

His Majesty greets Japan Emperor on his birthday

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Emperor Naruhito of Japan on the occasion of his birthday. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and long life to Emperor Naruhito, and the friendly people of Japan further progress and prosperity. — ONA



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OMAN OBSERVER

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MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO BRUNEI, GUYANA

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to Sultan Bolkiah, and his country's friendly people further progress and welfare. His Majesty has also sent a cable of greetings to President Dr Mohamed Irfaan Ali of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana on the occasion of his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes to President Ali and his country's friendly people. — ONA

HM HOCKEY CUP FINAL ON MARCH 1

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, will preside over the final match of His Majesty the Sultan's Hockey Cup for 2020 on Monday (March 1), in the presence of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth. The 50th edition of the Cup saw the participation of 14 clubs, including Al Nasr, Al Salam, Sohar, Seeb, Muscat, Salalah, Majees, Al Ittihad, Ahli Sidab, Qurayat, Al Bashayer, Nizwa, Bausher and Dhofar. — ONA



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SPECIAL CORNER FOR LATE SULTAN QABOOS



The National Museum is setting up a special corner named after late Sultan Qaboos. The initiative comes as part of efforts to develop the museum's narrative art, which is considered among innovative pillars of documentation and which aims to enrich the experience of visitors to this leading cultural edifice. Jamal bin Hassan al Musawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, said: "This corner will immortalise this towering personality in Omani history (Sultan Qaboos) and perpetuate his memory in the hearts and minds of Omanis and expatriates. It will convey, almost comprehensively, all the aspects of life of late Sultan Qaboos, both as an Omani and as a Sultan. It is scheduled to inaugurate the Sultan Qaboos Corner by the end of this year."

DETAILS ON P3

New electricity tariff will be applied gradually, says top official

ZAKARIA FIKRI
MUSCAT, FEB 22

The new electricity consumption bill has not been rescinded, but it will be applied in a phased manner. Generally, the January bill includes the approved tariff as per the regulations published in December which involves the gradual application of the new tariff over the year.

This was stated by Qais bin Saud al Zakwani, Executive Director, Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR).

He said that the approved tariff for the first group is 15 baisas, which will be applied gradually over the year starting with 11 baisas in the first month for electricity consumption up to 2,000 kilowatts. He added the mechanism for the gradual application of the new tariff is the purview

The approved tariff for the first group is 15 baisas, which will be applied gradually over the year starting with 11 baisas in the first month for electricity consumption up to 2,000 kilowatts

QAIS BIN SAUD AL ZAKWANI

Executive Director (APSR)

of the National Subsidy System Committee.

It has been rumoured that the new electricity tariff has been revoked as it was supposed to be enforced in January as per the

subsidy reorientation regulation issued by the APSR. January bill was calculated based on 11 baisas instead of 15 baisas for consumption up to 2,000 kilowatts, and 14 baisas instead of 20 baisas for electricity consumption up to 4,000 kilowatts. The bill for electricity consumption above 4,000 kilowatts will be 22 baisas instead of 30 baisas, the official said, adding that the new tariff will be applied gradually.

NEW TARIFF STRUCTURE

The new tariff structure includes the following categories: Big consumers category that includes all subscribers of all the categories except the residential category who consume 100 megawatts per hour in a year or more, and the cost-reflective tariff (CRT) is applied to all subscribers in this category.

Oman bans arrivals from 10 countries

MUSCAT: As part of its ongoing session, the Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic held a meeting on Monday under the chairmanship of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior, to discuss updates about the pandemic, measures of protection against the virus and ways to curb its spread.

The Supreme Committee studied the impact of the global epidemiological situation on health systems in different countries around the world, particularly amid the spread of mutated variants of the virus linked to travel. In this context, the committee pondered over the potential risks lest the new strains might prevail in the Sultanate and exert pressure on its health establishments — a likely possibility indicated by local reports and PCR tests conducted on incoming passengers.

To protect individuals and society and to safeguard the outcome of efforts made over the past period, the Supreme Committee decided to suspend incoming flights from 10 countries, which

are: Sudan, Lebanon, South Africa, Brazil, Nigeria, Tanzania, Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Ethiopia, in addition to arrivals from any other country if the travellers happened to have visited the above-mentioned countries within 14 days before applying to enter the Sultanate.

The ban takes effect from Thursday (12 am) and continues for a period of 15 days. An exemption is granted to Omani citizens, diplomats and health

workers and their families who all have to undergo the usual approved health procedures before entering the Sultanate.

The Supreme Committee urges all citizens and residents to avoid travel abroad, except under extreme necessity.

The committee prays to the Almighty Allah to protect all people against all harm.

Meanwhile, the total number of positive Covid-19 cases in the Sultanate reached 139,692 while the number of recoveries stood at 130,848, comprising 94 per cent.

The total number of Covid-19 related death cases stood at 1,555, the Ministry of Health said.

DECISION TAKES EFFECT FROM THURSDAY

A WAXING GIBBOUS MOON



This picture taken on Monday shows a view of the moon in its waxing gibbous phase (is between a half moon and full moon), as seen from Kuwait City. — AFP

Omani students in snow-battered Texas safe and sound

WASHINGTON: The Cultural Attaché's Office at Oman Embassy here said that Omani students in the Texas, partly overwhelmed by a winter storm, are safe and sound. The office described the students' conditions as "good and reassuring".

In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Dr Talal Mohammed al Balushi, Cultural Attaché at the Sultanate's Embassy in



Congresswomen help distribute food at the Houston Food Bank on Sunday. — AFP

Washington, said that the snow storm swept through the southwestern side of Texas and that the University of North Texas is far from the centre of the storm.

Dr Talal stressed that weather conditions there are stable, and he advised Omani students to stick to the instructions issued by the university and US authorities.

Meanwhile, some 8.8 million people in Texas still had is-

ues with their water supply as of Sunday evening, CNN quoted authorities as saying, after a record-breaking freeze knocked out power stations last week. Millions of Texans are still being advised to boil water before using, though all power plants were back online over the weekend and power had been restored to most homes as the weather returned to normal. — Agencies

Omani students in UK brave pandemic odds

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
patkaushal

Even though it is a challenging time for the students pursuing their studies away from their countries, some Omani students in the UK said they were coping with the situation and trying to be as much safe as possible from the new strains of Covid-19.

Some of the students who are residing in Bristol said they were in high spirits and motivated despite all the challenges they are facing due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Saud al Busaidy, who is doing PhD in education at the University of Bristol, said, “I stay at home most of the time, busy with my study. As it is allowed to do exercise outside with certain restrictions, I usually go for a walk, which is a great

way to clear my head from the lockdown stress.”

Majed al Rahbi, a final year student at the University of West of England, said, “Covid-19 has significantly changed the delivery of courses in most of the university departments in which lectures and tutorials are online at the moment. I am coping with that.”

Nasser al Nasri is also a student in Bristol, but he is with his family. As nurseries are open, Nasser takes two of his children to the nursery, and then resumes his classes online. Nasser said, “Although most of the shops are closed, shopping for necessities is permitted. Many grocery shops that provide ‘halal’ food are open. Others including clothes shops are closed. Pharmacies and healthcare services centres are open.”

I stay at home most of the time, busy with my study. As it is allowed to do exercise outside with certain restrictions, I usually go for a walk, which is a great way to clear my head from the lockdown stress

SAUD AL BUSAIDY
PhD student at University of Bristol

Majed and Nasser admitted staying indoors is challenging for them. They admitted to having managed stress and anxiety through

virtual hangouts once or twice a week with other Omani students. This helps them in encouraging each other to express feelings and create a lively atmosphere full of fun and excitement.

“Most of the Omani students in Bristol, and the UK in general, are coping with the situation, and if any student has any issue, they can contact their academic adviser at the Cultural Attaché Office,” they said.

There is an active group of Omanis staying in Bristol. Majed al Rahbi is head of the Omani Society of Bristol and Bath since 2018. He admits to having faced many challenges. “Challenges are there, but we keep supporting new students coming to Bristol. I usually advise them where they should stay, the safe areas, the agencies

that provide accommodations for students, and the shops that provide ‘halal’ food and other groceries.”

“Some students faced a difficult time during this pandemic. We have a WhatsApp group on which we share experiences and other stories,” he said and added that the social media groups keep them connected and stress-free.

Commenting on the travel situation in the country, Saud al Busaidy said, “I had to travel to Oman after the second lockdown and had to return to the UK in February when the third lockdown started. Oman Air, thankfully, provides one flight a day from Muscat to London Heathrow. At both the airports, I have noticed that precautions have been taken as all staff at the airport, the cabin

crew, and all the passengers wear a face mask, and I have seen that hand sanitisers are provided at both airports.”

“Before my flight to London, I had to provide a negative result of the PCR test, and I had to fill in a passenger locator form, which both were requested at London Heathrow airport.”

Saud had to quarantine for 10 days in Bristol. The information about what is required before travelling, is given by the staff at the Cultural Attaché Office at the Oman Embassy in London.

“The British government updates the countries policies and the details are available online at their website www.gov.uk. Thus, students should read what is needed before heading off to the airport,” Saud said.

Budget deficit stands at 13.5% of GDP

MUSCAT: The Sultanate’s general budget deficit increased by 58.5 per cent at the end of the third quarter of 2020, to reach RO 2.4 billion, compared to RO 1.5 billion during the same period of 2019, constituting a ratio of 13.5 per cent to the gross domestic product (GDP) at current prices.

The data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI) on the Analysis of the Economic Situation in the Sultanate as at the end of third quarter of 2020 indicate that the total public revenue dropped by 24.4 per cent at the end of third quarter of 2020, to hit RO 6 billion, compared to RO 7.9 billion for the same period of 2019.

The total public expenditure fell by 10.9 per cent to reach RO 8.5 billion. The data also shows that the GDP at current prices declined by 16.5 per cent, from RO 21.8 billion at the end of the third quarter of 2019 to RO 18.2 billion in 2020. This decrease is mainly attributed to the slump in total value added of oil activities from RO 7.7 billion at the end of the third quarter of 2019 to RO 5.8 billion at the end of the third quarter of 2020.

This drop in the value added of oil activities is mainly attributed to a decrease in the value added of crude oil by 28.3 per cent and the value added of natural gas by 3.5 per cent to reach RO 1.15 billion at the end of the third quarter of 2020, compared to RO 1.19 billion for the same period of the previous year.

The report also points out that the value added of non-oil activities fell by 12.4 per cent to reach RO 13.2 billion at the end of the third quarter of 2020. This decrease is attributed to the drop in value added of industrial activities by 19.8 per cent and those of service activities by 10.6 per cent, while the value added of agricultural and fish field activities rose by 9.8 per cent.

As for indicators of foreign trade, the NCSI data shows that the surplus in trade balance at the end of the third quarter of 2020 decreased by RO 1.6 billion, compared to the same period of the previous year of 2019 when it stood at RO 2.7 billion. The decline in the surplus of trade balance is due to a drop in the value of merchandise exports by 21.5 per cent at the end of the third quarter of 2020.

The value of merchandise import decreased by 11 per cent, to stand at RO 6 billion. Indicators of the monetary situation within the NCSI report show that the total domestic liquidity (M2) at the end of the third quarter of 2020 rose by 11 per cent, to reach RO 19.3 billion, compared to RO 17.4 billion in the same period of the previous year of 2019.

The money supply (M1) increased by 13.4 per cent, to stand at RO 5.7 billion. Total deposits of the private sector at the end of the third quarter of 2020 grew by 9.5 per cent, to reach RO 16.4 billion, compared to RO 15 billion in the same period of 2019. The total value of loans and financing granted by commercial banks and Islamic windows at the end of the third quarter of 2020 rose by 2.1 per cent, to stand at RO 26.4 billion, compared to RO 25.9 billion in the same period of 2019.

The total value of personal loans at the end of third quarter 2020 also increased by 0.5 per cent, to reach RO 8.5 billion. — ONA

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National Museum commemorates rich legacy of Sultan Qaboos



MUSCAT: The National Museum is setting up a special corner named after the late Sultan Qaboos.

The initiative comes as part of efforts to develop museum narrative art, which is considered among innovative pillars of documentation and which aims to enrich the experience of visitors to this leading cultural edifice.

Jamal bin Hassan al Musawi, Secretary-General of the National Museum, said, "This corner will immortalise this towering figure in Omani history (Sultan Qaboos) and perpetuate his memory in the hearts and minds of Omanis and expatriates. It will convey, almost comprehensively, all the aspects of life of the late Sultan Qaboos, both as an Omani individual and as a monarch. It is scheduled to inaugurate the Sultan Qaboos Corner by the end of this year, unless adverse conditions intervene otherwise, given the exceptional conditions



under coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic."

Al Musawi pointed out that the National Museum was honoured by the Royal orders issued by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to transfer Royal 'sultani antiques' to the National Museum and make them available to members of the public.

Al Musawi explained that steps are underway to establish the Sultan Qaboos Corner, which will showcase the most sought-after "Letter 1" – or what was often referred to as "The Will", addressed by the late Sultan to the Royal Family Council. It is the first unique rarity received by the



National Museum. It will be on show in the State Symbols Section of the museum.

"Current action focuses on the stage of internal equipping, including the forging of show boxes. This will be followed by the stage of designing and fixtures for Royal sultani items.

Al Musawi added that a minor, first-of-kind corner named "Armitage" will be established at the museum. It will be a miniature expo showcasing relics from the Islamic civilisation in Russia and it will run on for one year, renewable for a similar duration.

"Meanwhile, close coordination is underway with

This corner will immortalise this towering figure in Omani history (Sultan Qaboos) and perpetuate his memory in the hearts and minds of Omanis and expatriates. It will convey, almost comprehensively, all the aspects of life of the late Sultan Qaboos, both as an Omani individual and as a monarch

JAMAL AL MUSAWI

Secretary-General,
National Museum

Louvre Abu Dhabi museums to designate a corner in the National Museum for antiques from the Ottoman civilisation. Muscat will for the first time host such exhibits, the latter being in the context of cooperation with Louvre Abu Dhabi, which began four years ago," Al Musawi added.

Al Musawi outlined efforts undertaken towards the restoration and enrichment of museum collections, noting that the National Museum laid emphasis on programmes of preservation and maintenance to raise the standard of Sultan Qaboos-related items under its custody.

As many as 706 items were restored in 2019 and a total of 1,578 others in 2020, while a selection of antiques from the Ministry of Heritage and Culture is being restored. Since 2018, preservation services are offered to individuals and establishments against a certain charge, Al Musawi added. — ONA

Non-resident Ambassador to Australia presents credentials



TOKYO: Dr Mohammed bin Said al Busaidy, Sultanate's Ambassador to Japan presented his credentials to Gen David John Hurley, Governor-General of Australia as Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Non-resident Ambassador of the Sultanate to Australia. During the credentials presentation ceremony, which was held via video-conferencing, the Sultanate's

ambassador conveyed sentiments and best wishes of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to Gen Hurley and the Australian friendly people further progress and prosperity. On his turn, the Governor-General of Australia asked the Ambassador to convey his greetings and appreciation to His Majesty the Sultan. He lauded the steadily growing relations between the two friendly countries. — ONA

Oman takes part in GCC-UK meeting

MUSCAT: The Sultanate took part in the joint ministerial meeting held via video-conferencing today between the GCC countries and the United Kingdom (UK).

The Sultanate was represented in the meeting by Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs.

The GCC side in the meeting was headed by Dr Abdullah Rashid al Zayani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bahrain and Chairman of the GCC Ministerial Council whilst it was chaired

from the British side by James Cleverly, Minister of State for Middle East and North Africa.

The meeting touched on relations of cooperation between the GCC countries and the UK and means of enhancing them in various fields, as well as exchanging views on the regional and international issues of common interests.

Dr Nayef Falah al-Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General, Ranil Jayawardena, UK Minister for International Trade and officials in the Foreign Ministry took part in the meeting. — ONA

Negative Covid-19 test report must for passengers to India

KABEER YOUSUF

🐦kabeeryousef

Travellers to India must have negative Covid-19 PCR test. They should submit a self declaration form online at the Air Suvidha portal (www.neadelhiairport.in) before the scheduled travel, upload a negative RT PCR report conducted within 72 hours prior to the journey and also submit a declaration with respect to authenticity of the report.

"We have received the circular from the Indian Civil Aviation Authorities and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to follow certain rules and regulations while taking booking for any destination in the country," travel agents said

Additionally, passengers bound to India have been advised to submit an undertaking on the air suvidha portal or to the Ministry of Civil Aviation through concerned airlines before the journey, to abide by the decision of concerned authority to undergo home quarantine / self monitoring of health for 14 days.

They should submit a self declaration form online at the Air Suvidha portal (www.neadelhiairport.in) before the scheduled travel, upload a negative RT PCR report conducted within 72 hours prior to the journey and also submit a declaration with respect to authenticity of the report

PCR test exemption is only for those travel for emergency purposes like death in the family. To seek such exemption, travellers shall apply to the same portal at least 72 hours before boarding.

"Boarding shall be allowed only to those passengers who have filled in the self declaration form online and uploaded the negative RT PCR test report."

Only asymptomatic travellers



will be allowed to board the flight after thermal screening. Also, all passengers are advised to download Arogya sethu app.

While on board, passengers must keep the mask on, follow respiratory hygiene, hand hygiene and other precautions. While

disembarking, physical distancing should be maintained.

Passengers travelling to Mumbai would be subjected

to mandatory institutional quarantine at their own cost, in the nearby hotels for seven days.

All passengers transiting to onward domestic flights in India should hold a valid negative Covid-19 test report for travel exemptions.

All international passengers arriving in Karnataka from any country shall have Covid-19 negative certificate (issued within 72 hours from the time of departure), otherwise, they will be mandatorily subjected to RT-PCR test for Covid-19 at the port of entry.

All passengers travelling to Tamil Nadu must carry a valid Negative Covid-19 test report, issued within 72 hours from the time of departure.

All passengers travelling to Tamil Nadu should carry auto-generated TN e-Pass (<http://tnepass.tneag.org>).

All passengers travelling to Kerala must register on the Covid-19 Jagratha portal before commencement of journey through covid19jagratha.kerala.nic.in/



CYCLING IS
PROVEN TO BURN
MORE CALORIES
COMPARED TO
WALKING

RIDE IT, STAY FIT

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

There is one sport that took centre stage for many individuals in Oman during the pandemic is cycling.

Cycling has known benefits for fitness. So how many calories can we burn while cycling? According to Mohammed al Hashmi, a staunch promoter of cycling in Oman, “The amount of calories you want to burn depends on the speed you maintain.” Cycling is proven to burn more calories compared to walking.

Cycles got so popular during the peak pandemic that there was shortage of cycles at one point in time. A person who knows the value of cycling as a sport as well as for individual fitness regime, is Mohammed al Hashmi, who out of his passion for cycling opened his first shop in Izki and has now successfully opened his second outlet in Maabela. He is also the founder of Gulf Cycles and creates events for cyclists that are frequented by both nationals and expatriates.

“I started with a small shop in Izki and this year I have expanded to Muscat because I want to create a different experience. Cycling was a hobby for me but I wanted other people to benefit from it too because so many people suffered from high blood pressure and sugar. Cycling can keep you fit. When I first started people weren’t too keen. I started organising events and showed how to ride the bicycle in the right method. I go to schools to give talks and also to villages and towns in different wilayats”, explained Mohammed.

SAFETY FIRST

“I do not want anyone to ride without helmets. It is an extremely important safety measure to protect your head in case of a mishap”, pointed out Mohammed. There are many safety steps a cyclist must keep in mind because a lot of time they are cycling on main roads. Many individuals also use it as a means of transportation.

In Oman the neon jackets are required if one is cycling on the main road. The longest distance Mohammed has travelled in his cycle is 100 km.

“It all depends on the type of cycle one chooses and that requires an understanding of where you want to cycle. For example, with your gravel bike you can cycle on road or off road and this is what we would use for travelling. The mountain bikes have thicker and bigger tyres and the cycle frame is also different. The cycles are made of aluminium, steel and carbon. The carbon is the lightest. The road bikes are made for speed and they are also made from aluminium, steel and carbon”, explained.

Carbon cycles are apt for climbing and often used in races because it is not heavy.

Mohammed is currently developing another concept with cycling and that is a studio to work out on a cycle. The stationary bike with a screen on front will take the rider through the terrain he/she wants and accordingly one gets the work out too.

PLACES TO GO CYCLING

“There are quiet a few places to go cycling and we have some tracks at Bausher, Maabela”, he said. In 2017 Mohammed started with the concept of Gulf Bicycles, a brand that has become popular now in Oman. It has its own group of cyclists who compete in races.

“We have six members and in the current season we are in third place. The Oman Cycling Federation organises the races and this season we have done seven races. March 26, will see the last race”, noted Mohammed.



Cycling was a hobby for me but I wanted other people to benefit from it too because so many people suffered from high blood pressure and sugar. When I first started people weren’t too keen. I started organising events and showed how to ride the bicycle in the right method

MOHAMMED
AL HASHMI
Founder of Gulf Cycles



Insured Omanis in pvt sector top 253,000

SHAMSA AL RIYAMIYAH
MUSCAT, FEB 22

The number of insured Omani employees at the private sector stood at 253,300 at the end of January this year, a 3.1 per cent decline compared with the same period of 2020, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The number of nationals employed by the private sector is projected to surge in the months ahead owing to the replacement and work-related training policies adopted by the ministry of labour.

The majority of national employees in the private sector occupy clerical jobs at 56,000, followed by engineering jobs at 55,000, service jobs (42,000) and public administration directors (30,000).

As per the economic activities, the construction sector employs 54,000



nationals, wholesale and retail trade (37,000), the manufacturing sector (32,000) and the transport and storage sector (20,000).

The data shows that 68,000 national employees earn monthly salaries ranging

between RO 325 and RO 400; 51,000 earn salaries between RO 400 and RO 500; 31,000 employees earn salaries between RO 500 and RO 600; 21,000 employees earn salaries between RO 600 and RO 700; 14,000 employees

earn salaries between RO 700 and RO 800; 10,000 employees earn salaries between RO 800 and 900; 7,000 employees earn salaries RO 900 and RO 1,000; 32,000 earn salaries between RO 1,000 and RO 2,000; and 15,000 employees

Jobs announced

The Ministry of Labour has unveiled new jobs opportunities in 32 private establishments mostly assistant engineering, medical and financial jobs, as part of its policy aimed at providing job opportunities for nationals in various sectors and stimulating the economy growth.

Besides, the ministry announced 103 opportunities for work-related employment in technical fields at 6 private establishments.

earn salaries over RO 2,000.

The majority of national employees are based in Muscat Governorate at 81,000 followed by North Al Batinah Governorate at 45,000, South Al Batinah (42,000) and Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (32,000).

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Indian Social Club Oman

NOTICE CALLING THE AGM

Members are hereby notified that the Annual General Body Meeting of the Indian Social Club, Oman, is scheduled on Friday, 26th March 2021 at 6.00pm in an online session.

Agenda:

1. Reading of the notice calling the meeting by the General Secretary.
2. Opening address by the Chairperson.
3. Approval of the minutes for the previous Annual General Meeting.
4. General Secretary's Report.
5. Discussion and approval of the audited accounts for the year 2020 and appoint auditors for the year 2021.
6. Election of the Managing Committee for the year 2021 and 2022.
7. Any other points raised by the member with the permission of the chair.

Members whose name appears in the voters list, only may attend the meeting.

HON. GENERAL SECRETARY
INDIAN SOCIAL CLUB, OMAN

Fuel stations must provide basic facilities: MoCIIP

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

The government said that it is mandatory for the fuel stations to provide basic and essential facilities such as clean toilets, air-filling outlets, and clean restrooms as part of their efforts to ensure quality service and customer satisfaction.

The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) was replying to complaints that the air-filling outlets at some fuel stations in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali are not functioning properly.

"There is also a lack of prayer rooms, clean restrooms, and good restaurants at some places near fuel stations," said a few travellers in complaints to the ministry.

"The implementation of the decision to provide all the necessary services in the fuel stations will help travellers on long drives and also provide job opportunities in the shops near fuel stations," said a citizen. According to a decision

of the MoCIIP, all fuel filling stations should provide basic public amenities.

The new regulations amend the provisions related to licenses' issuance for setting up and operation of filling stations.

The text of the amendment reads: "Articles 32 and 38 on the conditions ruling the licenses for erecting and running filling stations will be replaced by the following texts: Owners of the petrol stations should provide basic public facilities in all filling stations such as toilets and other basic services required by the geographical location of the station."

Operators shall ensure that these facilities are clean and available to the user during the working hours of the station.

Article 38 imposed penalties on violators starting with a written warning and then an administrative fine of RO 1,000 for some violations in case of repetition. Other fines reach up to RO 3,000 for breaching articles 26, 29, and 36.

MoH to train medical specialists

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 22

The Ministry of Labour, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health's Directorate General of Private Health Institutions, has decided to receive the requests of institutions that wish to train Omanis specialised in professional medical fields.

The specialised fields are dental assistants and medical positions and assistants. The applications must be submitted between February 22 and March 22, 2021.

The ministry confirmed that this support will be limited and priority will be given on a first-served basis. Recently, the government said it will intensify efforts to replace the expatriates employed in various private sectors with the national workforce.

It also called on private health institutions to cancel subcontracts of the expatriate workforce, which will contribute to creating job opportunities for Omanis in the future.

MUSCAT-CAIRO DIRECT FLIGHTS

The UAE-based Budget carrier Air Arabia Egypt has announced it will launch a twice-weekly service between Cairo and Muscat, starting March 11.

Flight E5 753 will depart Cairo every Monday and Thursday at 12.55pm and arrive in Muscat at 6.35pm.

The return flight, E5 754, will depart from Muscat at 7.25pm and arrive in Cairo by 10.05pm.

The flights will be operated using an Airbus A320.



SULTANATE OF OMAN MINISTRY OF HEALTH

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health invites specialized companies to participate in the following Tenders: -

Tender Ref.	Description	Last date for Collection of Tender Document	Closing Time/ Day/Date	Eligibility	Tender Fee (Non-Refundable)
MOH/HQ-18/2021	Supply of Surgical Instrument	25/ February /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 17/March/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-19/2021	Supply of Surgical Items for The Royal Hospital	25/ February /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 17/March/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-20/2021	Supply of Pharmaceuticals for The Royal Hospital	25/ February /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 24/March/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 125.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-21/2021	Supply of Surgical Items (Neuroplastic)	25/ February /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 17/March/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-22/2021	Supply and installation of Freezers for the Management of Corona (Covid-19) at Various Health Facilities	25/ February /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 10/March/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-23/2021	Supply of Radiopharmaceuticals for Sultan Qaboos Hospital in Dhofar Governorate	04/ March /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 17/March/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-24/2021	Supply of Surgical Items (Covid 19)	28/ February /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 10/March/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-25/2021	Supply of Surgical Consumable Items	04/ March /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 31/March/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-26/2021	Supply of Surgical Items (Cochlear Implants)	04/ March /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 31/March/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set
MOH/HQ-27/2021	Supply and Installation of Medical Equipment at Bahla Hospital in Al Dhakiliyah Governorate	11/ March /2021	Before 08 am on Wednesday 24/March/2021	Specialized Companies registered with Tender Board	R.O 25.000 Per set

- All Specialized and interested Companies registered with Tender Board on the above mentioned Grade may obtain Tender documents from the E. Tendering website: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om> against non-refundable payment as mentioned above for each set of document.
- Tenders should be submitted on line on the given website signed and sealed. The Tenderer should enclose scan copy of Bank Guarantee or a certified Cheque issued by a Local bank for not less than One percent (1%) for the Tender value validity for (90) days from the Tender Submission date, addressed to The Chairman of the Tender Committee before one day of date submission.
- The Original Bank Guarantee should be submitted to the office of Director of Purchase and Tenders one day before the submission date for all Tenders.
- Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest tender and reserves the right to accepts or reject any tender.

(<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

Any Clarification, you may contact via
Telephone: 24166670
Email id etenderhd@ita.gov.om

MOORE STEPHENS LLC

NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF ZAWAWI 3D SERVICES LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1380)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Zawawi 3D Services LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1151278, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Members on 3 February 2021. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

Office No.41,4th Floor, Building No.1022, Way No.1013;
Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within six months from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Zawawi 3D Services LLC
(Under voluntary liquidation)

Iran: IAEA chief visit led to ‘significant achievement’

TEHRAN: Iran on Monday hailed as a “significant achievement” the outcome of a visit by the head of the UN nuclear watchdog and a temporary agreement they reached on site inspections.

That deal effectively bought time as the United States, European powers and Tehran try to salvage the 2015 nuclear agreement that has been on the brink of collapse since Donald Trump withdrew from it.

Tehran now demands that Washington scrap punishing sanctions Trump reimposed in 2018, while Washington demands that Iran first return to all its nuclear commitments.

In the standoff, Iran’s parliament has demanded that Iran from Tuesday limit some inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

IAEA chief Rafael Grossi held last-ditch talks in Tehran



Iranian foreign ministry spokesman Saied Khatibzadeh during a press conference in Tehran. — AFP



IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi addresses the media upon his arrival from Tehran at Vienna International Airport in Schwechat. — Reuters

on Sunday where the two sides hammered out a temporary technical deal.

They confirmed that Iran will continue to allow access to UN inspectors to its nuclear sites — but will for three months bar inspections of other, non-nuclear sites.

Grossi said afterwards that a “temporary solution” had been

Iran will continue to allow access to UN inspectors to its N-sites but will for three months bar inspections of other, non-nuclear sites

achievement”.

Khatibzadeh stressed that the outcome was “within the framework of the parliament’s binding law”.

Iran will temporarily suspend so-called “voluntary transparency measures” — notably inspections of non-nuclear sites, including military sites suspected of nuclear-related activity.

Tehran will for “three months record and keep the information of some activities and monitoring equipment” at such sites, Iran’s Atomic Energy Organization said. — AFP



Demonstrators take part in a protest marking two years since the start of a mass protest movement demanding political change in Algiers. — Reuters

Algerians hit streets on protest anniversary

ALGIERS: Thousands of Algerians marched on Monday in the capital and other cities to mark the second anniversary of the North African nation’s anti-government “Hirak” protest movement, journalists said.

The protest movement in April 2019 forced longtime president Abdelaziz Bouteflika into resigning, and Monday’s demonstration in Algiers is the largest since rallies were suspended in March last year in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Police were deployed in force in Algiers, with helicopters hovering overhead.

“We are not here to celebrate, but to demand your departure,” the protesters shouted, referring to a regime that they see as being little changed from the one headed for two decades by Bouteflika.

“The fateful hour has arrived,” read one banner brandished by demonstrators.

Security checkpoints created traffic jams across the city, with identity checks carried out around key flashpoints, with several arrests made.

Police tried to block protesters from gathering around the Grand Post Office, which was at the heart of the mass protests that kicked off in Algiers and several other cities on February 22, 2019 to oppose

Bouteflika’s bid for a fifth term.

Elsewhere in the country, marches were being held on Monday including in Annaba, Oran, Setif and Mostaganem, according to witnesses and accounts on social media.

Demonstrators kept up their action after Bouteflika’s resignation, demanding a sweeping overhaul of a ruling system in place since Algeria’s independence from France in 1962. They only suspended marches last March due to coronavirus restrictions, but calls circulated on social media for a return to the streets from Monday.

On the eve of the anniversary, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune, elected in December 2019 on a very low turnout in a poll boycotted by the protest movement, announced a limited government reshuffle, in a bid to head off renewed rallies.

The reshuffle saw few major changes by Tebboune, who was once a prime minister under Bouteflika.

Among those retained are Prime Minister Abdelaziz Djerad and Justice Minister Belkacem Zeghmami, seen as a symbol of Algeria’s judicial crackdown on protesters and opposition activists.

Tebboune also signed a decree dissolving parliament, clearing the way for early elections, for which no date has yet been set. — AFP

Erdogan defends plunge in reserves

ANKARA: President Tayyip Erdogan on Monday defended a policy that oversaw a steep drop in FX reserves under former finance minister Berat Albayrak, his son-in-law, saying it helped Turkey to ride out pandemic-related shocks.

Albayrak abruptly resigned shortly after Erdogan replaced the central bank governor.

In his two-year term as finance minister, the lira slumped to record lows while foreign-exchange reserves dwindled under a policy of state banks selling an estimated \$130 billion in dollars to support the lira. In a social media campaign blaming Albayrak for economic woes, the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) demanded to know what had happened to the FX funds that it said was sold from the central bank’s reserves. — AFP

Gaza Strip’s vaccination campaign kicks off

GAZA CITY: The Gaza Strip’s vaccination campaign against Covid-19 began on Monday using Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine, the Hamas-run Health Ministry said in a statement.

A total of 11,000 people are expected to get both doses of the vaccine over the next three weeks.

On Sunday, Mohammad Dahlan — the rival of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas — brokered the shipment of 20,000 doses of the Sputnik V vaccine to the Strip, donated by the United Arab Emirates.

The shipment arrived in Gaza through the Rafah border crossing point with Egypt. A ministry spokesman said that medical staff would be the first to get inoculated, followed by patients with chronic diseases and those who have had organ transplants.

It is the first large shipment of vaccines to Gaza, which is run by the Hamas movement, since the outbreak of the pandemic last March.

Last week, the Palestinian Authority sent 2,000 doses from the West Bank to Gaza to help combat the spread of the virus in



A Palestinian health worker prepares a shot of the Russian Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine in Gaza City. — AFP

the coastal enclave.

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, over 54,000 cases of infection and 543 deaths have been recorded in the coastal enclave, according to data released on Sunday.

The Gaza Strip is home to over 2 million people, living in cramped and often miserable conditions with poor health care.

Israel intensified its blockade of the Gaza Strip in 2007, in a move supported by Egypt. Both countries say the measure is necessary for security reasons.

SHORT TAKES

AMMAN

Syrian pound sinks to record low

The Syrian pound sank to a new record low on Sunday with a scramble for dollars in a country hit by sanctions and facing a severe foreign currency crunch, dealers and bankers said.

Traders said it cost as much as 3,450 Syrian pounds to buy 1 dollar on the street on Sunday, more than 18 per cent lower than the end of last month.

One leading Damascus-based licensed exchange dealer said the dollar had been rising with demand that far exceeded supply



after months of relative stability in the 2,500 range.

“There is a lot of demand on dollars but hard currency is not available,” one dealer in the city of Aleppo said. — AFP

MIKHMORET

Israel to clean beaches after massive tar pollution

Israeli authorities warned people to keep away from the country’s Mediterranean shore to avoid a massive tar slick, as thousands of labourers and volunteers worked to clean contaminated beaches.

Powerful winds and unusually high waves pummelled Israel’s entire Mediterranean coastline over Tuesday and Wednesday, with tonnes of tar staining 160 kilometres of beaches along Israel’s Mediterranean coast from Gaza to Lebanon.

The ministries of interior,



environmental protection and health urged people to avoid “the beaches for bathing, sport and leisure, until further notice”.

“Exposure to tar can risk the public’s health,” they said in a joint statement. — AFP

AMMAN

Yemen prisoner swap talks end with no deal

Talks on a possible prisoner exchange between Yemen’s warring parties concluded on Sunday with no deal after a month of wrangling, the UN said.

“I am disappointed that this round of talks did not amount to what we saw in Switzerland last September which resulted in the historic release of 1,056 detainees,” said the world body’s Yemen envoy, Martin Griffiths, in a statement.

“I urge the parties to



continue their discussions and consultations, conclude the implementation of what they agreed to and expand the arrangements to release more detainees soon.” — AFP

In brief

■ HANOI



VIETNAM TO START COVID-19 VACCINATIONS IN MARCH

Vietnam will begin its Covid-19 vaccination programme next month with frontline healthcare staff and the elderly in line for the first doses as the country tackles a new wave of coronavirus infections, state media reported.

The Southeast Asian country expects to receive 60 million doses this year, including 30 million under the WHO-led COVAX scheme, with a first batch of 204,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine due to arrive on February 28.

"The first wave of Covid-19 vaccinations, prioritising frontline medical workers and high-risk groups, will begin in March", the state-run *Tuoi Tre* newspaper reported. — AFP

■ JAKARTA



INDONESIA PRESIDENT WARNS OF FOREST FIRES AS HOT SPOTS DETECTED

Indonesian President Joko Widodo said local authorities should get prepared for potential forest fires later this year as hot spots had been detected on the island of Sumatra.

The Southeast Asian country has suffered some of the biggest tropical forest fires outside the Amazon and Congo in recent years, putting at risk endangered animals like orangutans and tigers and sending choking haze across the region. "Ninety-nine per cent of forest fires are perpetrated by humans, whether intentional or out of negligence", Jokowi, as the president is widely known, said in a virtual meeting with officials. — Reuters

■ TOKYO



JAPANESE PM OFFERS APOLOGY FOR HIS SON

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga on Monday offered an apology after his government found his son, a media company employee, had treated officials to lavish dinners nearly 40 times.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications reported a total of 13 ministry officials had been wined and dined by his son Seigo Suga, who works for Tohokushinsha Film Corp, which provides satellite broadcasting services for which the ministry issues licences.

Tohokushinsha Film Corp spent a total of more than 520,000 yen (#4,950) on the dinners, according to broadcaster NHK. — dpa

Doctors in South Korea threaten strike

SEOUL: Doctors in South Korea have threatened a protest strike against legislation to strip them of licences following criminal convictions, sparking fears about possible disruption of a coronavirus vaccination effort set to begin this week.

Healthcare workers are scheduled to receive the first batch of AstraZeneca's vaccine from Friday, as South Korea looks to protect 10 million high-risk people by July, on its way to reaching herd immunity by November.

But over the weekend, the Korean Medical Association (KMA), the largest grouping of doctors, said it would go on strike if parliament passed the bill to revoke the licences of doctors getting jail terms.

"The bill might result in ordinary, innocent doctors being stripped of their licences and falling into hell because of an accident that has nothing to do with their



A nurse takes part in the coronavirus disease vaccination mock drill at the vaccination centre in Seoul. — Reuters

job, or lack of legal knowledge", spokesman Kim Dae-Ha said in a statement on Monday.

Association President Choi Dae-Zip has called the bill "cruel", saying its passage into law would "destroy" current cooperation

with the government to treat the virus and carry out the vaccine campaign.

No date has been set yet for the strike, the KMA said however.

The standoff stoked concern that any strike of doctors could

The standoff stoked concern that any strike of doctors could slow the rollout

slow the rollout at a time when authorities are scrambling to allocate medical personnel to about 250 inoculation centres and 10,000 clinics nationwide.

Discord over the bill was undesirable ahead of the vaccine rollout, the health ministry said, adding that the doctors' association was in the grip of a "misunderstanding" about it. Parliament has been seeking to revise the Medical Service Act to ban physicians guilty of violent crimes, such as abuse and murder, from practicing their skills.

Ruling party lawmakers pushing for the bill denounced the association, saying it was trying to "take public health hostage to maintain impunity from heinous

crimes".

The group of nearly 140,000 has a long history of medical policy disputes with the government.

Many hospitals were depleted of staff during the pandemic last year when it steered weeks-long walkouts over plans to boost the number of medical students, build medical schools, ease insurance coverage and increase telemedicine options.

That action spurred hundreds of thousands of Koreans to file presidential petitions urging punishment for the doctors, as polls showed 58 per cent of respondents opposed the strike. There are no surveys yet on the latest stalemate.

Last week, a government poll showed almost 94 per cent of 367,000 healthcare workers aged 64 or younger in priority groups said they were ready to take the AstraZeneca vaccine, despite concerns over its efficacy in older people. — Reuters

Taliban oppose postponement of US troop withdrawal

KABUL: The Taliban strongly reject a possible postponement of the United States' troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, a spokesman for the insurgent group said in an interview.

"Our fighters will never agree to an extension", Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said.

"Nato, America and all sides have come to the conclusion that if they want to overcome the current crisis, the only good solution is the implementation of the agreement signed", he added.

In early 2020, the US promised to withdraw its troops by May 1, 2021. In return, the fighters committed to peace talks with Afghanistan's government.

Observers accuse the Taliban of violating other promises made

as part of the agreement.

For example, the Taliban are said to be continuing to cooperate with other terrorist groups, and the level of violence in the country is also said to be too high.

Nato countries will now continue their mission in Afghanistan until further notice, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on Thursday after consultations.

The Taliban continue to seek a diplomatic solution, but warn of consequences if the agreement is violated.

"If, God forbid, the agreement is violated, then of course the people of Afghanistan will defend themselves... as they have done for the past 20 years", Mujahid said. — dpa

PROTEST AGAINST FUEL HIKE



Members of Dravida Munnetra party take part in a protest against the price hike of fuel and liquefied petroleum gas in Chennai. — AFP

Mumbai imposes fresh virus restrictions after spike in cases

NEW DELHI: India's financial capital Mumbai imposed fresh coronavirus restrictions on Monday as a rise in cases in the worst-affected region sparked fears of a new wave, while the country's vast inoculation drive fell behind schedule.

All religious, social and political gatherings are banned in the city and the surrounding western state of Maharashtra, home to 110 million people, after infections spiked to levels last seen in October.

Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray said he was "worried about the severity of a second wave if it hits the state", which has recorded nearly 52,000 deaths since the pandemic began.

"The simple mantra is wear a mask, follow discipline and avoid lockdown. We will review the situation again in the next eight days and decide on a lockdown", Thackeray said in a live television address on Sunday.

Elsewhere in the state there



A medical worker prepares to administer a dose of the Covid-19 coronavirus vaccine to a municipal worker at a vaccination centre in New Delhi. — AFP

were tighter restrictions.

India's tough nationwide lockdown imposed in March has largely been relaxed, with even its famously lavish weddings and cricket crowds returning, albeit with numbers capped.

Daily new cases peaked at more than 97,000 in September but have been falling sharply, coming in at under 9,000 a day earlier this month.

But the past two weeks have seen an uptick, with around 14,000 new infections on Monday, the biggest rise coming in Maharashtra, taking India's total past 11 million since the pandemic began with 156,000 deaths.

In the capital New Delhi, which on Monday recorded just 46 new infections and two deaths in the crowded megacity of 20 million, locals said they were still concerned.

"If we look worldwide, in places where they let the guard down cases have increased again," said 44-year-old sales and marketing professional Gaurav Kumar.

"We cannot afford to take things lightly, given our population size and recent history of cases."

"Everyone seems to believe that corona has gone away from our country. I don't think so", said housewife Seema Arora, 30.

"People are being foolish."

— AFP

Huge anti-coup rallies in Myanmar after threat

YANGON: Hundreds of thousands of anti-coup protesters rallied across Myanmar again on Monday after a clear threat from the junta that it was prepared to use lethal force to crush what it branded as "anarchy".

The warning came after three demonstrators were shot dead over the weekend, and the funeral on Sunday for a young woman who died from bullet wounds at an earlier rally.

International alarm continued to build, with the United Nations chief on Monday condemning the military's "brutal force", and the European Union announcing it was ready to impose sanctions on the junta.

Massive street demonstrations have taken place since Myanmar's military staged a coup on February 1 and detained civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi, ending a decade-long experiment with democracy. A civil disobedience campaign has also since choked many government operations, as well as businesses and banks, and the junta late on Sunday gave its most ominous signal yet that its patience was wearing thin.

"Protesters are now inciting the people, especially emotional teenagers and youths, to a confrontation path where they will suffer the loss of life", said a statement on state-run broadcaster MRTV. — AFP



Myanmar citizens protest against the military coup in front of the UN office in Bangkok. — Reuters

EU prepares to sanction four Russians over Navalny

BRUSSELS: European Union foreign ministers agreed on Monday to prepare sanctions on four senior Russian officials close to President Vladimir Putin in a mainly symbolic response to the jailing of Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, three EU diplomats said.

The political agreement, which is expected to be formally approved by the EU in March, came after France, Germany, Poland and the Baltic states urged the 27-member bloc to send a message to Putin that debate and protest must be allowed in Russia.

Navalny was arrested after returning to Moscow last month from Germany, where he had been recovering from a near-fatal poisoning in August with what Western nations said was a nerve agent. His arrest sparked nationwide street protests in Russia.

No names were discussed at Monday's EU meeting, but one diplomat said the proposed new travel bans and asset freezes would target, among others, Alexander Bastrykin, whose Investigative Committee handles probes into major crimes and reports directly to Putin.

Bastrykin is already under



Chief of Staff and Political director of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, Leonid Volkov speaks during a joint press conference with CEO of the Anti-Corruption foundation at the Lithuanian Embassy in Brussels. — AFP

British human rights sanctions. Also to be targeted, the diplomat said, is Igor Krasnov, who became Russia's prosecutor-general a year ago in a move seen as giving Putin greater scope to retain influence once his presidential term expires in 2024.

The third official on the draft list is Viktor Zolotov, head of Russia's National Guard, who

publicly threatened Navalny with violence in September 2018. The fourth man named by the diplomat is Alexander Kalashnikov, head of the federal prison service.

The sanctions are set to be imposed under a new framework that allows the EU to take measures against human rights violators worldwide.

Separately the EU has already sanctioned six Russians and a state scientific research centre in response to the August poisoning of Navalny.

The proposed new listings fall well short of the demands made by Navalny's allies, who have drawn up a list of 35 people including members of Russia's business elite — the so-called oligarchs — they want to see targeted.

EU governments say sanctions against senior state officials can better withstand legal challenges, while it is more difficult to prove business executives' involvement in any human rights abuses.

Before the EU meeting, Leonid Volkov, a senior Navalny aide, said in Brussels that sanctions against oligarchs might be a way to weaken Putin if they came to feel that association with the president was more of a liability than a source of protection.

But Volkov welcomed Monday's decision: "Even if it's too little... it's the first time personal sanctions are applied with regard to human rights violations, so it opens a way for further negotiation on this with Europe."

— Reuters

German students return to schools

BERLIN: Hundreds of thousands of German pupils returned to schools and kindergartens for the first time in two months on Monday, despite fears of a third coronavirus wave fuelled by the British variant.

Schools and daycare centres reopened in 10 German regions, including the capital Berlin and the most populous state North-Rhine Westphalia.

Most schools are limiting the return to pupils attending primary classes one to three. Class sizes have also been halved, alongside other precautions such as mask-wearing and airing out rooms, but critics have questioned whether the timing is right for the reopenings.

In discussions with party colleagues on Monday, Chancellor Angela Merkel reportedly mooted plans for

a step-by-step relaxation of measures in areas such as social contact, schools and restaurants and culture.

Merkel argued that relaxation measures should be strongly tied to testing, according to participants in the meeting.

Yet experts are warning that Germany could be at the start of a third coronavirus wave, as case numbers have begun to rise again in recent days.

On Monday, the nationwide seven-day incidence rate returned to 61 cases per 100,000 people after sinking to almost 50 in the past weeks.

"We're seeing that the numbers are climbing again. That's annoying, and it brings back some uncertainty," Health Minister Jens Spahn told public broadcaster ARD on Sunday, urging "caution".

— AFP



Students attend class at the Bruno H Buergeel primary school in Berlin amid the novel coronavirus Covid-19 pandemic. — AFP

Italian ambassador killed in DR Congo attack

GOMA, DR Congo: Italy's ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo was among three people killed on Monday when a UN convoy came under attack in the troubled east, DRC sources and the Italian government said.

Luca Attanasio died of his wounds after a World Food Programme (WFP) convoy came under gunfire near Goma while he was on a field trip, a senior diplomatic source said in Kinshasa.

The Italian government confirmed Attanasio's death and said an Italian policeman, Vittorio Iacovacci, as well as a driver it did not identify, had also died.

President Sergio Mattarella lashed at what he called a "cowardly attack."

"The Italian republic is in mourning for these servants of the state who lost their lives," he said in a statement.

Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio expressed his "great dismay and



Moroccan soldiers of the MONUSCO patrol the road in the Kibumba area in the Virunga National Park, 25km from Goma, where Italy's ambassador to the DR Congo was killed when a UN convoy came under attack. — AFP

immense sorrow", breaking off from a meeting in Brussels with EU counterparts to make an early return to Rome.

"The circumstances of this brutal attack are not yet known and no effort will be spared to shed light on what happened," Di

Maio said.

Attanasio, 43, had been representing Italy in Kinshasa since 2017, first as head of mission, and then as ambassador from October 2019.

The envoy suffered "gunshot wounds to the abdomen" and was

taken to a hospital in Goma in critical condition, the diplomat in Kinshasa said. The DRC's army said its troops were searching the area for the assailants.

A vast country the size of continental western Europe, the DRC is grappling with numerous



Luca Attanasio, Italian Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

conflicts, especially in its remote, mineral-rich east.

Scores of militias roam the four eastern provinces, many of them a legacy of wars in the 1990s that sucked in countries around central-southern Africa and claimed millions of lives.

The Rome-based WFP said that Attanasio was on a fact-finding mission with the UN's food agency.

"The delegation was travelling from Goma to visit a WFP school feeding programme in Rutshuru

when the incident took place," it said in a statement.

"The attack... occurred on a road that had previously been cleared for travel without security escorts," it said.

Monday's attack occurred north of Goma, in Nyiragongo Territory.

Armed groups in the area include a Rwandan Hutu militia called the FDLR, as well as the M23, also known as the Congolese Revolutionary Army.

The region includes the Unesco-listed Virunga National Park, a vast wildlife reserve that is home to a quarter of the world's population of critically endangered mountain gorillas.

More than 200 of the park's rangers have been killed in attacks stretching back more than a decade.

The UN's refugee agency, the UNHCR, said last week that more than 2,000 civilians were killed in North and South Kivu and Ituri province last year. — AFP

LONDON Prince William says Prince Philip 'ok' in hospital

Britain's Prince William has said his grandfather, Prince Philip, is "ok" as he remains under observation in a London hospital. Philip, who is married to Queen Elizabeth II, was hospitalised last Tuesday after "feeling unwell" with an unspecified illness.

Buckingham Palace has confirmed the illness is not connected to the coronavirus. He and the queen both received their first vaccine dose against the virus on January 9.



Prince William gave reporters an update on his grandfather's condition, saying: "Yes, he's OK, they're keeping an eye on him," according to the Press Association. — dpa

MOSCOW Syria approves Russia's Sputnik vaccine

Syria has authorised the use of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, its embassy in Moscow said. The country is the latest to approve the Russian vaccine, named after the Soviet-era satellite. Sputnik V was registered in August before clinical trials were under way, which left experts wary. But leading medical journal *The Lancet* published results showing the jab to be safe and 91.6 per cent effective.

"The Syrian Arab Republic has completed all registration proce-



dures for the Russian Sputnik V vaccine against the coronavirus infection and allowed its use on its territory," the Russian TASS news agency cited the Syrian Embassy as saying. — AFP

ROME Italy extends inter-regional travel ban

Italy has extended an inter-regional travel ban by just over a month due to rising coronavirus infection rates across the nation.

People are not allowed to leave their own regions until March 27, the new government of Prime Minister Mario Draghi announced on Monday in one of its first decisions in the fight against the pandemic.

Exceptions include travel for work and emergencies. Visits to other private households are only possible to a very limited extent.



In "red zones" with a high coronavirus risk, people are required to stay at home when possible. Under the new decree, private visits are also prohibited in those zones until March 27. — dpa

The ever evolving journey of life...

There is this life and we really do not have much scope to falter. Yes we can go with the flow and reach where it takes us or choose and plan.

It is not to say that people cannot afford to make mistakes because to err is human, but to come out of it maybe with scars and then come up in life and continue to thrive is when one is attempting to live the life. To remain where we are but not evolving would be sad.

This does not mean job hopping. Career is only part of our life as the pandemic has shown us. The job losses have been many but quite a few people became creative.

A friend said the pandemic era has been good for her because she got back into designing and was able to sell her tapestries online.

It is not always easy to keep mind at equal pace and keep emotions in balance. I recently met a mental health PhD candidate who is conducting research on drug addiction and cases of relapse. At one point she said, “I do not want to be emotional, because I want to say it the way the situation is for them. Their issues have to be understood.” Listening to her was overwhelming, then imagine the people who are going through the struggles of life trying to make a



Lakshmi Kothaneth
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CAREER IS ONLY PART OF OUR LIFE AS THE PANDEMIC HAS SHOWN US. THE JOB LOSSES HAVE BEEN MANY BUT QUITE A FEW PEOPLE BECAME CREATIVE

second inning in life trying to clear and overcome the past. Would the society give them a second chance? Can they regain the trust? Once we come to a conclusion we seemed to be stuck with it and seem to have a hard time to give a second chance. The question is can people really change? Smokers are able to overcome the habit so why not others? But according to Hameeda al Harthy, an expert on mental health who teaches at Higher Institution for Health Specialties, it is a mental state that even takes individuals to addiction in the first place. When children are unknowingly or knowingly neglected it goes on to have an impact on self esteem. They could easily be the victims of drug addictions, according to Hameeda.

In our younger days if we were told off about playing video games now the outlook is different. Video games have been found to have its assets too even though we still can find their disadvantages such as the potential impact on social skills. While playing video games online they can have connections with unknown people to play with them. Could all this add to the challenge of the delicate communication within the family? If all these years family orientation has mattered, surely it is important

even now especially when it comes to laying the foundation of values. I remember the satellite television was considered a threat to the society as it brought in the term global village, what about now when we are all in the cloud and distances have vanished and we are all in one web? With so many distractions waiting to capture their attention, Hameeda says it is best that you become a friend of your child, “Let them talk to you first about anything they want.”

More than 6,000 babies were born in January 2021 in the Sultanate, according to National Centre for Statistical Information. This is the generation born during the pandemic era when lifestyle as we know has gone through the new norm, but for these children who are born now strangers with masks will be the norm and the use of frequent use of sanitizer will be seen as a habit not a compulsive disorder and the new way of greeting with the fist or elbow a custom.

The greetings with a handshake, a hug or the desert style of greeting by touching of the noses, which is considered as the higher level of respect could be something of the past by the time these babies grow up, until of course we overcome the challenge of Covid-19 era.

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

MIXED SIGNALS

Road to renewed Iran deal likely to be long, bumpy

ARSHAD MOHAMMED AND HUMEYRA PAMUK

It took seven years from the summer's day in 2008 when a top US diplomat first sat down with his Iranian counterpart until the two sides sealed the 2015 Iran nuclear deal that aimed to keep Tehran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

No one expects it to take as long to establish whether they can resuscitate the pact abandoned by former US President Donald Trump, but US and European officials say the journey will be lengthy and arduous, if, indeed, they even begin the trek.

US President Joe Biden's administration said last Thursday that it was ready send to its special envoy, Rob Malley, to meet Iranian officials and seek a path back to the deal, agreed by Tehran and six major powers and named the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The issue of who goes first... I don't think it's the one that's going to be the most difficult. It's defining how each side views compliance...

US OFFICIAL

While Tehran sent mixed signals at first, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif took a hard line on Sunday, saying: “The US will not be able to rejoin the nuclear pact before it lifts sanctions.”

The crux of the deal was that Iran would limit its uranium enrichment programme to make it harder to amass the fissile material for a nuclear weapon — an ambition it has long denied — in return for relief from US and other economic sanctions. In theory, it should not be hard to decide how to revive an agreement whose terms are detailed in 110 pages of text and annexes. In reality, it will be a challenge for two reasons: the scores of sanctions that Trump imposed on Iran after walking away from the deal in May 2018 and the steps Iran took, after waiting more than a year, to violate the pact in retaliation.

While both sides have so far focused in public on the question of who moves first to revive the deal — each insists that the other must do so — a US official said the “sequencing” could be finessed.

“The issue of who goes first ... I don't think it's the one that's going to be the most difficult,” he said. “It's defining how each side views compliance,” the official added, citing instead which US sanctions might be lifted and “the question of ... the steps that Iran has taken, are they all reversible?”

The JCPOA, hammered out by Iran, Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States, required the United States to remove only “nuclear-related” sanctions on Iran.

Experts say Biden would find it politically fraught, and maybe impossible, to meet Tehran's demands that these be lifted given the likely criticism from Republicans.

WE WERE WIPED OUT

Merchants in historic Philadelphia market grapple with pandemic

JONNELLE MARTE

Athens Voulgaridis and his family have run their Greek gyro stand in Philadelphia's Reading Terminal Market since 1984, outlasting three recessions and a trademark battle with the US Olympic Committee.

No crisis has hit the business as hard as the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused a brief shutdown and slashed sales by as much as 80 per cent at the lowest point.

Typically a bustling hub of restaurants, shops and food vendors, the indoor market, which celebrated its 128th anniversary on Monday, stayed open throughout the pandemic. But with conventions on pause, tourism down and much of the lunch crowd now working remotely, foot traffic at the market whittled down to roughly a third of its normal levels.

“We were wiped out,” said Annie Allman, who took over as chief executive and general manager of the Reading Terminal Market in late January.

Merchants selling meat, cheese and other staple grocery items in one of the country's oldest and largest markets have seen steadier traffic. But restaurants that cater to people in need of a quick bite or visiting the landmarked building located conveniently close to the city hall and convention centre downtown were more acutely affected by restrictions on travel and indoor dining to slow the spread of the virus.

Visits to the greater Philadelphia area dropped by as much as 40 per cent last year and spending by visitors



Vanesa Peredo, owner of A Taste of Spain, serves customers at Reading Terminal Market in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. – Reuters

MERCHANTS SELLING MEAT, CHEESE AND OTHER STAPLE GROCERY ITEMS IN ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S OLDEST AND LARGEST MARKETS HAVE SEEN STEADIER TRAFFIC

was cut roughly in half, according to projections from Econsult Solutions, Inc.

The challenges the market's merchants are facing are indicative of the hurdles impeding restaurants, shops and other service industry employers across the country that are seeing slow rebounds as people remain hesitant to travel or spend time close to each other indoors.

“All our customer base has just disappeared,” said Voulgaridis, 48, who took over the family business, Olympia Gyro, in 2009 as the

economy was coming out of the Great Recession. In 2012, he received a cease and desist notice from the US Olympic Committee, requiring him to change the name of the business from Olympic Gyro.

While sales are improving after the city reinstated indoor dining earlier this year, they are still down by about 65 per cent from pre-pandemic levels, Voulgaridis said.

“This was just taking a knife to everything and cutting the lifeline to everything you've had,” he said.

— Reuters

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AFAN BRACE SPURS AHLI SIDAB

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ
MUSCAT, FEB 22

Yusuf Afan's brace powered 11-time champions Ahli Sidab to a crushing 4-0 victory over Nizwa in their HM Cup hockey championship Group A final round match at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Monday.

It was an utterly dominant performance from Ahli Sidab who controlled the game throughout the 60 minutes of the match. Afan gave Ahli Sidab the early impetus with a field goal in the 11th minute.

Nizwa kept things tight with some resolute defending to deny Sidab in the second and third periods.

However, Afan again arrived at the party for Sidab with his second goal in the 47th minute that made it 2-0 for Ahli Sidab.

Thereafter, Nizwa were at the receiving end of an Ahli Sidab onslaught as Aseel al Muaini struck another goal in the 57th minute. Hamed al Fazari then converted a penalty corner in the 58th minute to wrap up an overwhelming 4-0 victory for Ahli Sidab.

Nizwa kept things tight with some resolute defending to deny Sidab in the second and third periods

INFORMATION MINISTER TO PRESIDE OVER FINAL

Assigned by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information will preside over the final of the HM Cup on Monday, March 1, in the presence of HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth.

The 50th edition of the event is being held with the participation of 14 clubs, namely Al Nasr, Al Salam, Sohar, Seeb, Muscat, Salalah, Majees, Al Ittihad, Ahli Sidab, Qurayat, Al Bashayer, Nizwa, Bausher and Dhofar.

Among the 14 teams, eight teams — Ahli Sidab, Sohar, Nizwa, Majees, Al Nasr, Bausher, Dhofar and Seeb — have already qualified for the final round stage.

Oman to play friendlies against Jordan, India

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, FEB 22

Oman national football team will play friendly matches against India and Jordan in March. Both preparatory matches will be part of 'Red Warriors' Dubai camp which will take place from March 11 to 25.

According to the announcement by Oman Football Association (OFA) in their official twitter account, the team will have short domestic camp in Muscat from March 8 before heading off to Dubai. The first preparatory match against Jordan is scheduled to take place on March 20, while India fixture will be played on March 25.

The OFA has circulated to all the domestic clubs that the top-tier league will be stopped from March 6 until April 2 for the preparation of the senior football team. The matches of the 11th week of Omantel League, supposed to be played on March 4 and 5 will be postponed until further notice.

The newly announced overseas camp in the United Arab Emirates will help Oman prepare for the forthcoming matches of the 2022 World Cup Joint Qualification matches.

In November 2020, Oman were supposed to have Dubai camp but it was cancelled at that time and swapped with a local camp in Muscat. During the in-



Branko Ivankovic

ternal camp in last November in Muscat, the Red Warriors had beaten Muscat club 1-0 in a preparatory match at Seeb Stadium. Striker Khalid al Hajri netted the lone goal of the match.

FIRST ASSIGNMENT FOR IVANKOVIC

The friendlies against Jordan and India will be the first two officials assignments for Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic who took charge of the team earlier last year.

It is expected that the technical coaching staff will give equal chances for all players of the team in both games before selection of the main eleven.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) had moved the Asian World Cup Qualifiers from March to June. Also, the AFC allowed the national associations to host the remaining matches of the group during May 31 to June 15. Qatar is the nearest country to host group E matches.





Sri Lanka's Kumara tests positive for Covid-19

Sri Lanka pacer Lahiru Kumara has tested positive for Covid-19 ahead of the team's tour of the West Indies, the country's cricket board (SLC) said in a statement on Monday. Kumar, 24, is likely to miss the limited-overs leg of the tour, which begins on March 3.



Medvedev cracks top three, Karatsev soars 72 places

Daniil Medvedev broke into the top three for the first time in Monday's ATP rankings, while Russian compatriot Aslan Karatsev shot up 72 places after his shock run to the Australian Open semifinals. Karatsev, 27, rose from 114th to 42nd after knocking out three seeds before his dream run was ended by Djokovic.



Manchester City's Raheem Sterling scores against Arsenal. — Reuters

CITY JUGGERNAUT KEEPS ROLLING ON

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, FEB 22

Manchester City appear to be marching emphatically towards what would be their third Premier League title in four years after a 1-0 win over Arsenal, giving them a comfortable 10-point lead in the table. Remarkably, this was their 18th consecutive win in all competitions this season and their 11th positive result playing away from home. It equals the best all-time run for an English top-flight side set also by the club in 2017.

Asked to compare this feat to

his 2018 team's record 100-point haul in the league, City manager Pep Guardiola said: "I think it's even better this time because we had such a difficult start to the season. People look at our run of wins and think it's so easy, but I didn't expect it and I'm surprised and impressed by how well we have done. When all the other teams have been suffering and dropping points, we have been so consistent for the last two months."

Guardiola went on to say: "We won at Chelsea, at Anfield (against Liverpool), at Goodison Park (against Everton) and now



at Emirates, incredibly tough games. That's why I'm more than pleased to win just 1-0. People talk about records and victories but to do this you have to win this type of game many, many times. I'm more than grateful to these players for what they are doing

EPL RESULTS

ON SUNDAY

Aston Villa 1 (Traore 48) Leicester 2 (Maddison 19, Barnes 23)
West Ham 2 (Antonio 5, Lingard 47)
Tottenham 1 (Moura 64)
Arsenal 0 Manchester City 1 (Sterling 2)
Manchester United 3 (Rashford 30, James 57, Fernandes 75-pen) Newcastle 1 (Saint-Maximin 36)

because they are digging out results when it really matters and that is what brings tight, winning teams."

Arsenal were shocked by City's early offensive. Raheem Sterling missed a shot at a chance in the opening minute. Then with just

79 seconds into the match, the visitors took the lead. Ruben Dias, a new City signing this season, sent a beautiful long, diagonal pass to Riyad Mahrez, who went past left-back Kieran Tierney and crossed left-footed from the right for 5ft 7in tall Stirling to move away and outjump Rob Holding to head inside the far corner.

City enjoyed more of the possession throughout the game and had some near misses. Their control was such on the game that Arsenal never looked able to hit back with an equaliser, let alone a winner. They did have a couple of near misses when Tierney had

a fine effort saved in the first half and later Nicolas Pepe drove one into the side-netting.

Arsenal manager, Mikel Arteta said: "The way we conceded that early goal meant we had to be exceptional for the rest of the game and nail it. And we didn't do that. We had some really good moments where we matched them but the reality is that when we got into good positions, we lacked the final pass and the quality needed to score two or three goals. But at the moment they are the best team because they dominate in every single department."

Inter crush AC Milan 3-0 to pull clear on top

MILAN: Inter Milan coach Antonio Conte hailed a game "played to perfection" as Lautaro Martinez scored a double, with Romelu Lukaku also on target in a 3-0 win over city rivals AC Milan to extend their lead at the top of Serie A on Sunday.

Inter opened up a four-point lead over their second-placed opponents Milan as Conte's side target a first league title since their unprecedented treble under Jose Mourinho in 2010.

"Credit to the lads, they put in an extraordinary performance, carried out to perfection," said Conte, bidding to end his former club Juventus's quest for a 10th consecutive league title.

In third, Roma were held to a goalless draw at 15th-placed Benevento, giving Juventus, who are 11 points off top spot, the chance to move third against rock



ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS

ON SUNDAY

Parma 2 (Cornelius 3, Kucka 32-pen) Udinese 2 (Okaka 64, Nuytink 80)
AC Milan 0 Inter Milan 3 (Martinez 5, 57, Lukaku 66)
Atalanta 4 (Zapata 52, Gosens 64, Muriel 71, Romero 79) Napoli 2 (Zielinski 58, Gosens 76-og)
Benevento 0 Roma 0

bottom Crotone on Monday.

Roma are five points adrift of Milan with both teams going head-to-head in Rome next weekend.

Behind, in a match for fourth

place, Napoli crashed 4-2 at Atalanta with Nigerian forward Victor Osimhen stretched off and hospitalised overnight after losing consciousness following a knock to his head. — AFP

Conway stars as NZ beat Australia

CHRISTCHURCH, New Zealand: A Devon Conway batting masterclass inspired New Zealand to a 53-run win over Australia in the opening Twenty20 international in Christchurch on Monday.

Conway smashed an unbeaten 99 off 59 balls as the Black Caps overcame a shaky start to finish on 184 for five after losing the toss and being put in to bat.

In reply, the tourists were all out for 131 after 17.3 overs, with Black Caps spinner Ish Sodhi taking four wickets for 28 to give the hosts an early edge in the five-match series.

Australia captain Aaron Finch refused to blame the loss on his team's two-week Covid-19 quarantine upon arrival in New Zealand. "It feels like a long time since we played but we were treated brilliantly (in quarantine)," he said. "They just ran harder and we didn't get it right."

Jhye Richardson, fresh from signing a multi-million dollar Indian Premier League contract, was the pick of the Australian



bowlers, taking two for 31.

But the tourists could not dislodge Conway, whose 59-ball knock included 10 fours and three sixes, helping the Black Caps bounce back from 19 for three.

SCOREBOARD

NEW ZEALAND

M Guptill c Agar b Sams 0
T Seifert b J Richardson 1
K Williamson c Wade b Sams 12
D Conway (not out) 99
G Phillips c Marsh b Stoinis 30
J Neesham c Wade b J Richardson 26
M Santner (not out) 7
Extras (LB-3, W-4, B-2) 9
Total (for 5 wks, 20 overs) 184
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-11, 3-19, 4-93, 5-140
Bowling: Sams 4-0-40-2, Zampa 3-0-20-0, J Richardson 4-0-31-2, K Richardson 4-0-42-0, Agar 2-0-20-2, Stoinis 2-0-17-1, Maxwell 1-0-9-0

AUSTRALIA

M Wade c Williamson b Boult 12
A Finch c Conway b Southee 1
J Philippe c Conway b Boult 2
M Marsh c Santner b Jamieson 45
G Maxwell c Neesham b Southee 1
M Stoinis c&b Sodhi 8
A Agar c Jamieson b Sodhi 23
D Sams c Jamieson b Sodhi 1
J Richardson st Seifert b Santner 11
K Richardson c Neesham b Sodhi 5
A Zampa (not out) 13
Extras (LB-1, W-7, NB-1) 9
Total (all out, 17.3 overs) 131
Fall of wickets: 1-3, 2-8, 3-16, 4-19, 5-56, 6-98, 7-99, 8-99, 9-108
Bowling: Southee 3-0-10-2, Boult 3-0-22-2, Jamieson 3-0-32-1, Neesham 1-0-9-0, Sodhi 4-0-28-4, Santner 3-3-0-29-1

Conway said he was "pretty chuffed" with his career-best effort. — AFP

BIRTHDAY OF HIS MAJESTY, THE EMPEROR OF JAPAN

Tuesday, February 23, 2021 Special Supplement



Message by H.E. KOBAYASHI Toshinori, Ambassador of Japan to the Sultanate of Oman on the Occasion of the Emperor's 61st Birthday, 23rd February 2021



H.E. KOBAYASHI TOSHINORI
Ambassador of Japan to the
Sultanate of Oman

An old Japanese folk story tells of a fisherman who, after rescuing a sea turtle, is invited to ride it on a journey to a fantastical and timeless kingdom under the sea. My own journey across the ocean to the Sultanate two years ago was far more conventional - nevertheless, I too found myself in a beautiful land of breathtaking nature, vibrant society, and enduring splendour, and I feel extraordinarily blessed to experience the Omani way of life. Oman too, of course, has its turtles aplenty; whenever I witness the majestic form of one off the coast of this country, I am possessed by a strange feeling that our two nations have been somehow linked by these beautiful creatures since eons past.

I have often come to remark and appreciate the unexpected similarity between the culture of our two countries, though we may be separated by over 8000km, by climate, language, and ancestry. A strong sense of communal custodianship, a society guided by principles of integrity and sincerity, a proud tradition of hospitality and generosity - these are the qualities which are shared between our peoples, and form the invisible threads which bind together our international friendship. So too does our shared maritime heritage; nations such as ours whose fates have been shaped by the waves recognise the vital importance of fostering cooperation with overseas nations.

His Late Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, may his soul rest in peace, possessed great vision and under his wise guidance, Oman

established a precious and greatly admired diplomatic stance of positive neutrality. Since his accession to the throne, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has affirmed and reinforced the unique Omani path of peaceful approach toward all nations. The great effort expended by the Sultanate to contribute to the peace and stability of the region and the world is recognised and appreciated by Japan as a noble and worthy undertaking. Our shared 'DNA' as sea-faring nations brings with it a keen awareness of the gravity of maintaining maritime security and ensuring unimpeded economic activity in the oceans. These well-aligned priorities have convinced us that Oman is a valuable and assured partner for a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific.'

Of course, our two nations already enjoy substantial long-standing relations.

From ancient radios long consigned to museums, to gleaming new vehicles displayed in dealerships, I am proud to see that Japanese products have long been viewed by the people of Oman as emblematic of quality and reliability. Nowhere is this more evident than in the enthusiastic recital of Japanese brand names by friendly locals in even the remotest of the mountain villages to which I have ventured!

It is not only the enduring popularity and desirability of Japanese cars and electronics that have contributed to the daily lives of Omanis, however. Consortiums led by Japanese companies produce around 70% of Oman's electricity, as well as more than 25% of the drinkable water. It is with great happiness that I see the corporations of Japan supporting the livelihoods of Omanis in this way, and I expect that our technology will be able to aid Oman further in fields ranging from environmental protection to medical science. In turn, Oman's importance to Japan's energy stability, through the supply of crude oil and natural gas, cannot be understated.

In the face of unprecedented global challenges brought about by COVID-19, the government of Oman's decisive response has successfully tempered a tragic crisis. It is my sincere hope that once this difficult period is behind us, the ties between Japan and Oman will emerge stronger than ever before.

We celebrate the 61st birthday of His Majesty Emperor Naruhito of Japan on 23rd February 2021. It is worth mentioning that H.M. Emperor Naruhito, accompanied by Her Majesty the Empress, paid an official visit to Oman in 1994 when His Majesty was the Crown Prince. During their visit, H.M. the Emperor and H.M. the Empress were accorded a warm welcome and generous hospitality by His Late Majesty Sultan Qaboos and the Omani people.

Inspired by the warm relationship between the Imperial Family of Japan and the Royal Family of the Sultanate of Oman, I hope to see our two nations further enhance our ties, and I would like to wish continued health, prosperity, and long-life for both H.M. Emperor Naruhito and H.M. Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

From a favourite vantage point on the hilltop beside the town of Qalhat, azure skies overhead and the shining ocean filling the horizon, I cannot help feeling the weight of time and a bond which stretches through the centuries. In the foreground lie the crumbling ruins of the ancient city, visited in the 13th Century CE by explorer Marco Polo who first brought word of Japan to the West. Behind it, across the bay, looms the LNG plant which today supplies the gas used in my hometown in Japan. And so, Oman and Japan have always been and will forever be connected by an ocean of opportunities.

Oman and Japan – Two Nations United by Timeless Bonds

It gives me great pleasure to convey my heartfelt greetings, on behalf of all Members of the Board of the Oman Japan Friendship Association (OJFA), to His Majesty, Emperor Naruhito of Japan, on the auspicious occasion of his 61st birthday.

This year, in Oman, we mark a significant occasion celebrating the Anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik taking over the reigns. We are confident that His Majesty's visionary leadership and guidance will steer Oman further ahead on its inspiring path of development, peace and stability. For this, we the people of Oman pledge our complete support to His Majesty's leadership. May the Almighty bless him with good health and long life.

Oman and Japan are two great nations, united by timeless bonds based on rich heritage and culture that goes back to hundreds of years. With time, these remarkable ties have grown stronger. Offering numerous opportunities to people of both the nations to learn about each other's absorbing culture and heritage. While also taking advantage of mutually beneficial economic relationships.

As a responsible Association, focussed on taking these special bonds to even greater levels, the Oman Japan Friendship Association uses every opportunity to build enduring relationships and foster meaningful ties between people of both the nations. The Association plans and initiates a number of activities in various areas. Including fields as diverse as commerce, education, culture, arts, tourism, sports and more. Like each year, this year too, the Oman Japan Friendship Association reaffirms its commitment to taking these remarkable bonds to even greater levels.

Apart from building lasting relationships through deep-rooted culture, Oman and Japan have made impressive economic progress based on each other's strengths. Japan's expertise in Machinery, Iron, Steel, Electronics, Automotive and more continue to benefit Oman through imports from Japan. Similarly, as a major producer of Oil and Gas, Aluminium and Fishery Products, Oman continues to cater to Japan's growing demand through exports to Japan. It is also encouraging to know that Japanese companies have made impressive investments in Oman through joint ventures in a number of projects including the energy sector.

Since its inception, over the years, the Oman Japan Friendship Association in close co-operation with the Embassy of Japan, has continued to improve relations between people of both the nations by planning and initiating a number of cultural exchange programmes that showcase the diverse, rich and absorbing culture of both the nations.

Unlike each year, for years together, the last year unfolded a unique and challenging environment as a result of the global pandemic. Although the highest levels of care and concern were exercised to limit people-to-people contacts through special events offline, a few online events and programmes continued to play a role in strengthening the relationship between people of Oman and Japan.



Mohammed Saud Bahwan
Chairman of the Board
Oman Japan Friendship Association

It is very inspiring to witness the interest, the people of Oman have in learning the Japanese language. To cater to this interest, each year the Oman Japan Friendship Association in cooperation with the Embassy of Japan, conducts a 3-month Japanese Language Course that is held through the year. These courses are held by native Japanese language teachers and are popular among Japanese language enthusiasts here in Oman.

Due to limitations like social distancing norms and adherence to health and safety guidelines, advised by competent authorities, The Embassy of Japan, recently in December last year, offered students interested in learning the Japanese language, an opportunity to register and learn for free through the event – "Online Study in Japan Week 2020".

In September, the Embassy of Japan conducted the Japanese Illustration Online Competition for all residents in Oman. The theme of the competition was in relation to Japan such as: landscapes, nature, tradition and culture.

Earlier in February the same year, the Embassy of Japan inaugurated the Japan stall at the 25th Muscat International Book Fair at Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre in cooperation with the Japan Foundation. The stall had books from Japan that covered a variety of genres and activities like Origami, Japanese calligraphy and more.

Every year several such events and activities like these held by the Oman Japan Friendship Association, showcase each nation's rich culture and heritage to the people of both the nations – Oman and Japan. In the days to come, the Oman Japan Friendship Association will continue to plan and initiate several such events and activities that will bring people of Oman and Japan closer.

On this special occasion, on behalf of all the Board members of the Oman Japan Friendship Association, I convey sincere greetings to His Majesty Emperor Naruhito. May God Almighty grant him good health and long life. And may the beautiful bonds of friendship that bind Oman and Japan, continue to grow even stronger.



Warm wishes to the people of Japan
on the occasion of the 61st Birthday of
His Majesty Emperor Naruhito

Building Enduring Bonds Through Deep-Rooted Relationships

Oman and Japan share a warm relationship that has grown stronger over the centuries. The rich and absorbing culture and heritage of both the nations continues to inspire and enhance the warm relationship between the people of both the nations.

The Oman Japan Friendship Association is focussed on deepening and enhancing the relationship between Oman and Japan. Through regular programmes and well-planned initiatives, the Association aims to draw people of both the nations to benefit from each other's strengths in various areas. Including fields as diverse as commerce, education, culture, arts, tourism, sports and more.

On this special occasion, the Oman Japan Friendship Association reaffirms its commitment to continue to play a significant role in taking the remarkable relations between Oman and Japan, to even greater levels.



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Omani oil firm weighs ‘blue hydrogen’ production to power electric vehicles

ONE-OF-A-KIND PROJECT: ARA Petroleum's venture has three key objectives: Harnessing solar energy to generate electricity; producing ‘blue hydrogen’ from flare gas to power fuel cell electric vehicles and capturing carbon dioxide (CO2) from the second process to be sold as feedstock to Omani industries

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

ARA Petroleum, a wholly Omani owned upstream energy firm, says its partnership with a Japanese conglomerate in the development of a unique hybrid project will contribute to the production of, among other commodities, ‘blue hydrogen’ to power a fleet of fuel cell electric vehicles in its concession areas.

Muscat-based ARA Petroleum, 100 per cent owned by Zubair Corporation LLC, has sizable



investments in the upstream Exploration & Production (E&P) segment of Oman's hydrocarbon industry.

The company has a 100 per cent interest in Block 44 in northwest Oman, a 1,162 sq km concession that holds the Shams and Munhamir fields. A year later, the company signed an Exploration and Production Sharing Agreement (EPSA) for Block 31, a 1,528 sq km concession located immediately adjacent to Block 44.

Earlier, ARA Petroleum began

its debut in the E&P sector with the signing of a contract with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to operate the Qarat Al-Milh Small Fields (QSF) contract area in 2016.

Last month, ARA Petroleum announced a partnership with Japanese multinational Sumitomo Corporation to study the feasibility of developing a hybrid project to provide “an integrated clean energy infrastructure solution” for the former's operations in the Sultanate.

Billed as a one-of-a-kind project, it has three key objectives: Harnessing solar energy to generate electricity, producing ‘blue hydrogen’ from flare gas and capturing carbon dioxide (CO2) from the second process to be sold as feedstock to Omani industries. A 20 megawatt (MW) solar power scheme is envisioned for development as part of the hybrid project.

In a statement, ARA Petroleum said the hybrid project will

help the company achieve its goal of becoming a CO2 neutral hydrocarbon producer.

“This project is a key transitional element in pursuing its strategy towards reducing flaring and capturing CO2. The joint project between the two companies will provide a unique clean solution to hydrocarbon production and is the first of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman. It will be a showcase for utilisation of new green technologies.”

Sultan al Ghaithi, ARA Petroleum CEO, remarked: “One of the most robust design elements of this hybrid project is the ease to replicate the concept in other ARA Petroleum fields and any E&P operation in Oman where associated gas is currently being flared.” He added that the project will help develop Omani competencies in the field of hydrogen.

Foreign-owned empty trucks to be barred entry from Oct 19

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 22

Empty trucks owned by foreign-registered transport companies will be barred from entering the Sultanate and its territories with effect from October 19, 2021 under the provisions of the new Land Transport Law.

The move is aimed at encouraging businesses and organisations to patronise local Omani transport companies, said the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology (MoTCIT).

Citing the provisions of the new Land Transport Law, promulgated by Royal Decree 10/2016, together with its Executive Regulations, the Ministry pointed out that overseas-registered ‘empty trucks’ coming from across the border will be barred entry after October 19, 2021.

Omani F&B innovations showcased at Gulfood 2021



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 22

The Industrial Innovation Center (IIC) is showcasing innovative food and beverage products developed by young Omanis at the Gulfood 2021 International Food Expo, which opened in Dubai earlier this week.

In all, six Omani start-ups are represented at the kiosk run by IIC as part of Oman's pavilion at Gulfood 2021. The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (PEIE) has a big presence at the five-day-long expo.

Omani start-ups featured at the expo include Peno, a company specializing in the production of nut butter; Rochi — brand of date-based sweets; squid and other seafood pickle promoted by Bahr Al Marra; pet foods from Baseen; a full range of fish products in the form of shrimp paste, sardines and shrimp stock cubes from Loams and coffee from Cafea Oman.

The Director of Food & Beverage Innovation, said IIC's participation in the event offers an opportunity for young Omani entrepreneurs to get exposure to international markets and understand modern ways of promoting their products to wider audiences.

The Food & Beverage Innovation Programme at the Centre is focused on encouraging the growth of Omani start-ups specializing in innovation products that capitalise on the country's rich natural resources.

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Scheme Period: 11th Feb 2021 to 11th Apr 2021. All the above benefits not applicable on Ministry, Bulk Fleet, Corporate & RAC Deals. *Soner may also include some dealer installed accessories. Picture & color are indicative. For exact details, visit nearest Kia showroom. ⁵- In case, the customer does not prefer to avail the service benefits, a similar service cost can be deducted by purchasing the Cash Gift of the vehicle based on the model purchased, maximum upto the service cost of 20,000AED in Bundle option. In that case, the rest service offer in Bundle option will be upto 5 years/50,000KMS only & full service offer is Flexible option. ⁶- On RAC. Tax and Driving School purchases. Insurance applicable would be given to the extent of a private vehicle. Additional premium as per insurance norms would have to be paid by the buyer. ⁷- Applicable on 1st individual owners of Kia vehicles or Guarantor recorded as per RIA records or current individual valid Mulkiya holders of existing Kia vehicles.

XBRL: A tool for digital reporting



JAMES RAVI BRL, “eXtensible Business

Reporting Language” is an open standard business reporting platform. The Capital Market Authority (CMA) in Oman is preparing to launch XBRL portal for uploading the financial reports for the regulated entities.

XBRL is developed by a non-profit consortium backed by various governmental agencies, regulators and major companies around the globe.

Why XBRL?

In a non-XBRL world, though the financial statements are prepared based on some reporting standard like IFRS, USGAAP, IndAS, they lack the consistency, comparability and data-computability.

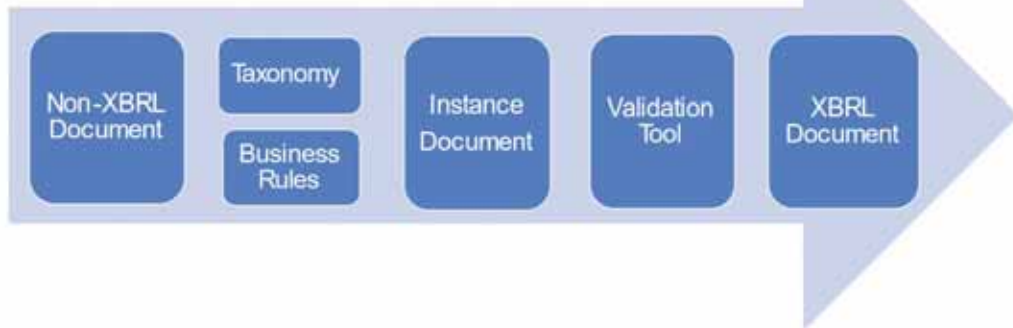
Mostly, financial statements such as Income Statements and Balance Sheets are processed, transmitted and stored in Word, Excel, PDF, HTML or plain text formats which remain as a block of information without much

digital use.

For instance, though all listed entities in Muscat Stock Market report under IFRS, for an element in Balance Sheet like Trade Debtors, they use different terms like “Accounts Receivable” or “Sundry Debtors, or “Due from customers”. We, human beings can understand all these terms refer to the same data, but in the digital world they are useless as computers cannot see them the same way.

As a result, if someone wants to know the total Trade Debtors in the retail sector, such data is not readily available unless it is manually compiled from the Balance Sheets of all the entities in that sector.

XBRL Process Schema



Taxonomy and Business Rules XBRL allows the creation of authoritative unique definitions called Taxonomies that capture the meaning contained in all the terms used in business reports as well as the relationships between these terms. Taxonomies developed by regulators or standard-setters or other government agencies clearly define information that needs to be reported upon.

XBRL allows the creation of Business Rules that validate the data in the financial statements before they are reported. Such validation rules can be logical or mathematical or both and they authenticate the reports so that the data therein is ready for digital use.

The process

XBRL first gives a unique code to each line item in the financial statement based on the Taxonomy approved by the regulator in that region. Secondly, the relationship between each item in the report is tested and governed by a predetermined set of Business Rules.

Thirdly, relationships are established between each code depending on the financial line item they represent. Finally, and most importantly, both the definition of the code and its relationship are very carefully designed by finance and computer experts, approved by regulators and are required to be followed by financial information

In a non-XBRL world, though the financial statements are prepared based on some reporting standard like IFRS, USGAAP, IndAS, they lack the consistency, comparability and data-computability.

reporters. The financial reports thus generated are called “Instance Documents”.

Using this process, a non-XBRL document is converted into a XBRL document. Despite the fact that this technology is still very young, the adoption of XBRL has been remarkably fast. Many countries have already made XBRL mandatory for financial reporting or are planning to do so.

In future, the potential of exploiting the data in XBRL financial reports with Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence, will surely enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of planning and decision-making process at all levels. **(James Ravi is Director in Audit and Assurance at Crowe Oman)**

PRESS RELEASE

#WIN_EASILY WITH MAISARAH PRIZE ACCOUNT SCHEME 2021

Maisarah Islamic Banking Services has announced the 2021 edition of the Prize Account Scheme. The 2021 scheme makes winning easier by providing more chances for customers to win from draws to be held in categories — prizes per branch, grand prizes, special prizes and mega prizes.

The scheme had seen over 4,900 winners since 2016, and still counting. The prize scheme will be valid from January 2021 and will run till December 31, 2021.

Nasser Said al Bahantah, Chief Retail Banking Officer, Maisarah said, “We have gained a lot of attention and positive feedback to our Prize Account Scheme in the last few years. Over the past years, we have seen more than 4,900 winners, and we look forward to see more customers join the winners in this year’s scheme.”



Bank Muscat gives away RO 400,000 in the first draw for Al Mazyona in 2021



MUSCAT: Bank Muscat conducted the first draw of the 2021 scheme for Al Mazyona at the bank’s Head Office recently in the presence of Dr Hamood bin Ali bin Humaid al Marshoudi, the Wali of Bidbid.

As many as 31 winners walked away with RO 400,000 in high-value prizes in the draw. The winners included 10 Asalah customers who won RO 25,000 each while 20 Al Jawhar customers walked away with prizes worth RO 5,000 each. One lucky winner won the monthly mega prize of RO 50,000 in the draw.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir al Raisi, Deputy

General Manager — Premier Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “The bank is pleased to conduct the first draw of the 2021 scheme and I congratulate all the lucky winners for their excellent savings habit, which has resulted in them winning these high-value prizes.

Bank Muscat is well known as an innovator in the financial services sector in Oman and the Al Mazyona scheme has been playing a very important role in creating a good savings habit amongst people in the Sultanate. The bank will continue to launch new innovative products and services in response to the needs of our valued customers.”

cities.

Delivered by Dr Yaqoob al Bulushi, the programme highlighted several topics related to digital transformation including the challenges facing the process and ways to overcome them, methodology for implementation of digital transformation to meet the needs of the organisations, and development of digital transformation strategy.

Madayn Academy conducts lecture on digital transformation

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, FEB 22

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn), represented by Madayn Industrial Academy, organised a virtual awareness lecture on ‘Digital Transformation Management’ as part of a series of programmes held to develop the skills and capabilities of human cadres in Madayn’s various industrial

Global honour for Oman’s hospitality landmark

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, FEB 22

Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel has been named among the World’s Top 500 by Travel+Leisure for 2021 for the second consecutive time.

Every year, the largest travel media brand in the United States, with an audience of 8.1 million, asks its readers to share their thoughts on destinations, city hotels, resorts, and more in its World’s Best Awards survey.

Each prestigious edition of the resulting roster of properties, which is divided into eight geographic regions, serves as a trusted resource for millions of enthusiastic travellers around the world.

The inclusion of Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-



Carlton Hotel on this year’s list is the latest in a string of international awards the hotel has garnered, as it continues to maintain its reputation as one of the world’s most luxurious resorts, and an ultimate destination for prestigious events and leisure alike.

Nabil Abdul Wahab al Zadjali, General Manager of Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel, said, “In the past year, the

travel industry has confronted the greatest challenge it has perhaps ever faced. Yet, we have risen to meet the moment, adapting our service and rethinking hospitality in ways that keep our guests safe and happy. Awards like this are a welcome testament that even through challenging times, we continue to set benchmarks for the industry and are able to present our guests with unforgettable experiences and uncompromising hospitality.”

Last year, Al Bustan Palace, a Ritz-Carlton Hotel was also named in the Top 5 Resorts in North Africa and Middle East by Travel+Leisure and was also recognised with six awards from the prestigious World Travel Awards 2020, including World’s Leading Palace Hotel, Oman’s Leading Beach Resort and Oman’s Best MICE Hotel.

Pace of real estate investment recovery picks up

Promising trend: Strong fourth quarter 2020 performance moderated the full-year investment decline

BUSINESS REPORTER

MUSCAT, FEB 22

Global real estate investment volumes declined by 28 per cent year-on-year from a record amount of capital markets activity in 2019. According to JLL’s recently published Global Real Estate Perspective, full-year transaction volumes totalled \$762 billion in 2020.

In EMEA, investment volumes reached \$282 billion, marking a 17 per cent decrease year-on-year. Global investment volumes were buoyed by strong performance during the fourth quarter, which totalled \$267 billion, an increase of 65 per cent from Q3 2020.

Fourth quarter global investment activity continued the trend of decelerating quarterly



declines throughout 2020 — 21 per cent year-on-year in Q4 2020 compared to — 41 per cent in Q3 2020 and — 50 per cent in Q2 2020. Established markets with sector diversity, transparency and scale fuelled the fourth quarter rebound. France, Germany and the US totalled an aggregate of \$150 billion, representing an increase of 81 per cent on Q3 2020, during the final quarter.

Gateway markets in Europe and Asia Pacific saw interest pick up in the quarter, where investor demand is improving for centrally-

located, larger-ticket assets — particularly core offices.

“As 2020 progressed and the pandemic matured in markets, investors have learned to better navigate the uncertainty. This confidence was reflected in higher levels of capital deployment in the latter part of the year,” says Sean Coghlan, Global Director, Capital Markets Research & Strategy, JLL.

According to JLL, the improvement in activity was most evident in select segments of the markets.

Capital targeting income and

operational stability: The logistics and multifamily sectors continue to exhibit strength globally, with rent collections holding steady and secular tailwinds intact. This dynamic is resulting in more resilient pricing, with winning transaction bids hovering near expectations.

The office sector experienced a moderate recovery in investor sentiment in the fourth quarter, with activity expanding in global gateway markets.

Private capital has seized on the opportunity to acquire quality office product, representing a near all-time high of 29 per cent of acquisitions valued above \$100 million since the onset of the pandemic. Institutional investors are returning to the market but remain cautious.

Core product seeing expanded liquidity: Desirable long-let, core product represented the largest share of closed transactions in 2020. Prime, high-quality assets have experienced relatively marginal price adjustments since COVID.

**Sterling steadies around \$1.40**

The pound hit a new three-year high of \$1.4050 in London trading on Monday, before stabilising around the \$1.40 level, as bullish investors bet on the UK's vaccination rollout. — **Reuters**

**Gold rebounds on dollar weakness**

Gold prices rose on Monday, rebounding from a more than seven-month low hit in the previous session, as a weakening dollar eclipsed pressure from firmer Treasury yields. — **Reuters**

**Bitcoin price slips sharply**

Bitcoin fell sharply on Monday after surging to a record \$58,354 a day earlier, as a sell-off in global equities curbed risk appetite. It rallied over the weekend to record levels. — **Reuters**

Boeing recommends airlines suspend use of some 777s after United incident

WASHINGTON: Boeing Co urged airlines to suspend the use of 777 jets with the same type of engine that shed debris over Denver at the weekend after US regulators announced extra inspections and Japan suspended their use while considering further action.

The moves involving Pratt & Whitney PW4000 engines came after a United Airlines 777's right engine failed on Saturday, scattering its protective outer casing over a residential area. United said the next day it would voluntarily and temporarily remove its 24 active planes, hours before Boeing's announcement.

Boeing said 69 of the 777 planes with PW4000 engines were in service and 59 were stored, at a time when airlines have grounded planes due to a plunge in demand associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The manufacturer recommended airlines suspend operating them until US regulators identified the appropriate inspection protocol. It falls short of a mandatory global grounding but is another headache for the plane maker after its 737 MAX crisis and comes after criticism of US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) oversight regarding the 737 MAX.

The 777-200s and 777-300s affected are older and less fuel efficient than newer models and are currently being flown by just five airlines — United, Japan Airlines Co Ltd (JAL), ANA Holdings Inc, Asiana Airlines Inc and Korean Air Lines Co Ltd.



A United Airlines Boeing 777-200 ER plane is towed as an American Airlines Boeing 737 plane departs from O'Hare International Airport in Chicago, Illinois. — **Reuters**

Most of them are phasing them out of their fleets.

The problem concerns Pratt & Whitney, one of three engine makers originally involved in the 777, whose engines power less than 10 per cent of the delivered fleet of more than 1,600 planes.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said its initial examination of the 26-year-old plane indicated most of the damage was confined to the right engine, with only minor damage to the airplane.

It said the inlet and casing separated from the engine and two fan blades were fractured, while the other fan blades exhibited damage. Pratt & Whitney, owned by Raytheon Technologies Corp, said it was coordinating with operators and regulators to support a

Boeing said 69 of the 777 planes with PW4000 engines were in service and 59 were stored, at a time when airlines have grounded planes due to a plunge in demand associated with the pandemic

revised inspection interval for the engines.

Japan's transport ministry ordered JAL and ANA Holdings to suspend their use while it considered whether to take additional measures, acting before the FAA. An official at South Korea's transport ministry said it was

waiting for formal action by the FAA before giving a directive to its airlines.

The US agency said it would soon issue an emergency airworthiness directive. "Based on the initial information, we concluded that the inspection interval should be stepped up for the hollow fan blades that are unique to this model of engine, used solely on Boeing 777 airplanes," the FAA said.

Japan's transport ministry said that on Dec. 4, 2020, a JAL flight from Naha Airport to Tokyo returned to Naha due to a malfunction in the left engine. Its Transport Safety Board said on December 28 that it had found two of the left engine's fan blades were damaged, one from a crack due to metal fatigue.

The investigation is ongoing. Japan said ANA operated 19 of the type and JAL operated 13, though the airlines said their use had been reduced during the pandemic. JAL said its fleet was due for retirement by March 2022.

Korean Air — which has 16 of the planes, 10 of them stored — said it will follow the relevant authorities' directives on any measures. The Dutch Safety Board said on Monday it was investigating what had caused a Boeing 747-400 to lose parts of a different type of PW4000 engine shortly after taking off from Maastricht airport on Saturday.

The European Union Aviation Safety Agency meanwhile said it was requesting information on the cause to determine what action was needed. — **Reuters**

Brazil's Petrobras shares plunge 17 per cent



RIO DE JANEIRO: Petrobras shares traded in New York plunged nearly 17 per cent in premarket trading on Monday as analysts cut ratings on the stock after far-right Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro moved to replace the state-controlled oil company's market friendly CEO with a retired army general.

Credit Suisse, Scotiabank, Bank of America, Bradesco and XP analysts were among those who downgraded their recommendations on shares of Petroleo Brasileiro SA, as the Rio de Janeiro-based producer is known.

XP analysts said investing in Petrobras is no longer defensible after Bolsonaro's sudden decision to replace CEO Roberto Castello Branco. "There are risks to the company's independence and ability to continue pricing its fuel to international parity".

— **Reuters**

Business confidence in Germany jumps

BERLIN: German business confidence surged to its highest level since October this month on hopes of a rebound in Europe's biggest economy and an end to tough restrictions aimed at containing the coronavirus.

The Munich-based Ifo institute said on Monday that despite the current lockdown, its closely watched business climate index jumped to a more-than-forecast 92.4 points this month from a revised January reading of 90.3.

"Companies are ... starting to look beyond the pandemic and the lockdown," said Commerzbank chief economist Joerg Kraemer. Analysts had forecast a more modest gain in February to 90.5 from a previously estimated 90.1 in January.

The Ifo's release came ahead of next week's meeting between Chancellor Angela Merkel and the 16 state premiers on what further steps to take in facing up to the crisis. Powering the index higher were the executives' bullish outlook for business



Employees work on a Computed Tomography 'CAT scan' at the manufacturing plant of Siemens Healthineers in Forchheim near Nuremberg. — **Reuters**

conditions six months down the track, as well as a rise in their assessment of the current state of the nation's economy.

Based on a survey of about 9,000 business leaders, the Ifo February gain was in line with solid rises in other leading indicators, despite concerns about the faltering rollout of anti-virus vaccines.

This includes the ZEW index measuring the mood among German investors as well as the IHS Markit's latest composite purchasing managers' index for the country's service and manufacturing sectors. — **dpa**

Biden to revise small business loans to reach smaller, minority firms

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden will launch changes to the main US coronavirus aid programme for small businesses to try to reach smaller, minority-owned firms and sole proprietors left behind in previous rounds of aid.

Biden administration officials said that for two weeks starting on Wednesday, the Small Business Administration will only accept applications for forgivable Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans from firms with fewer than 20 employees to ensure that they are not crowded out by larger firms.

The changes, to be formally announced by Biden on Monday, come as small business bankers say demand for Paycheck Protection loans is slowing as firms reopen.

When the PPP was launched in April 2020 at the height of coronavirus lockdowns under a \$3 trillion relief bill, its initial \$349



A customer leaves a retail store in Chicago. — **Reuters**

billion ran out in two weeks.

Congress approved another \$320 billion in May, but the programme expired in August with about \$130 billion in unused funds. The programme was re-launched on Jan. 19 with \$284 billion in new funds from a coronavirus aid bill passed at the end of December, and a Biden administration

official said about \$150 billion of PPP money is still available.

But Biden administration officials said there are still many minority and very small firms in low-income areas that have not been able to receive aid.

The changes aim to make it easier for firms with no employees — sole proprietors, independent contractors, and

When the PPP was launched in April 2020 at the height of coronavirus lockdowns under a \$3 trillion relief bill, its initial \$349 billion ran out in two weeks

self-employed people such as house cleaners and personal care providers — that could not qualify previously because of business cost deductions. The Small Business Administration will revise the rules to match the approach used to allowed small farmers and ranchers to receive aid, the businesses said. The officials said the programme will also set aside \$1 billion for businesses without employees in low- and moderate-income areas, which are 70 per cent owned by women and people of colour.

— **Reuters**

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features



Lessons from a young champion reader

At a very young age, Sama al Amriyah has been winning Arab reading competitions in Oman including contests on reading the Holy Quran. A top-performer at school, she shares some lessons on the importance of developing a passion for reading not only for kids but also for adults... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

CHAIRMAN OF THE WORLD



LESS FORMAL, MORE COMFORTABLE: PANDEMIC TRANSFORMS WORK ATTIRE

Suits and tailored shirts are out, sweatpants and pajamas are in: remote working is changing work clothes habits, and while vaccines may bring back some formality, old-school office attire should emerge from the pandemic far less starched and strict... **Story on Page 20**

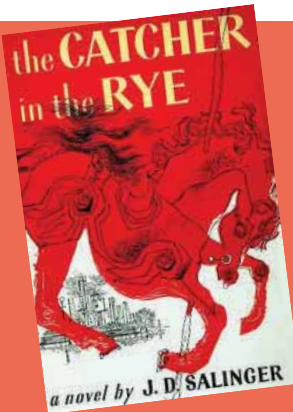
WILDLIFE



LOCKED-DOWN PUB BECOMES IRELAND'S FIRST WILDLIFE HOSPITAL

A pub that closed its doors during lockdown is now serving a menagerie of very different clientele after transforming into Ireland's first wildlife hospital... **Story on Page 19**

READ



THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

BY J.D. SALINGER

The novel details two days in the life of 16-year-old Holden Caulfield after he has been expelled from prep school.

ENTERTAINMENT



ARENA ROCK? PALM BEACH SAYS TRY ARENA OPERA

With the pandemic forcing most stages to go virtual, the Palm Beach Opera is embracing its tropical weather and holding an outdoor festival... **Story on Page 19**

CONSERVATION



ELIZABETH ANN, THE FIRST CLONED FERRET, SPURS HOPE FOR ENDANGERED US SPECIES

US scientists have successfully cloned an endangered black-footed ferret using frozen cells from a long-dead wild animal, the first time any native endangered species has been cloned in the United States... **Story on Page 19**



ENTERTAINMENT

Anne Hathaway
says she was ninth
choice for 'Devil
Wears Prada'



NEW YORK: Where there's a will, there's a (Hathal) way. Anne Hathaway admitted Friday that she was far from the first pick for one of her most famous and beloved roles: Andy Sachs in 2006's "The Devil Wears Prada."

The Academy Award winner, 38, spilled "some tea" during her appearance on "RuPaul's Drag Race," during which contestant Rosé asked if the actress ever had to "fight tooth and nail for" her roles.

"A lot of them," she said. "I will give you some tea: I was the ninth choice for 'Devil Wears Prada.' But I got it! Hang in there! Never give up."

The Oscar-nominated film pitted the ambitious but (initially) dowdy Andy against Meryl Streep's shark of a fashion editor Miranda Priestly.

Rachel McAdams was first in line to play Andy, thanks to her 2004 hot streak with "The Notebook" and "Mean Girls," People reports. The now-Academy Award nom continuously turned down the opportunity.

Other actresses known to have auditioned for Andy are Juliette Lewis and Claire Danes.

This isn't the first time Hathaway's spoken about fighting to play the aspiring journalist who aims to parlay her time as Miranda's assistant - a job that "a million girls would kill for" - into a serious writing gig.

"I didn't have to audition," the "Les Misérables" star told Variety in 2016, adding, "I had to be patient. I wasn't the first choice." — **tca/dpa**

Feeling angry?
The 'Rage
Room' opens
in Sao Paulo



SAO PAULO: Feeling frustrated and stressed out? Brazilians now have a place to vent their anger and fury in the newly opened "Rage Room."

Inside a warehouse on the outskirts of Sao Paulo, people are able to swing giant hammers at old televisions, computers and printers, demolishing the machines, and shattering the glass into tiny pieces.

Forty-two-year-old Vanderlei Rodrigues, who opened the business a month ago in Cidade Tiradentes, said he has received a fair number of customers wanting to vent, especially during the pandemic.

"I think it was the best moment to be able to set this up here in Cidade Tiradentes, related to everything that people are going through, a lot of anxiety, stress."

The "Rage Room" experience costs \$4.64.

Wearing protective suits and helmets, participants write issues that bother them on the walls - "ex-girlfriends," "ex-husbands," "corruption" and "work." These words become the targets of their anger.

Alexandre de Carvalho, 40, who works in advertising and drives two hours back and forth to work, said with worries about health due to the pandemic, "it's great to come here and release some adrenaline and pent-up feelings."

For Luciana Holanda, 35, who is an unemployed mother of two daughters, she said she prefers to vent her frustration inside the "Rage Room."

"With all this accumulated stress, being a mother, having children and not being able to work ... it is very good to be able to release some stress and vent."

"I am not going to vent my frustrations on my daughters or on anyone, so I really prefer to break things, I love it." — **Reuters**



Lessons
from a
young
champion
reader



BY BARAA'H AL MUJAINI

When was the last time you grabbed a book and read it completely? Or when was the last time you take on a new hobby?

The pandemic has severely affected us physically, mentally, and psychologically, yet, finding new stimulating ways to heal and rebuild ourselves is entirely in our hands.

Reading—yes reading an article, a newspaper or a book — just like other hobbies can help you significantly. Books can help us reshape our personalities, thoughts, attitudes, thinking, and understanding of life.

This has been learned at a very young age by Sama al Amriyah. At just 7-years old, she was the youngest competitor and the winner in the Arab Reading Challenge in Oman held in 2017.

While the majority of kids her age are wasting their time on social media, she put her free time into good use spending it acquiring knowledge but going through books after books.

This diligence for reading led to her always becoming 1st place in all her classes and has contributed greatly to getting amazing marks at school.

But how did a girl, barely in her teens, got so engrossed with books? What was it about reading that she's dedicated a large portion of her childhood to it?

For Sama, it's all about passion.

"I've always been fascinated with experiencing new things,

about acquiring knowledge. As a result, reading became a passion," she shared.

She said she could have spent the time going through social media and being on-trend just like her peers but for some reason, she doesn't feel the pressures others do. Her interests were purely different and she doesn't feel left out not knowing what's happening in the digital world.

"Reading for me is a form of

Sama's accolades include winning at different levels with multiple awards at the Sultan Qaboos Competition for Holy Quran reading.

entertainment. It is time-consuming and requires focus and dedication. I have divided my time between memorising the Holy Quran, studying for school, and reading various types of books," she said.

Sama's accolades include winning at different levels with multiple awards at the Sultan Qaboos Competition for Holy Quran reading.

Observers have noted that Sama already achieved so much

more than a lot of adults in their lifetime. All of these achievements, Sama said, wouldn't have been possible without a good environment and the support of her parents.

"My family, they are always empowering me, especially my mother who was and is always beside me in every single step. And not to forget my special teacher who has been motivating me and nominated me to represent my school in the Challenges," Sama said.

Asked what was the most difficult about joining the Arab Reading Challenge, Sama said, "The hardest was the time limit. I had to memorise the names of all authors and publishing houses of all the books I had read, besides, I was required to read 50 books within only six weeks."

"Reading has helped me remarkably in different aspects, it exposes my mentality to a new world full of new information and secrets, it also helped me educationally to understand rapidly and easily," she shared.

She said, "My advice to everyone is to read as much as possible, in all kinds of fields. I recommend the parents too, who are playing a vital role in shaping their kids and guide them to the right destination, to support their kids and instil in their minds the importance of reading."

To learn more about Sama and her journey, follow her Instagram account that is being run by her mother: **sama_calligraphy**



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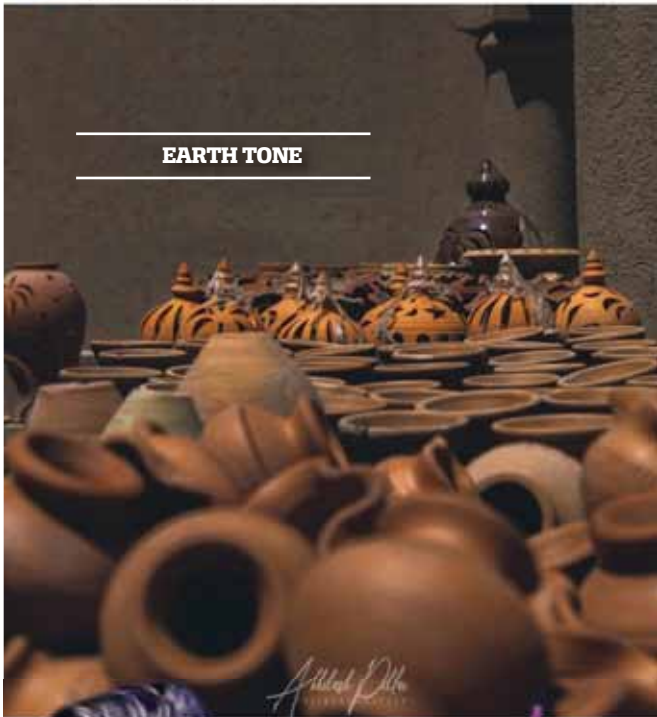


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AROUND THE WORLD

Locked-down pub becomes Ireland's first wildlife hospital



A PUB that closed its doors during lockdown is now serving a menagerie of very different clientele after transforming into Ireland's first wildlife hospital.

The bar of the Tara Na Ri pub in County Meath to the northwest of Dublin is now deserted, the blinds pulled down, the Guinness taps dry and the till empty.

But the pub's outbuildings are a hive of activity.

In one, a member of staff bottle-feeds Liam, a two-week-old wild Irish goat who was found on a mountainside.

Three swans nest on straw in former stables, a skittish fox settles in a new enclosure, and a wide-eyed buzzard is being nursed back to health.

"We were very much accustomed to just one singular way of living," said James McCarthy, whose family have owned the pub for more than a decade.

"When that's taken away you're just kind of left with a void. It takes some time before it starts getting replaced with other things that you never would have thought were possible before."

McCarthy has turned the outbuildings over to the government-backed agency Wildlife Rehabilitation Ireland (WRI) and instead of pulling pints, now serves drive-through customers with takeaway coffees at the front of the pub.

LOCALS MUCK IN

The WRI facility, which opened on Friday, is the first animal hospital in Ireland capable of caring for animals of any species, size or medical needs.

"We're bracing ourselves for 'orphan season' which is our busiest time of year," said animal manager Dan Donohue, calming a flustered pigeon on an examination table.

"We'll get lots of baby birds, baby foxes etcetera and they'll keep us busy for the next six months."

Pubs play a vital role in Irish society, especially in remote rural areas, and the closure of the Tara Na Ri in March 2020 was a heavy blow for the community.

The inn stands near a hill called the Tara with ancient burial mounds. Its name means Tara of the Kings.

But WRI education officer Aoife McPartlin said the pub's regulars had pitched in with enthusiasm.

"We embraced them, they embraced us," she said of locals, who volunteered their time to renovate the outbuildings.

The project saw "everybody mucking in" through long days and dreadful weather, she said.

"And as a result we can now open." — AFP



Arena rock? Palm Beach says try arena opera

WITH THE pandemic forcing most stages to go virtual, the Palm Beach Opera is embracing its tropical weather and holding an outdoor festival.

The company is expecting to host some 1,000 people per show at their series kicking off this weekend starting with the classic "La Boheme" — the largest-scale opera with an audience in the United States since the pandemic essentially shut down live performance nearly a year ago.

Organisers say the capacity for the festival running from February 19-27 is possible due to the size of their outdoor amphitheater, which has 6,000 fixed seats. Masks, temperature checks and social distancing will be required to attend.

While much pandemic-era opera has gotten more intimate, via screens or with small audiences, the Palm Beach festival is aiming to expand.

"Ozzy Osbourne stood in the place where I'm conducting," David Stern, the opera's chief conductor who will lead both "La Boheme" and "The Magic Flute," said with a laugh.

Despite its size the space "actually is very friendly," the Paris-based conductor said, and the star voices large enough to fill the venue whose three-production run — with two performances of each show — will also include "Pagliacci."

The orchestra is smaller than normal, however, with eight feet of distance between string players and 12 between wind instruments, Stern said.

Considering the precautions and production size, it's a series that offered a chance to innovate while also getting back to basics.

"This would not have been a moment to have done the experimental, unknown repertoire," Stern said. "We wanted to have seasoned singers who have done this, who know the roles, and who can get beyond the basic singing of it and make something very special."

"We needed to get a signal out, when there's so little or no performance going on the United States, to come out and say: 'We're not just doing it — we're doing it big.'"

STRONGEST BOND

Virtually all performing arts companies cancelled or at least curtailed their seasons when coronavirus-induced shutdowns began in March 2020.

Since then a number of companies, including Palm Beach, have been vying to meet what's proven a devastating (and prolonged) moment for the arts.

In October the Atlanta Opera held an outdoor series under a circus tent that retrofitted scripts to reference coronavirus, with some performers wearing masks or singing behind plexiglass.

Such performances are not opera as usual but many artists see them as vital to staying fresh, honing their craft — and staving off the mental health toll that for many has accompanied the pandemic.

"When I lost my first set of gigs, in the summer of 2020, I hit a very, very, very quick and sudden and scary depression of not knowing where my talent and my voice and my music — when I would be able to do it again for an audience," said Ryan Speedo Green, a bass-baritone playing Colline in "La Boheme."

Fellow performer Isabel Leonard, who is playing Musetta in that show, said the months pushed offstage also have proven damaging to the bottom line.

"A lot of us have burned through our savings," she said.

"A lot of us who, you know, are almost 40, are in a sort of start-over position."

The festival is crafted to fit pandemic times, but Stern said there are lessons to take from what's intended as a temporary solution.

"Right now we're catering so much to the audience experience," he said, which is an exercise in finding ways to "keep opera friendly without mitigating what opera is."

The option of making a larger outdoor performance — which can make the experience feel "more open," he said — a permanent seasonal offering could be explored, for example.

Ultimately, Stern said the challenge of performing with pandemic-era restrictions has highlighted how elemental music is to connection. — AFP



Elizabeth Ann, the first cloned ferret, spurs hope for endangered US species

US SCIENTISTS have successfully cloned an endangered black-footed ferret using frozen cells from a long-dead wild animal, the first time any native endangered species has been cloned in the United States.

Black-footed ferret recovery efforts aimed at increased genetic diversity and disease resistance took a bold step forward on December 10, with the birth of Elizabeth Ann, created from the cells of Willa, a black-footed ferret that lived more than 30 years ago, the US Fish and Wildlife Service said.

"Although this research is preliminary, it is the first cloning of a native endangered species in North America, and it provides a promising tool for continued efforts to conserve the black-footed ferret," said Noreen Walsh, director of the Service's Mountain-Prairie Region.

The species, North America's only native ferret, were once thought to be extinct but were brought back from nearly vanishing forever after a Wyoming rancher discovered a small population on his land in 1981. They were captured to begin a captive breeding programme to recover the species.

But only seven of the original wild animals bred, and all living ferrets today are closely related. That puts limitations on the species' genetic diversity, creating challenges for resilience to changing environments and emerging disease threats.

Elizabeth Ann is a genetic copy of Willa, a black-footed ferret captured among the last wild individuals, who died in the 1980s and has no living descendants, so is not one of the seven founders.

The Wyoming Game & Fish Department had the foresight to preserve her genes and sent tissue samples from Willa to San Diego Zoo Global's Frozen Zoo in 1988. Years later, that provided viable cell cultures for the project.

The team — which includes biotech conservation group Revive & Restore, private pet cloning company ViaGen Pets & Equine, San Diego Zoo Global and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums — is working to produce more black-footed ferret clones in the coming months as part of continuing research efforts. — Reuters



Less formal, more comfortable: Pandemic transforms work attire

Suits and tailored shirts are out, sweatpants and pajamas are in: Remote working is changing work clothes habits, and while vaccines may bring back some formality, old-school office attire should emerge from the pandemic far less starched and strict.

"For the last year, everybody has just been dressed from the waist up, wearing a nice short for Zoom calls", quipped stylist Sascha Lilic.

Many workers who have already returned to offices notice a new relaxed vibe.

"I saw someone wearing just their socks when they walked through to get something from another department", recalled Deanna Narveson, a journalist in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

"I think I've been dressing slightly more casual myself", added Narveson, who nevertheless makes sure she puts on "real clothes" when working from home.

According to employees at several companies, the casualness has happened by itself without management or HR teams intervening.

"Shorts and T-Shirts at the Pentagon was pretty new", said Matt Triner, boss of IT consulting firm Hunter Strategy, which the US government has contracted to do several projects.

The relaxation of dress codes in the professional world was already under way long before the pandemic, with the tech sector and start-up generation leading the way.

It was even catching on at banks.

"We have had a 'flexible' dress code policy for almost two years now, which encourages our people to use their own judgement for what is appropriate to wear for their work day", said a spokesperson for Goldman Sachs.

The pandemic has seen the trend towards comfort accelerate, though.

"Suits and ties were already going away in IT. The pandemic gave the last hangers-on an excuse to let go", said Triner.

The trend has been catastrophic for formal menswear companies like Brooks Brothers and the parent company of Men's Wearhouse, which both declared bankruptcy last year.

New York designer David Hart, a specialist in luxury men's ready-to-wear items, has taken "a step back" from

tailoring from the time being to focus on knitwear, masks, sweaters and polo shirts.

DISRUPTIVE

The pandemic will have "lasting consequences" in the way people dress for work, particularly men, according to Lilic.

"The outfit will become more casual. It will still be a suit, but there might be a drawstring waist or elasticated waist", he said.

Lilic, who has worked with several major fashion houses including Hugo Boss and Elie Saab, predicts more loafers and a lot fewer ties.

"The open collar shirt is going to be great", he said.

The shift is already visible among fashion brands, which are pushing more and more cotton and linen jackets as well as polo shirts and even simple sneakers.

Workplace looks will become more individualistic, but also respectful of the office environment, Lilic believes.

"It will respect more of your personality", he said. "But I don't think it is going to be so impactful on men's fashion that everybody's going to turn up in their banking office as a rapper."

Appearance, and some formality are "still important to some customers", said Triner, though "as customers get younger, this is changing rapidly", he added.

"I think the suit will stay but it won't have the blatant physical effect. It will less (be) something to hide behind", said Lilic.

For American designer David Hart, "there will be a strong urge for men to start dressing up again" after the pandemic.

"I think that people will start dressing up for themselves and not because they are required to for work", he said, confident that the rise of men's fashion will continue.

Hart, whose brand was built on tailored jackets and trousers, even dreams of a post-pandemic world where "suits and ties will become disruptive." "The man wearing a suit will be the new rebel", he said. — AFP

The relaxation of dress codes in the professional world was already under way long before the pandemic, with the tech sector and start-up generation leading the way

