were oversized and black. At Etro, they had an ethnic feel, at Pucci they were branded, while at Max Mara they highlighted the label's founding date of 1951.

For Alberta Ferretti they were in leather, while Dolce & Gabbana made them sexy with Madonna-style conical additions to the chest.

BLACK

Black was used to claim a more formal wardrobe.

At Valentino, the colour dominated with only flashes of white, gold and check.

At Prada, it contrasted with elements of colour on the arms, legs, necks or in accessories.

Armani used it to similar effect, the collection based on black with blue, green and lilac.

A grand finale of black at Fendi brought hyper-sophisticated looks. Meanwhile the strong woman with a contemporary Amazonian spirit at Alberta Ferretti wore black overalls, capes and wide black trousers.

FUR

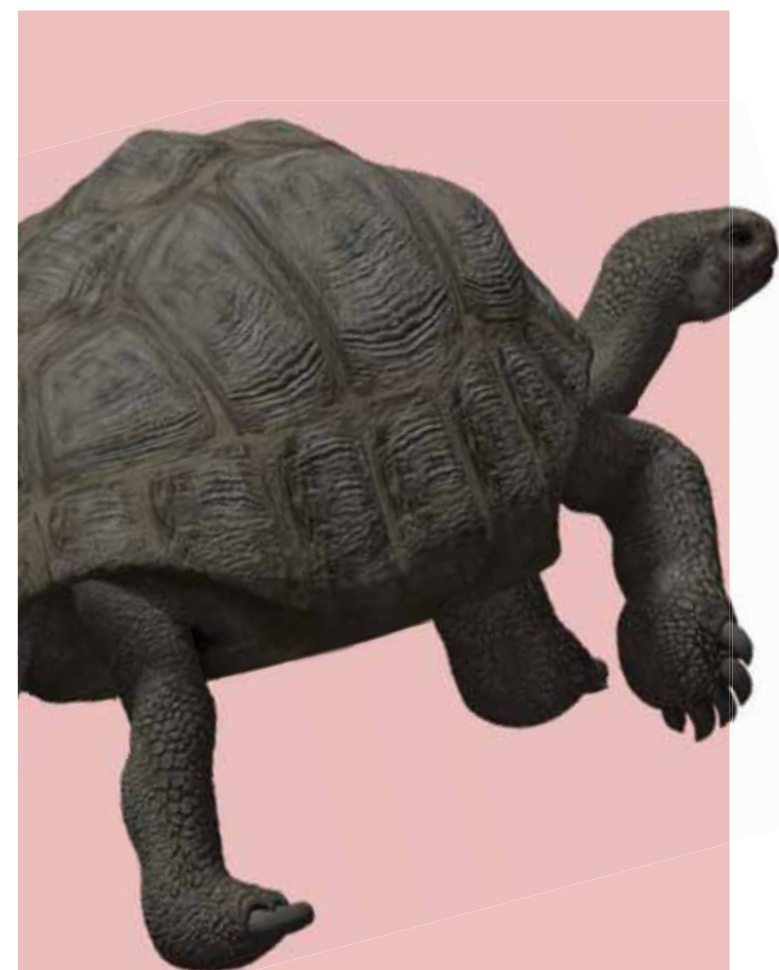
Like an animal coming out of hibernation, the heavy coat of the Yeti or Star Wars' Chewbacca is back, whether real or fake.

For Prada, the fur was synthetic and ubiquitous, used not just for coats and stoles but also in the decor of the show, covering walls and floors.

Fur specialists Fendi presented several grand looks, but with a novel approach — re-using materials from previous pieces.

Florentine house Ferragamo was fur-free, but showed knitwear with dramatic fur-like fringes.

At Dolce & Gabbana, the fur coat was colourful, sometimes pink, golden or multicoloured, and always oversized.—**AFP**



Galapagos island gets 36 endangered giant tortoises

THREE DOZEN endangered giant tortoises, born and raised in captivity, have been released into the wild on one of the Galapagos islands, where their kind is from.

The Galapagos National Park said the 36 creatures were freed on the northeastern part of San Cristobal island, where an estimated 6,700 giant tortoises roam free.

The latest additions belong to the Chelonoidis chathamensis subspecies — one of 15 endemic to the Galapagos, where Charles Darwin's observation of birds and tortoises on different islands led to his theory of natural selection.

The youngsters are between six and eight years old, and weigh between three and five kilograms (6.6-11 pounds) each.

The animals spent time in quarantine and were tested for disease and parasites before their release so as not to endanger the rest of the natives, the park said.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists Chelonoidis chathamensis, or San Cristobal Giant Tortoise, as endangered, though their numbers are on the rise.

The slow-breeding creatures can live to the age of about 100 or 150 and are endemic to the Galapagos Islands in the Pacific Ocean off Ecuador's coast.

According to the IUCN, the San Cristobal Giant Tortoise population experienced "catastrophic decline" due to the introduction of predators, competitors and vegetation change — from about 24,000 animals historically to about 500-700 in the early 1970s.

By 2016, the numbers had recovered somewhat to about 6,700.

In the last eight years, 75 of the sub-species, raised in captivity, have been reintroduced to San Cristobal.—**AFP**



WOMEN ON THE
WORLD STAGE

Having female ambassadors and pioneering Omani women representing Oman on the global stage when this was not the norm in our part of the world is by far the best and most memorable achievement to me. I was lucky enough to have worked closely with the first female Omani ambassador HE Khadija al Lawati during my time as an undergraduate in the Netherlands and later on connected with HE Hunaina al Mughairi within her capacity as the Omani ambassador to the US, and it showed me how Oman was so ahead of its peers. A lot of us Omani women assumed that it was a norm when in fact it wasn't until fairly recently in neighbouring countries.

As a female leader, the most significant barrier has to deal with the conventional roles society has imposed based on gender, and this goes back to the need for a paradigm shift on the stereotypical mindset a lot of us in the world are subjected to. People make assumptions about women at work and as leaders based on their stereotypical roles in society, and Omani women have strived and continue throughout their careers to change that perception as much as they can; to prove that women are capable of doing way more than what society allows them to do.

The way to overcome the challenges should start by targeting the closest circle first, before broadening it, and having those uncomfortable conversations that most of the time we tend to avoid. But also, being in a male-dominated society, it is important for women to find male allies who continue to offer their support to their female colleagues' opinions and decisions when it seemed difficult to get through to people's minds.

This year's International Women's Day theme proclaims "from challenge comes change, so let's all choose to challenge". As a young Omani woman, the identities I carry have impacted the work that I do in ways that would surely be different if I wasn't carrying them, and for that, I am grateful because it has allowed me a unique point of view which I am sure many of my fellow Omani women share. Despite the challenges women face, I am confident that with more of us coming together, championing one another, and seeking allies, we can all work hand in hand to promote gender-responsive policies and find ways to connect our work using the gender lens

Rumaitha al Busaidi
Middle East Climate Strategist
Media Personality
Marine Scientist

WOMEN IN
HOSPITALITY

Did you know that "Hospitality" is currently classified amongst the top female-led industries in the world? The hospitality sector has significantly changed over the past decades. Nowadays, female hoteliers tend to portray a leadership style that is highly recognised and appreciated by the employees, which positively contributes to their deep essence of motivation and achievement.

Due to the dynamic nature of hotel life, there are still some preconceptions that women face during the hiring process, such as the difficulty in finding work-life balance, childbearing, or choosing family over a career. Hence, being a female hotelier made me strongly believe that professional and personal lives are layers on top of each other with rotating levels of emphasis. Since I cannot let go of any of them, I chose to celebrate this overlap rather than trying to force them apart.

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My advice to all the working women out there: Never let work and ambition compete with your personal life. How much or little guilt you experience at work or home is in your control; as it is more of a mindset to become happy with your choices. Success starts by believing in an idea, doing what it takes to make it happen, going out there to achieve it and doing what you love every day!"

Sarah Khaled
Director of Marketing Communications
Shangri-La Al Husn Resort & Spa

WOMEN IN
FINANCE & BANKING

I am honoured to be among a great number of women in the banking industry and beyond who are working alongside our male counterparts with every bit as much passion and drive. While we are fortunate for the industry's ongoing commitment to promoting a supportive and equal opportunities culture, our success can no less be attributed to the determination and strength of women across the Sultanate.

We are blessed to live in a country that recognises the potential of women and grants us equal rights, owing to the wise vision of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and now His Majesty Haitham bin Tarik. This commitment is just important as ever as we continue to build a globally competitive banking industry, while supporting Oman's Vision 2040 for a progressive and equal society.

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As we commemorate International Women's Day, we hope to encourage women across the Sultanate to know what they are capable of, and to know that every one of them is important and valuable to our nation's development.

Salima al Marzooqi
Chief of Islamic Banking
NBO

Women in Oman as Bosses:
Achievements,
Challenges and the Future

WOMEN IN
TECHNOLOGY

Women in Oman have been an essential contributor to building the Omani society. Women have contributed to the continuous development of Oman while empowering fellow women to participate in the prosperity of this country.

On International Women's Day, we celebrate all women, we celebrate the many strengths and the perspectives they bring to technology. For women in technology, that means we acknowledge those who have pushed the boundaries of the industry and are helping to strengthen workforces by making them more inclusive environments. As a forward-thinking and innovative sector, it's important for the tech industry to continue creating opportunities where women not only enter the industry, but break the gender 'norms' to lead.

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It is now more than ever that women in STEMA are needed to provide knowledge and mentorship to other women because when we encourage and empower each other, it can result in amazing things for the future of tech, future of a nation and future generations.

Alena Dique
Coordinator, UNCTAD Youth Action Hub, Oman
Founder, One Oman

WOMEN IN
CORPORATE & PR

The PR and Communications industry has always had its slew of opportunities and challenges for women. Things have changed tremendously. Only 10 years ago, this was a male-dominant industry. Today, the advances are evident, where we are seeing more women occupy senior positions, from women bosses running their own agencies to communication experts sitting with their male counterparts, vying for a seat on the table.

I think no matter if you are on the client or on the agency side of the equation, the biggest challenge that I have seen in the field is having women's voices heard. I will never forget when I attended a meeting and the female client was 'shushed' by her male counterpart because he wanted to talk. She simply shied away. The consistent lack of female voices suggests that women participation is still undervalued, where in reality their experiences are distinct. The diversity they bring impacts business decisions and innovation.

“

I am fortunate enough to be working side by side with a man who supports women and women who support other women - where both have extended opportunities to me that have been new, challenging and rewarding. This is what is needed to bridge the gap and advance to an inclusive society.

Luma al Saleh
Deputy Managing Manager
TRACCS

WOMEN IN
CREATIVES

During the era of our late Sultan, the role of Omani women has expanded and has included male-dominated areas like politics, arts and governance. Omani women broke many glass ceilings in the last 20 years and the same can be said in the field of fine arts. It is very heartwarming to observe that Oman women had been getting the full support of the government in the field of art by establishing the Omani Society for Fine Arts in 1993. Open to both genders, it has allowed women to launch their careers in the even bigger field into the consciousness of the international art market.

One of the remaining challenges we have to contend with as artists are the scarcity of galleries. While we get exposure to OSFA, it will help make the art scene in Oman even more dynamic if more galleries will be created to also give focus to emerging artists. Inshallah, education more focused on fine arts will also rise so that raw talents in Oman can be honed.

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It is my dream as an Omani woman artist to one day rise and reach international ranks. With the mechanisms in place, women artists in Oman are now given opportunities to rise with their male counterparts. For the world to appreciate local and Omani talents is not impossible. It just needs a little bit more push and support to bring it to the pinnacle it deserves.

Enaam Ahmed
Artist
Omani Society of Fine Arts