

All commercial activities to close from 8 pm to 5 am from today

The Supreme Committee's decision to close all commercial activities in the Sultanate's governorates from 8 pm to 5 am comes into effect from today, and will remain in force till March 20. The closure covers all restaurants, cafes and cafeterias inside tourism installations, in addition to home delivery services. The ban exempts fuel filling stations, health establishments and private pharmacies.



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OMAN OBSERVER

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AL SUWAIQ BOOK DHOFAR FINAL



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OPEC OIL HAS ADVANTAGE OVER US SHALE DURING RECOVERY



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CAIRO

SUPPORT TO JOINT ARAB ACTION

The Sultanate, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, reaffirms that it is proceeding with its approach that supports and reinforces joint Arab action and the adoption of the comprehensive and lasting peace option on the basis of the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab peace initiative. This was stated by Abdullah bin Nassir bin al Rahbi, Sultanate's Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative to the Arab League, at the 155th session of the Council of the Arab League at the ministerial level held in Cairo on Wednesday.

DETAILS ON P2

MUSCAT

BRITISH DEFENCE SECRETARY ARRIVES

Ben Wallace, UK Secretary of State for Defence, arrived in Muscat on Wednesday evening on a several-day official visit to the Sultanate. He was received upon his arrival at Seeb Air Base by Brigadier Hassan bin Ali al Mujaini, Head of Moral Guidance at the Chief of Staff Office of the Sultan's Armed Forces, the UK ambassador to the Sultanate, and the defence attaché of the UK Embassy in Muscat. — ONA

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A girl looks on at the malnutrition ward of Al Sabeen Maternity and Child Hospital in the Yemeni capital Sanaa. — AFP

CALLS FOR END TO WAR

# Sultanate committed to provide aid for Yemen

NEW YORK: The Sultanate has reiterated its commitment to provide humanitarian aid for the brotherly people of Yemen.

The pledge reflects Oman's dedication to the Humanitarian Response Plan and international efforts to provide relief to alleviate human suffering in Yemen.

This came in the Sultanate's Speech at the Virtual High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Crisis in Yemen. The speech was delivered by Dr Mohammed Awadh al Hassan, Sultanate's

Permanent Representative at the United Nations in New York. In the speech, the Sultanate affirmed that it will continue to host Yemenis and provide free treatment for them, noting that it will sustain its ongoing support at various levels.

At the conclusion of the speech, the Sultanate called for an end to the war in Yemen due to its disastrous repercussions. Oman backs UN Secretary-General's plea to implement a ceasefire and halt all offensives, said Dr Al Hassan.

STARVATION

Earlier, the UN warned that famine could become part of war-torn Yemen's "reality" in 2021, after a donor conference raising funds to keep millions from starvation fell short by over half.

The UN had sought to raise \$3.85 billion from more than 100 governments and donors, but only \$1.7 billion was offered.

"The prospect of more people suffering a famine has grown", UN Development Programme chief Achim Steiner said. — Agencies

# ICC prosecutor set to open probe into war crimes in Palestine

THE HAGUE: The International Criminal Court prosecutor said on Wednesday her office will open a formal investigation into war crimes in the Palestinian Territories which will examine both sides in the conflict.

The decision comes after the court ruled on February 5 that it has jurisdiction in the case, prompting swift rejection from US and Israel. The Palestinian Authority welcomed the ruling. "The decision to open an investigation followed a painstaking preliminary examination undertaken by my office that lasted close to five years", outgoing Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said in a statement.

"In the end, our central concern must be for the victims of crimes, both Palestinian and



A file photo of Palestinian demonstrators during clashes with Israeli troops at the Israel-Gaza border east of Gaza City on April 6, 2018. — Reuters

Israeli, arising from the long cycle of violence and insecurity that has caused deep suffering and despair on all sides", Bensouda said.

"My office will take the same principled, non-partisan, approach that it has adopted in all situations over which its

jurisdiction is seized."

Bensouda, who will be replaced by British prosecutor Karim Khan on June 16, said in December 2019 that "war crimes have been or are being committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip". — Reuters

Omani handicraft makers are some of the world's best. The potters of Bahla, for example, had been moulding clays into different shapes and vessels for generations. With conservation and support from the government, it has grown into a reliable industry and a source of income for small scale entrepreneurs. This comes as the Sultanate celebrated Omani Artisans Day on Wednesday, which falls on March 3 every year. DETAILS ON P20



SHAPING THE IDENTITY OF OMAN

# Traders see hope with pre-VAT deals despite night closure

VINOD NAIR @vinot\_nair

The night closure of commercial activities to be implemented from today has come as a temporary setback for commercial establishments and retailers that were hoping to lure customers with some offers in the run-up to the implementation of Value-Added Tax (VAT).

Despite stern warnings from

the Supreme Committee and the Ministry of Health for seeking cooperation from the public to fight the pandemic, the number of Covid-19 related violations continue to be reported in the Sultanate.

Businesses, which are facing challenges from unrelenting pandemic, are trying to urge customers to take advantage of VAT-free promotions.

Businesses, which are facing challenges from unrelenting pandemic, are trying to urge customers to take advantage of VAT-free promotions. VAT will be introduced from April

It may be noted that VAT will be introduced in Oman from April 2021.

According to businesses, notwithstanding the current situation there are chances of a section of consumers taking advantage of the promotions by increasing their spending.

A few automobile dealers in the country have been sending promotional messages directly or

through social media.

"Take advantage of the pre-VAT offers", said a dealer in its messages to customers.

"Given all the benefits, coupled with VAT savings, this is a great opportunity that should not be missed by anyone. So, we highly recommend they make the most of this promotion before it ends on March 31", said Mitsubishi Motors Oman in a release. TURN TO P2

# 94 per cent of Bidiya water network complete

**BIDIYA:** The implementation rate of a RO 21-million project for installing a water distribution network in the Wilayat of Bidiya, has reached 94 per cent and the project is expected to be completed at the beginning of the third quarter of this year, the Public Authority for Water (Diam) announced on Wednesday.

The water distribution network will cover existing residential schemes and meet the demand for potable water resulting from the urban expansion the wilayat is witnessing.

With a total of 6,000 connections, the project will provide potable water for some 17,000 people.

Engineer Badr al Rabani, project director said the project involves installation of a 460-metre water distribution network in addition to construction of reservoirs and pumping stations. The water network will feed all the quarters of the Wilayat of Bidiya.



The project also involves installation of water networks with different diameters as well as the construction of an administrative facility in the Wilayat of Ibra to provide services for the entire Governorate of North Al Sharqiyah, a subscriber services hall, a water quality lab, a control and monitoring centre and administrative offices, the official said.

Diam works in line with the main plan for the water sector 2040 which targets to cover 98 per cent of the Sultanate with high quality water networks to meet the increasing demand for potable water in all governorates of the Sultanate.

Water is produced at the water desalination plants to ensure sustained and uninterrupted supply of potable water for all governorates.

The water desalination plants are connected to the strategic transmission lines which are connected to the water networks in the wilayats. — ONA

## Sultanate affirms its support to joint Arab action



**CAIRO:** The Sultanate, under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, reaffirms that it is proceeding with its approach that support and reinforces joint Arab action and the adoption of the comprehensive and lasting peace option on the basis of the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab peace initiative.

This was stated by Abdullah bin Nassir bin al Rahbi, Sultanate's Ambassador to Egypt and Permanent Representative to the Arab League, at the 155th session of the Council of the Arab League at the ministerial level held here on Wednesday. He added that the Sultanate hopes that this session will mark the beginning of the Arab unity and a translation of the Arab peoples' aspirations for solidarity to confront the challenges facing the Arab region.

The Sultanate affirms its keenness to exert all efforts and to coordinate with all parties to confront the challenges facing the Umma, Al Rahbi said, noting that the Sultanate does not spare an effort in serving the Arab issues the most prominent of which is the Palestinian cause, and confirms its support to the Palestinian brothers in their noble and legitimate pursuit to establish their independent state based on their historic

rights and the resolutions of the international legitimacy.

The Sultanate's ambassador to Egypt and permanent representative to the Arab League, added that the Sultanate expresses its support to any initiatives that seek to find a solution that satisfies all parties involved in the Renaissance Dam issue and supports the water rights of Sudan and Egypt.

The ambassador affirmed the Sultanate's permanent attitude towards the national issues of the sisterly Arab countries and the adoption of dialogue and peaceful means rather than arms and discord, he added that based on this the Sultanate calls upon all parties to support the efforts of the Arab League and the other efforts aimed at achieving peace and stability for all brothers so that the Arab countries can relish peace, stability and prosperity.

The ambassador underscored that the Sultanate values the role of the Secretariat-General of the Arab League under the auspices of Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit, to whom he expressed congratulations for winning a second five-year term as Secretary-General of the Arab League, wishing him success in his duties and calling for cooperation with him to achieve the interests of the Arab countries. — ONA

## SQU team develops quicker, cheaper alternative to PCR test

STAFF REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MAR 3

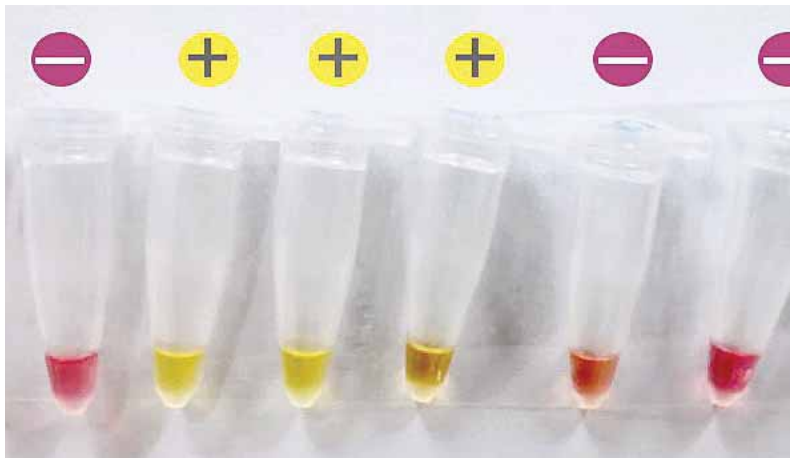
Funded by the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (MoHERI), a team led by Dr Haytham Ali of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has developed a ready to use, rapid and sensitive colorimetric Reverse Transcription Loop-Mediated Isothermal Amplification (RT-LAMP) based assay for the diagnosis of Covid-19 infection.

The assay can be utilised at its current status as a screening assay with the advantages of being simpler, quicker (20-30 minutes), and cheaper than the qRT-PCR.

"The colorimetric assay is highly sensitive and was able to detect as low as 80 viral genome copies with possible improvement through further adjustments," Dr Haytham Ali (pictured) said.

Three primer sets were designed by Dr Timothy Holton from SQU (co-principal investigator) based on the complete genome sequences of forty-one SARS-CoV-2 isolates from Oman, targeting the Spike protein gene and the M gene.

The primer set (CoV\_S23258) was found to be the most sensitive and specific among the three



was tested against SARS-CoV Frankfurt-1 RNA virus and avian coronavirus as they tested negative with the developed assay.

The research team examined the possibility of directly using saliva samples spiked with SARS-CoV-2 RNA that gave preliminary excellent results with the developed assay.

Dr Haytham's team is trying to convert the test into a lyophilised (freeze-dried) ready-to-use assay, where water and template need to be added to run the test. Results can be obtained by reading the colour change from red to yellow.

"Once we validate the lyophilised assay, we will proceed of implementing the assay as a point of care test in clinics, airports and other places," Dr Haytham added.

designed sets. The RT-LAMP assay was validated by testing 145 Covid-19 clinical samples obtained from SQU Hospital with a sensitivity of 96.9 per cent and specificity of 94.7 per cent when compared to the validated Real-Time Quantitative Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (qRT-PCR) assay.

The RT-LAMP assay specificity

■ FROM PAGE 1

## 3 deaths, 358 new cases

**MUSCAT:** The Ministry of Health (MoH) on Wednesday reported three Covid-19 deaths and 358 new cases of the coronavirus, taking the overall tally of cases to 142,527 and fatalities to 1,583.

The number of people who have recovered reached 133,138, the ministry said. Twenty-three patients were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 188, including 77 in ICUs.

## Businesses see hope with pre-VAT deals

"We had planned aggressive promotions for this month on our brands including watches, gadgets and household electronic appliances. This evening closure of commercial establishments will be a damper as that is the peak time for shoppers. We still see a chance with online business," said a senior official of a leading authorised distribution company in the country.

"With bank and finance companies going slow on loans and financing, especially to expatriates,

and the prevailing uncertainty in the job market, we are we hoping on pre-VAT and upcoming Ramadhan deals. We still hope consumers will take advantage of the offers," said another automobile group.

Oman will join the league of 160 countries which apply VAT around the world.

The VAT is an indirect tax whose value is borne by the final consumer, while the seller calculates and collects the tax and pays

it to the tax authority. The tax on consumption will be applied in the Sultanate at a basic rate of five per cent.

With around 94 customs tariff items such as meat, fish, poultry, dairy products, fresh eggs, vegetables, fruits, coffee, tea, cardamom, cereals and grains, olive oil, sugar, child foods, bread, bottled water and table salt to be exempted from the VAT, the impact on the inflation will be minimum in the short-term, feel the experts.

## Six projects win Omantel research grant

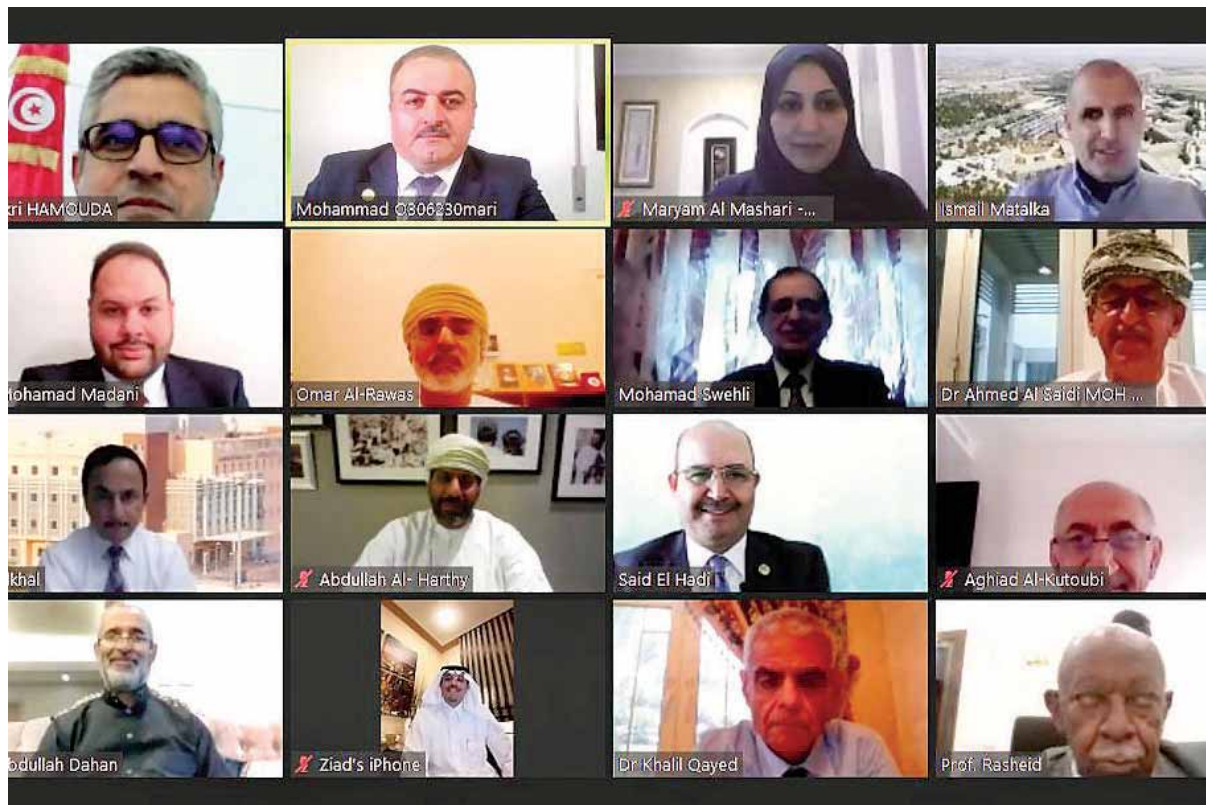
**MUSCAT:** A research grant offered by Oman Telecommunications Company (Omantel) saw the participation of many projects, of which six emerged as winners.

The grant, which deals with nanotechnology projects and research papers from the Centre of Communication and Information, comes within the context of contacts between Sultan Qaboos University and Omantel and it is considered one of the components of Oman Vision 2040 in the field of scientific research.

The three winning nanotechnology research projects were presented by Dr Mohammed al Abri, Dr Sankit Joshi and Dr Mohammed Othman.

The three winning research projects of the Centre of Communication and Information were presented by Dr Dhiya Nader, Dr Nasser al Tarahwi and Dr Khalid al Rassadi.

Omantel grant stems from an agreement signed by Sultan Qaboos University and Omantel in 2017. — ONA



## ABHS council meets under Oman's Chairmanship

MUSCAT: The Supreme Council of the Arab Board of Health Specialisations (ABHS) held a virtual meeting under the chairmanship of Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, President of ABHS Supreme Council.

During the meeting, Dr Al Saeedi thanked all the participants for their ongoing efforts in

a manner that serves the Arab health system, as well as their endeavours to promote health progress and prosperity at the country level.

ABHS approved minutes and decisions of the previous meeting, which took place in Muscat on February 16, 2020.

The meeting also approved decisions and recommendations

of the Executive Office's meeting which was held via video conference last Saturday.

The virtual meeting saw the participation of members of the Supreme Council along with the representative of the Technical Secretariat of Arab Health Ministers Council and Head of the Joint Consultative Scientific Council in the ABHS. — ONA

## Survey to gauge public knowledge of TB

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health on Wednesday launched a national questionnaire to measure the levels of knowledge, perceptions and practices related to tuberculosis in the Sultanate.

As many as 1,000 Omanis and residents from different governorates of the Sultanate were randomly selected to participate in the two-week survey.

The questionnaire serves as a local poll measuring public perceptions and pinpoint information gaps that reflect on social stands and actions pertaining to tuberculosis. Its results will help assess and promote social awareness and

engage all as partners in the mission to eradicate tuberculosis.

The selected participant will get a phone call from the working team.

In five minutes, the participant is expected to answer a set of questions dealing with general information, as well as specific questions on what the participant knows about tuberculosis, his/her perceptions to it and his/her reactions.

The success of the questionnaire depends to a large extent on the cooperation of all, their credibility and objectiveness in answering the survey questions aimed to activate individual and

collective responsibility towards the nation.

Tuberculosis is considered one of the most infectious diseases in the world. The Sultanate rates among countries with low levels of tuberculosis.

The Sultanate strives to revert to the post-TB eradication stage by cutting infection percentage to less than 1 in a million by 2035, cutting infection by 90 per cent and mortality rate by 95 per cent, compared to the epidemiological situation in 2015.

This reflects the National TB Eradication Strategy, which the Sultanate will carry out in stages.

— ONA

## Automobile fuel production up 10.3%

MUSCAT: The Sultanate's refineries recorded an increase in the production of automobile fuel during January 2021 by 10.3 per cent, compared to December 2020, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). The output of super grade petrol (M-95) reached 1,316,900 barrels until the end of January 2021, a rise by 2 per cent.

Of the total production, domestic sales of petrol (M-95) stood at 1,174,300 barrels, an increase by 14 per cent, while its exports stood at 119,000 barrels, comprising a rise by 121 per cent, compared to the end of January 2020. The production of standard grade petrol (M-91) by Omani refineries stood at 896,900 barrels comprising a decline by 14 per cent till the end of January 2021, compared to the same period in 2020. Domestic sales of petrol (M-91) stood at 687,100 barrels and its exports reached 351,000 barrels, a decline by 16 per cent, compared to January 2020.

Gas oil (diesel) output increased by 41 per cent to 3,303,100 barrels. Domestic sales of diesel stood at 1,054,800, a drop by 6 per cent and its exports reached 1,974,500, an increase by 43 per cent, compared to January 2020.

Aviation fuel oil production fell by 68 per cent to 434,600 barrels at the end of January 2021, compared to the same period of 2020.

— ONA



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## بنك الإسكان العماني (ش.م.ع.م)

### إعلان

يعلن بنك الإسكان العماني عن طرح المناقصة التالية:-

| رقم المناقصة | اسم المناقصة                                                                      | الشركات التي يحق لها الاشتراك والمسجلة لدى مجلس المناقصات | آخر موعد للشراء الإلكتروني | آخر موعد لتقديم العطاءات | قيمة النسخة       |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| ٢٠٢١/١       | دراسة جدوى لإضافة أنشطة البنوك التجارية بجانب نشاط تقديم القروض الإسكانية المدعوم | الأولى والممتازة                                          | ٢٠٢١/٣/١٥                  | ٢٠٢١/٣/٢٤                | ٢٥ ريالاً عمانياً |

• يمكن للشركات المتخصصة الحصول على وثائق المناقصة إلكترونياً عن طريق الرابط أدناه ابتداءً من يوم الخميس الموافق ٢٠٢١/٣/٤ (https://www.ohb.co.om/ar/Tender.aspx).

• يتم تقديم العطاءات إلكترونياً مع نسخة من الضمان البنكي من أحد البنوك المعتمدة بالسلطنة بمقدار (١٪) من قيمة العطاءات المقدم وساري المفعول لمدة (٩٠) يوماً من تاريخ تقديم العطاء.

• يقدم أصل الضمان البنكي (١٪) من قيمة العطاء في مظهر مغلق يوضع في صندوق المناقصات (بنك الإسكان العماني) بالطابق (الرابع) بمبنى البنك الرئيسي بمنطقة (روي التجارية) مقابل البنك المركزي العماني.

• للاستفسار عن المناقصة الإلكترونية يرجى التواصل على الهاتف رقم (٢٤٧٧٥٨٢٢).

يجوز للبنك إلغاء المناقصة ولا يحق للمتقدمين بعطاءاتهم المطالبة بأي تعويضات.

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I have been able to save more than 50 live turtles, but I have also found numerous other ones that were already dead by the time we found them

ABDULLAH AL FARSI

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH

@lakshmioman

Fishing nets continue to challenge turtles in the sea.

Few days ago, 22-year-old Abdullah al Farsi was in the midst of his work at the sea on the coast of Masirah when he came to the rescue of two green turtles entangled in an abandoned net. The video of the rescue shows Abdullah working with immense speed and accuracy in setting the turtles free.

Abdullah, who is from Ras Hilf, Masirah, has been involved in fishing with his family since he was 14 years of age and up until now he has saved more than 50 sea turtles. He has always felt it was the best way to support his parents and his siblings. Since then, the sea is a natural extension of land for him and so are the creatures. When he came across the movements on the surface of the sea he knew he would have to act fast.

He was on time for the two turtles but late for the third turtle.

Within seconds Abdullah and his partners pulled the net close to the boat and snapped out the ropes of the net with a knife. Next he picked up the turtle with ease into the boat clearing the last bit of tangled net and carried it to the other side of the boat releasing it so the turtle remained far away from the floating net and moved forward while his fishing partner held onto the second turtle caught in the net. Coming back, he cut free the net for the second turtle and urged it to move on. However, tragically only the shell remained of the third turtle.

Rescuing turtles is not new for Abdullah as there have been other incidents such as the releasing of a Hawksbill turtle recently and many more in the previous years.

"I have been able to save more than 50 live turtles, but I have also found numerous other ones that were already dead by the time we found them," Abdullah noted.

ENTANGLED IN TRAP

This is his request, "The fishermen

need to take their old nets to the shore and dispose them properly, rather than leaving them in the sea to trap turtles and other wildlife."

"In this case they removed the net, but actually there are so many old nets that it will take an organised clean-up to remove them all," said Amelia German, a resident of Masirah since two years who is a biologist and ecologist from UK and is involved in community and environmental projects and is also researching on plastic pollution in the island and the impact of climate change on turtle nesting. She has also been able to witness turtles nesting many times at the island.

In regard to reaching on time to rescue the turtles, Amelia said, "Fishermen have very good eyesight and they detect everything at sea." This probably could be one of the reasons fishermen can be the best ones to protect the turtles.

NESTING SITE

"Turtles live in the sea around Masirah Island all year around. They come to nest between February and September. There are four species here — the highest numbers are loggerhead turtles, Masirah used to have the highest population and they are listed as critically endangered on the IUCN red list of endangered species," Amelia observed.

"One thing we need to have desperately and would be beneficial is to have a turtle hospital because at the moment there is nothing we can really do for sick or injured ones. There are some people in Muscat who can take care of them but it is too far for us to transport them," Amelia added.

SEVEN SPECIES

Oman has five of the seven species of sea turtles and Masirah Island has four species, loggerhead, green, olive ridley and hawksbill. According to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, the green turtles are found on most of the Omani beaches and are plentiful in Ras Al Hadd, Ras Al Jinz, Masirah Island and Daymaniyat Islands; the loggerhead turtle nests on Masirah Island, the shores of Dhofar and Daymaniyat Islands; while the hawksbill turtle nests on the shores of Muscat and Daymaniyat Islands; the olive ridley turtle nests on Masirah Island; and the leatherback turtles are found in Omani waters but they do not nest in the Sultanate.



SEA  
TURTLE  
RESCUER



## Khat smuggling attempt foiled



MUSCAT: The Coast Guard Police vessels have foiled an attempt to smuggle 3,736 bundles of khat on board a smuggling boat and arrested four people near the coast of Sadah.

The confiscated drugs, the arrestees and the smuggling boat were handed over to the Directorate-General for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances to complete the legal procedures.

**ROAD ACCIDENT:** A major road accident involving three vehicles occurred on the Sultan Qaboos Street. One of the vehicles turned over and another caught fire near the airport bridge. The accident caused heavy traffic jam on both sides of the road.

## New regulations for ferries on Shanna-Masirah line



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology has issued a circular regulating the work of ferries operating between Shanna Port and Masirah Island to ensure security of marine navigation.

The circular banned the transportation of trucks loaded with fuel, gas and construction materials along with light vehicles but permitted their transportation alongside heavy trucks

**The circular banned the transportation of trucks loaded with fuel, gas and construction materials along with light vehicles but permitted their transportation alongside heavy trucks**

to the weight limit allowed on ferries, adherence to closing the ferry door during

the journey.

The circular also stipulated the issuance of a transportation card for all vehicles and trucks in addition to the commitment to providing insurance for passengers and vehicles and giving priority to maritime safety under all circumstances.

The port supervisors at Shanna and Masirah ports were directed to follow up the implementation of the regulations. Anyone who violates the regulations will be held legally accountable and the ferry will be suspended.



**إعلان مناقصة**  
**Tender Announcement**

SINYAR is the new integrated commercial identity for Oman National Transport Company SAOC and National Ferries Company LLC leading land and Maritime public transport operator and the first mass transport operator in the Sultanate. SINYAR has more than 1,600 employees and operates more than 500 buses and 7 ferries across the country.

SINYAR announce the following tender, to companies specialized in the related services.

| Tender Number |  |
|---------------|--|
| T-05-2021     |  |

| Tender Name                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| اتفاقية توريد قطع غيار لإسطول سنيار (MAN&VDL)<br><b>Framework Agreement for Supply of Spare Parts (Comprehensive) for In-house Repair/Maintenance of MAN vehicles &amp; VDL Vehicles.</b> |

| Project Summary                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Within the framework of this tender, Sinyar would like to have a qualified Supplier to supply spare parts for all Sinyar's MAN & VDL vehicles based on a call-off agreement for a period of five years. |

| Tender Fee | Grade & Specialty                  |
|------------|------------------------------------|
| 50/-       | Specialized Companies in the field |

| Start date for tender document distribution | Last date for tender document distribution | Last date for submission |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Sunday, 7th March, 2021                     | Thursday, 18th March, 2021                 | Tuesday, 6th April, 2021 |

Oman National Transport Company S.A.O.C. "SINYAR"  
Head Quarter, Ghala  
P.O.Box: 620, PC: 100, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

National Ferries Company L.L.C. "SINYAR"  
Head Quarter, Ghala  
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## Vlog Challenge on impact of pandemic on education

MUSCAT: CBSE Indian Schools in the Sultanate, with the approval of the Indian School Board of Directors, will participate in the innovative inter-school Vlog Challenge — "Let's Talk Contest" aimed at encouraging the students to present their ideas.

The first competition of the series as a Vlog Challenge is among the 21 Indian Schools of Oman. This unique initiative organised by LIFE Institutes and presented by Digitelence — Digital Intelligence Path — aims at bringing elements of fun, excitement and creativity through the spirit of competition in the area where students express their opinions about the "Effect of the Pandemic on Education."

The objective of the event is to encourage the students in talking about their concerns and suggestions as well as to make the students implement the philosophy of envisioning, exploring and expressing. The contest combined the best elements of public speaking and presentation through video logs to bring out excitement and creativity amongst participants.

## TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Nama Shared Services Company (NSS), invites the specialized companies to participate and submit their best offers for the tender below:

| Tender Number | Tender Name                        | Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents | Time & Last Date for Proposal Submission | Tender Fee (OMR) |
|---------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------|
| NSS/2021/1    | Development of IR4.0 SMART ROADMAP | 14 March 2021                                | 31 March 2021                            | 25/-             |

### Terms and conditions:

- Bids shall be submitted in a single envelope and sealed with red wax, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee", and must write on the envelope the tender name & number.
- 3 separate envelopes shall be included inside the single sealed envelope, and each of these 3 envelopes must be marked with a tenderer name & tender no. as per the below:
  - Commercial Proposal
  - Technical Proposal
  - Bid Bond
- Bids should be dropped in the tender box at NSS reception before 1.00 pm, time of the Sultanate, on Wednesday, 31 March 2021.
- Each bid should be accompanied with a temporary insurance, in the form of a bank guarantee or a cheque certified from one of the banks operating in the Sultanate, covering (1%) of the total bid value and valid for a period of (90) days from the last date for submission of offers, addressed to the "Chairman of the Internal Tender Committee". Tenders that do not include the required temporary insurance will not be considered.
- NSS is not obliged to accept the lowest or any other bid.
- Registration of the bidders to be done through the company Tender website ([www.nama.om](http://www.nama.om)).
- Interested party to deposit Tender Fee (Non-Refundable) on: Account Name: Nama Shared Services, Bank Muscat: 0423-048027270-017 Corporate Branch (Bidder name and Tender Number to be clearly mentioned). Tender Documents will be received by email.
- The deposit at the last day of purchasing should be before 1.00pm.
- In the event of receipt of the tender document on behalf of another company, the interested purchasers in the above tender document should provide details of the person's name and the company details.

  
نماء للخدمات المشتركة  
**Nama Shared Services**

**Al Muzn Mail**  
R - Floor - Al Mawaleh North, Al Seeb  
P.O Box C9740, Post Code 900, Sultanate of Oman.  
Phone Number: +968 24559200 / 246  
E-Mail: [ibrahim.alhinai@holding.nama.om](mailto:ibrahim.alhinai@holding.nama.om)

## National Bank of Oman GCC Fund

### Investment Manager Report

#### For the FY 2020 ending 31st of December 2020

The fourth quarter of 2020 marked the emergence of multiple vaccines to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Globally, investors welcomed the different announcements with optimism as equity indices and other risk assets continued to rally. Additionally, the United States of America, the largest economy in the world, elected their 46th president; the new administration is expected to strike a conciliatory tone with regards to global trade, in addition to a loose fiscal policy domestically. On the back of these two major developments, the MSCI World hit an all-time high while the 10-years US treasury yield reached 1.10%; more than double its lowest point during the year. The 10-year Japanese, German and Swiss government yields experienced a similar trajectory closing the year at their highest level for the year.

On the commodity front, crude enjoyed a remarkable quarter, rallying 27% to close the year at USD 52 a barrel. The emergence of a new strain and a new round of lockdowns did very little to tame investors' optimism, as crude continued to inch higher.

During the fourth quarter, the Fund gained 7.34%, to close the year at -1.56%. A performance that compares favorably to the benchmark's quarterly return of 5.88% and annual return of -3.62%. Unsurprisingly, during a year of pandemic and lockdowns, the sectors that performed the best among regional equities were healthcare and consumer staples; while financials and real estate were the worst performers. Saudi Arabia was the best performing GCC country, posting a 3.5% return, followed by Oman -1.57%, Qatar -1.51% UAE -2.38%, Bahrain -7.30% and Kuwait -9.93%.

2020, was a year of challenges. The coronavirus pandemic has shaken the entire world, leaving many of our old norms in question, and ushering in many 'new norms'. While the economy adapts to the new normal, credit must be given to central bankers around the globe for successfully shoring an endangered global economy. Regionally, deciders have accelerated their policy agenda to help regional economies adapt. While change may be uncomfortable to some; it brings its fair share of opportunity. We plan on continuing to adopt a cautious approach, while taking full advantage of a mutating environment to deliver results to our unit holders.

| STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION<br>AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2020               |                  |                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
|                                                                         | 2020<br>RO       | 2019<br>RO        |
| <b>Assets</b>                                                           |                  |                   |
| Financial assets at fair value through profit or loss                   | 8,158,406        | 9,271,089         |
| Cash and cash equivalents                                               | 1,347,752        | 808,280           |
| Interest receivable                                                     | 5,802            | -                 |
| <b>Total assets</b>                                                     | <b>9,511,960</b> | <b>10,079,369</b> |
| <b>Liabilities</b>                                                      |                  |                   |
| Amount due to related parties                                           | 26,759           | 28,439            |
| Accruals and other payables                                             | 10,000           | 8,565             |
| <b>Total liabilities</b>                                                | <b>36,759</b>    | <b>37,004</b>     |
| <b>Total net assets attributable to the unitholders</b>                 | <b>9,475,201</b> | <b>10,042,365</b> |
| <b>Total liabilities and net assets attributable to the unitholders</b> | <b>9,511,960</b> | <b>10,079,369</b> |
| <b>Net asset per unit attributable to the unitholders</b>               | <b>0.732</b>     | <b>0.782</b>      |

| STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME<br>FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2020                  |                 |                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
|                                                                                           | 2020<br>RO      | 2019<br>RO     |
| <b>INCOME</b>                                                                             |                 |                |
| Dividend income                                                                           | 151,503         | 404,346        |
| Interest income                                                                           | 25,140          | 8,384          |
| Foreign exchange gain                                                                     | 5,165           | -              |
| Other income                                                                              | 7,537           | -              |
| <b>Total income</b>                                                                       | <b>189,345</b>  | <b>412,730</b> |
| Net realised (loss)/gain on sale of financial assets at fair value through profit or loss | (928,099)       | 139,571        |
| Net unrealised gain on financial assets at fair value through profit or loss              | 727,029         | 393,977        |
| <b>Net investment (loss)/income</b>                                                       | <b>(11,725)</b> | <b>946,278</b> |

| EXPENSES                                                                                                                                         |                  |                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
|                                                                                                                                                  | 2020<br>RO       | 2019<br>RO     |
| Brokerage commission expenses (transaction cost)                                                                                                 | 55,760           | 51,905         |
| Management fees                                                                                                                                  | 96,960           | 111,459        |
| Administration fee                                                                                                                               | 15,061           | 15,321         |
| Custodian fees                                                                                                                                   | 9,626            | 9,600          |
| Fund Management Body's fee                                                                                                                       | 35,000           | 35,000         |
| General and administration                                                                                                                       | 10,088           | 17,624         |
| Foreign exchange loss                                                                                                                            | -                | 6,008          |
| <b>Total expenses</b>                                                                                                                            | <b>222,495</b>   | <b>246,917</b> |
| <b>(Loss) / profit and total comprehensive (loss)/ income and (decrease)/increase in net assets attributable to the unitholders for the year</b> | <b>(234,220)</b> | <b>699,361</b> |
| <b>(Loss) / profit per unit</b>                                                                                                                  | <b>(0.018)</b>   | <b>0.054</b>   |

Investment Manager & Administrator

Note: The complete accounts, in Arabic or English as requested, will be sent by mail to any shareholder within 7 days of a written request addressed to the Administrator, Investment Banking Operations, National Bank of Oman, P.O.Box:751, PC 112, Ruwi, Sultanate of Oman. Tel: 24778864, Fax: 24778993 Email: [GCCFund@nbo.co.om](mailto:GCCFund@nbo.co.om)

البنك الوطني العماني  
**NBO**

# One dead in rocket attack on Iraq base hosting US troops

**BAGHDAD:** At least 10 rockets slammed into a military base in western Iraq hosting US-led coalition troops on Wednesday, security sources said, leaving one civilian contractor dead.

The attack on the sprawling Ain al Assad base in Iraq's western desert comes after several weeks of escalating US-Iran tensions on Iraqi soil.

Ain al Assad hosts both Iraqi forces and US-led coalition troops helping fight the IS group, as well as the unmanned drones the coalition uses to surveil sleeper cells.

Coalition spokesman Colonel Wayne Marotto confirmed that 10 rockets hit the base at 7:20 am while Iraqi security forces said they had found the platform from which 10 "Grad-type rockets" hit the Ain al Assad base.

Western security sources said the rockets were Iranian-made Arash models, which are 122mm artillery rockets and heavier than those seen in similar attacks.

"One civilian contractor died of a heart attack during the attack," a high-level security source said, adding that he could not confirm the contractor's nationality.

The death marks the third fatality in rocket attacks in recent weeks, after rockets targeting US-led troops in the Kurdish regional capital of Arbil left two people dead.

Days later, more rockets hit a US military contracting company working north of the capital and the US Embassy in Baghdad, but only injuries were reported.

In response, the US carried



The rubble of a destroyed house next to the ruins of the Syriac Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception in the old city of Iraq's northern city of Mosul ahead of the pontiff's visit later in the week. — AFP

out an air strike on February 26 against Kataeb Hizbullah, an Iraqi paramilitary force stationed along the Iraqi-Syrian border.

Washington says it struck on the Syrian side of the border but Kataeb claims one of its fighters who was killed in the bombardment was protecting "Iraqi territory".

Analysts have pointed to both domestic and international reasons for the sudden rise in tensions.

Iraqi groups have an interest in ramping up the pressure on Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi following his pledges to rein in

rogue militias.

They may also carry a message from Tehran to Washington, which under US President Joe Biden is offering to revive the Iran nuclear deal abandoned by his predecessor Donald Trump in 2018. Iran is demanding the US lift sanctions immediately, while the US wants Iran to move first by returning to previous nuclear commitments.

Tensions between the two rivals peaked in January 2020, following a US drone strike on Baghdad airport that killed Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and top Iraqi paramilitary commander Abu

Mahdi al Muhandis.

Over the next 10 months, dozens of rockets and roadside bombs targeted Western security, military and diplomatic sites across Iraq — some of them deadly.

Iraqi and Western officials have blamed factions, some of which have established "front groups" to avoid being directly accused of violence.

Last year's attacks came to a near-complete halt in October following a truce with the hardliners, but they have resumed at a quickening pace over the past three weeks. — AFP

# Pope sticking to travel schedule

**ROME:** Pope Francis is sticking to a planned trip to Iraq at the end of the week despite the tense security situation in the country. The head of the Catholic Church confirmed his travel plans at a regular audience at the Vatican on Wednesday.

After wanting to meet the people in the country for so long, and recognising their suffering, he did not want to disappoint them, the 84-year-old Francis said.

Francis is due to visit Iraq from Friday to Monday for what he called a "pilgrimage."

Among other things, he plans to hold talks in the capital Baghdad.

"The Iraqi people have already waited for John Paul II, who was forbidden to travel. You cannot disappoint a people for the second time," the pope said.

On Tuesday, a spokesman for Francis said the pope would be travelling by

armoured vehicle and that he would not be meeting crowds. "This is a particular situation, that's why the transports will all be in a closed vehicle, meaning it will be complicated to see the pope on the streets," spokesman Matteo Brunelli said.

"There will be a number of meetings but none will be more than a few hundred people," he said.

Francis will also visit Ur, birthplace of the prophet Abraham, and meet Iraq's top cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al Sistani, 90.

"In the land of Abraham, together with other religious leaders, we also will take another step forward in fraternity among believers," Francis said.

The number of people who will be able to see him has been severely limited because of coronavirus restrictions. — dpa



Associate archbishop Mar Basilius Yeldo of Iraq's Chaldean Catholic Church, in charge of coordination for Pope Francis' visit upcoming visit, addresses a press conference in Baghdad. — AFP

# Lebanon protests call attention to ailing economic situation

**BEIRUT:** Dozens of people staged street protests in Beirut and other cities across Lebanon on Tuesday to call attention to the dire economic situation gripping the country.

Major roads across Beirut were closed by young men who burned tyres and rubbish bins.

Chanting "people are hungry," the protesters marched through the city, calling for all Lebanese to take to the streets.

The protests came after the Lebanese pound hit a record low against the dollar on the black market and amid severe power cuts nationwide.

The lack of foreign currency

has prevented the government from paying for fuel shipments, which led to severe power cuts that in some areas lasted more than 14 hours a day.

On Tuesday, the dollar was trading at a rate of 9,900 Lebanese pounds, the highest record since July. The Lebanese pound has lost 80 per cent of its value since 2019.

The economic situation has deteriorated drastically in Lebanon since 2019. It has been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic and the August 4 Beirut port explosion, pushing many people into poverty.

The economic crisis gripping the country is the worst since



Smoke rises as demonstrators block a road during a protest against the fall in Lebanese pound currency and mounting economic hardship in Beirut. — Reuters

the 15-year civil war that ended in 1990. Lebanon has been without a government since caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab resigned on August 10 after the Beirut port explosion.

Lebanon's prime minister-designate Saad Hariri has failed since October to form a government due to political divisions among the Lebanese rival factions.

Meanwhile, before the latest downturn, the pound had briefly stabilised at 8,000-8,500 to the greenback in recent weeks.

In July, it had reached 9,800 to the dollar.

The dizzying depreciation

came as the central bank started reviewing Lebanon's lenders, under international pressure for reform. As part of a series of demands, it had given them a Sunday deadline to increase their capital by 20 per cent.

On Monday, a central bank committee "agreed on a roadmap with deadlines for the Bank of Lebanon to take appropriate measures" if these requirements were not met, it said in a statement.

Lebanon's *Al Akhbar* newspaper said that the currency plunge was partly the result of commercial banks sucking dollars out of the market to meet the demands of the central bank. — Agencies

## JUBA

### 10 people killed in South Sudan plane crash

At least ten people, including the two pilots, died when a plane crashed at an airstrip in South Sudan's Jonglei state, the region's governor and the airline said.

The airline said all aboard the commercial plane died late on Tuesday when it took off from the airstrip at Pieri on a return flight to Juba. It could not give a specific death toll, saying up to 24 people could have been on the flight.

"It was with great shock and horror to receive the news of



the plane crash (HK-4274) of South Sudan Supreme Airline," Governor Denay Jock Chagor said in a statement. "Ten people including the two pilots lost their lives," he added. — AFP

## ALGIERS

### Thousands defy Algeria curfew as protests resurge

Some 2,000 Algerians, mostly students, rallied against the government in defiance of lockdown measures, as their two-year-old pro-democracy protest movement resurges. For the second consecutive week, young protesters accompanied by lecturers and other supporters poured through central Algiers, shouting slogans demanding "a free and democratic Algeria" and an end to the military's domination of the North African country.



They marched through the narrow streets of the Casbah in order to evade police cordons set up along the normal route of the once-regular student-led Tuesday marches. — AFP

## DUBAI

### Yemen fighters say US sanctions prolonging war

Yemen's Ansar Allah said the United States' sanctions on two of their commanders are proof that it is prolonging the war and making the humanitarian crisis worse, the Al Masirah TV channel reported.

"America is condemning itself and confirming that it is not thinking about stopping the aggression (..) and that it stands behind the prolongation of the war and the exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis," said an official of Ansar Allah.



The US imposed sanctions on Mansur al Saadi, the Ansar Allah Naval Forces Chief of Staff, and Ahmad Ali Ahsan al Hamzi, the Commander of Ansar Allah-aligned Yemeni Air Force and Air Defence Forces. — AFP

## In brief

### TAIWAN



#### TAIWAN SAYS WON'T BE BEATEN BY CHINA PINEAPPLE BAN

Taiwan will not be beaten by China's ban on pineapple imports and will rally round its farmers to turn crisis into opportunity with new markets and more sales at home, President Tsai Ing-wen said offering a defiant rebuke to Beijing.

China last week stopped the import of Taiwanese pineapples, citing "harmful creatures" it said could come with the fruit.

Taiwan's infuriated government called the ban a political move to further pressure the Chinese-claimed island, a charge that China denied. — AFP

### KATHMANDU



#### CHINA WILL GIVE MORE DOSES OF VACCINE TO NEPAL

China will give 800,000 shots of coronavirus vaccine to Nepal, its ambassador said, up from half a million promised earlier.

The gift is to support Nepal's fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, Hou Yanqi said in a Twitter post.

"Let us join hands to achieve the victory at an early date!" she said. Supplies have not yet started and Hou did not provide any delivery times. India has already gifted a million shots of the AstraZeneca vaccine that it makes to help its Himalayan neighbour kick off its immunisation programme in January. — Reuters

### PHNOM PENH



#### ROYAL TURTLE LAYS EGGS IN CAPTIVITY FOR FIRST TIME

An endangered turtle bred in captivity laid eggs for the first time in Cambodia, conservationists said this week, in a massive win for animal protection in the kingdom. The animal was among five Royal Turtles — once feared extinct in the country — that laid more than 70 eggs.

Cambodia is home to several populations of endangered turtles, whose numbers have dwindled due to demand for them in Vietnam and China as delicacies and for use in traditional medicine.

Royal Turtles, formally classified as Southern River Terrapins, were pushed to the brink of extinction by hunting and sand mining, which destroys the banks where they lay their eggs. — AFP

## South Korea probes deaths of two who received Covid vaccine



A nursing home worker receives the AstraZeneca vaccine at a healthcare centre as South Korea starts a vaccination campaign against the coronavirus disease in Seoul. — Reuters

**SEOUL:** South Korean authorities said on Wednesday they are investigating the deaths of two people, both with pre-existing conditions, who died within days of receiving AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine.

A 63-year-old nursing home patient with cerebrovascular disease, developed symptoms including high fever, after being given the vaccine four days ago, Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) Director Jeong Eun-kyeong told a briefing.

The man was moved to a larger hospital on Tuesday, but died after showing symptoms of blood poisoning and pneumonia, Yonhap news agency reported.

Another nursing home patient in his 50s with a cardiac disorder and diabetes died on Wednesday after suffering multiple heart attacks, having received the vaccine a day earlier, the agency said.

KDCA said it is investigating the cause of the deaths, but did not confirm any causal relationship to the vaccine. The agency earlier said it will provide compensation of over 430 million won (\$383,466) for deaths from the Covid-19

vaccine.

"KDCA is conducting epidemiological surveys with relevant local authorities... to confirm any link with inoculation", said Jeong.

An AstraZeneca spokeswoman in Seoul said the company had no comment.

Jeong noted that there were no cases of fatalities from receiving Covid-19 vaccines developed by AstraZeneca or Pfizer/BioNTech. However, did urge people to take the shot when they are feeling in good health.

The KDCA said that out of the people who had received the coronavirus vaccines, 207 had adverse reactions, including three cases of severe allergic reactions, known as anaphylaxis.

South Korea began vaccinating its population last week. By Tuesday midnight, 85,904 people had received the first doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and 1,524 had been given Pfizer shots, KDCA said in a statement.

South Korea reported 444 new confirmed Covid-19 cases on Tuesday, up from 344 on Monday, raising the country's tally to 90,816 infections, with 1,612 deaths. — Reuters

## 13 dead as Myanmar forces fire at protesters

**YANGON:** Myanmar security forces opened fire on protests against military rule on Wednesday, killing thirteen people, witnesses and media reported, a day after neighbouring countries called for restraint and offered to help Myanmar resolve the crisis.

The security forces resorted to live fire with little warning in several towns and cities, witnesses said, as the junta appeared more determined than ever to stamp out protests against the February 1 coup that ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

"It's horrific, it's a massacre. No words can describe the situation and our feelings", youth activist Thinzar Shunlei Yi said via a messaging app.

A spokesman for the ruling military council did not answer telephone calls seeking comment.

In the central town of Myingyan, where one teenaged boy was killed, protest leader Si Thu Maung, said police initially fired tear gas and stun grenades but quickly opened fire.

"They didn't spray us with water cannon, no warning to disperse, they just fired their guns", he said.

The heaviest toll was in another central town, Monywa, where five people — four men and one



Police run towards protesters to disperse a demonstration being held against the military coup in Yangon. — AFP

#### The heaviest toll was in central town of Monywa where five people were killed

woman — were killed, said Ko Thit Sar, editor of the *Monywa Gazette*.

"We've confirmed with family members and doctors, five people have been killed," he said. "At least 30 people are wounded, some still unconscious"

Two people were killed in the country's second-biggest city Mandalay, a witness and media reports said, and one person was

killed when police opened fire in the main city of Yangon, a witness there said.

The violence took place a day after foreign ministers from Southeast Asian neighbours urged restraint but failed to unite behind a call for the release Suu Kyi and the restoration of democracy.

"The country is like the Tiananmen Square in most of its major cities", the Archbishop of Yangon, Cardinal Charles Maung Bo, said on Twitter, referring to the suppression of student-led protests in Beijing in 1989.

— Reuters

### PROTECTING FARM PRODUCE FROM VOLCANIC ASH



A villager takes care of her vegetables field that's covered with volcanic ash from Mount Sinabung eruption at Kutambaru village in Karo, North Sumatra. — AFP

## Social media clip pulls India, Pakistan closer

**KARACHI:** A 19-year-old Pakistani student who shot to fame after her five-second video went viral on social media across the subcontinent, hopes numerous renditions of her monologue will translate into more dialogue between India and Pakistan.

The short video shot by Dananeer Mobeen in the Nathaigali mountains of northern Pakistan and uploaded onto Instagram shows a group of youngsters enjoying themselves by a roadside.

Swinging around the device she is filming on, Mobeen gestures behind her and says in Urdu, "This is our car, this is us, and this is our party taking place."

Seemly innocuous, she deliberately mispronounces the English word "party" as "pawri" to poke fun at South Asians who adopt Western accents. It



Dananeer Mobeen, a social media influencer, who has become famous after her five-second video went viral, plays the drums in Karachi. — Reuters

immediately struck a chord in both India and Pakistan, sparking top trending hashtags on social media, and garnering millions of

views and hundreds of spin-offs.

"It was the most random video. I initially had no intention of uploading it", Mobeen said,

**I'm honoured and grateful for all the love across the border**

**DANANEER MOBEEN**

*Pakistani student*

expressing surprise at how viral it had gone and adding the trend showed the power and reach of social media.

"Pawri" monologue renditions have been used by police in India and the Delhi Commission for Women in their social media outreach campaigns.

In one video, two Indian soldiers deployed in snowy mountains give it their own

spin with "This is us, this is our gun, and we are patrolling here", while popular Bollywood actors Ranveer Singh and Deepika Padukone each did a version that also went viral.

Indian dairy company Amul, known for inculcating trendy takes on current issues in its advertisements, did a "this is our pav-tea" version in a nod to a popular bread snack eaten with tea. "I'm honoured and grateful for all the love across the border", said Mobeen, expressing her happiness at fostering some rare friendly cross-border dialogue.

Since the video went viral, Mobeen said she has been inundated with acting and modelling offers, along with requests for product endorsements. Instead, she says she aspires to join Pakistan's foreign services. — Reuters



A woman brings food prepared as parents wait for the arrival of the rescued JSS Jangebe schoolgirls in Zamfara, Nigeria. – Reuters

## Six killed in fighter attacks in northeast Nigeria

ABUJA: Aid groups in Nigeria said on Wednesday six civilians died in a suspected attack on a northeastern town that, according to the UN, “directly targeted” aid facilities. A military source said that fighters from the IS West Africa Province (ISWAP), which split from mainstream Boko Haram in 2016, were behind the assault on the town of Dikwa that began late on Monday.

“At least six civilians lost their lives in crossfire, several others were injured and are still missing,” the Nigeria INGO Forum, gathering 54 international charities, said in a statement.

According to the coalition of NGOs, there was a second attack on Tuesday. Two security sources and a humanitarian source who requested anonymity said that the insurgents were able to take control of the town for several hours between Monday evening and mid-day on Tuesday.

Dikwa hosts one of the

military’s large “super camps” as well as one of nine “humanitarian hubs” — where humanitarians live and work.

Both were attacked, multiple sources said, but the Nigerian army claimed it “repelled” the attackers.

“The terrorist groups who stormed the town in an unconfirmed number of gun trucks and motorcycles were visited with heavy bombardment and overwhelming firepower,” army spokesman Mohammed Yerima said in a statement on Tuesday.

Last week, ISWAP fighters on board several trucks fitted with machine guns had already raided Dikwa, dislodging troops from the military base and sending residents fleeing.

The UN’s humanitarian coordinator in Nigeria, Edward Kallon, said on Tuesday the insurgents had “directly targeted” aid facilities in Dikwa, affecting efforts to help nearly 100,000 people in need. — AFP

# Biden calls on states to prioritise vaccinations for teachers

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden on Tuesday called on US states to prioritise Covid-19 vaccinations for teachers to ensure children could return to school quickly and safely, and said every educator should receive at least one shot by the end of March.

Biden also announced that Merck & Co Inc would help make rival Johnson & Johnson’s single-shot Covid-19 vaccine, a partnership similar to those seen during World War Two.

With three vaccines now available, Biden said he was confident there would be enough vaccines available for each adult in the United States by the end of May.

The Democratic president said he was upbeat about reaching his goal of delivering 100 million Covid-19 vaccine doses in his first 100 days in office, but urged Americans to remain vigilant in wearing masks and observing social distancing.

“Today’s announcements are a huge step in our effort to beat this pandemic,” Biden said in a televised statement from the White House. “But I have to be honest with you. This fight is far from over.”

Biden’s drive to get educators vaccinated more quickly comes amid a political controversy that has pitted parents pushing for schools to reopen against the teachers unions that helped put him in the White House and say the risks are still too great.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said Biden’s announcement was “great news



US President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris watch as Stoddert Elementary School counsellor Victoria Legerwood Rivera receives the first round of the Pfizer coronavirus disease vaccine in the South Court Auditorium at the White House in Washington. – Reuters

for everyone who wants in-school learning.”

Biden, whose new education secretary took office on Tuesday, said increased production of the three vaccines would boost what he called a “national imperative” to reopen US schools given growing mental health concerns and widening disparities caused by the challenges of remote learning.

Biden said over 30 states had already taken steps to ensure educators were vaccinated and that he was using the full authority of the federal government to direct the remaining states to

**Biden said he was confident there would be enough vaccines available for each adult in the US by the end of May**

follow suit.

“My challenge is this: We want every educator, school staff member, childcare worker to receive at least one shot by the end of the month of March,” he said, noting that parents were exiting

the labour market in “astonishing numbers” to help their children learn remotely.

To meet that goal, Biden said the federal pharmacy programme would prioritise the vaccination of pre-kindergarten through Grade 12 educators and staff, as well as childcare workers.

He said he was still pushing to have most schools open by the end of his first 100 days in office, but added that it required passage of the \$1.9 trillion rescue plan working its way through Congress. The plan includes some \$130 billion for the nation’s schools. — Reuters

# Meghan Markle ‘saddened’ by palace bullying claims

LONDON: Meghan Markle is “saddened” by reports published on Wednesday saying she faced a bullying complaint during her time living at Britain’s Kensington Palace before she stepped back from royal duties, her spokesman said.

The Times newspaper made the claims against the wife of Prince Harry, which are alleged to date back to October 2018 and involve members of the royal household staff.

The report came just days before the broadcast of an interview that Harry and the Duchess of Sussex, as she is formally known, gave to US chat show host Oprah Winfrey

about their decision last year to leave frontline royal duties.

“The duchess is saddened by this latest attack on her character, particularly as someone who has been the target of bullying herself,” her spokesman said.

“She is determined to continue her work building compassion around the world and will keep striving to set an example for doing what is right.”

The couple said The Times was being used to “peddle a wholly false narrative” before the television interview.

There was no immediate comment from Buckingham Palace nor Kensington Palace,



Britain’s Prince Harry and his wife US actress Meghan Markle pose for a photograph in the Sunken Garden at Kensington Palace in west London. — AFP File Photo

where Meghan and Harry lived with his older brother Prince William and his wife Kate until 2019.

Harry, who is Queen Elizabeth II’s grandson, married Meghan in a glittering wedding at Windsor Castle in 2018.

The former army officer’s marriage to the mixed race former television actress was seen as breathing new life into the centuries-old British monarchy.

But the couple announced early last year that they were stepping back from their duties, in part because of what they saw as unfair media coverage.

They moved to the United States

and have since permanently quit as working royals, relinquishing their honorary titles and patronages, Buckingham Palace announced last month.

Their interview with Oprah Winfrey is due to air on Sunday. They are expected to lift the lid on life inside the royal family following their fairytale wedding and the reasons for their split.

It comes as Harry’s grandfather, the queen’s husband Prince Philip, has been in hospital for several weeks under treatment for an undisclosed infection, sparking fears for his health.

— AFP

### SHORT TAKES

#### ATHENS

### Powerful earthquake shakes central Greece

An earthquake of magnitude 6.2 struck central Greece on Wednesday, sending people rushing from their houses but drawing no immediate reports of casualties or significant damage. The quake, which was felt across the country, struck close to Tyrnavos, a town about 230 km north of Athens, the US Geological Survey (USGS) said.

“I have never experienced anything like this before, I immediately left the house,” a citizen in Larissa region, in



central Greece, told ERT state television.

The USGS said the magnitude was 6.3, while the European Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) put it 6.2, revising earlier reports. — Reuters

#### LONDON

### Camilla says Prince Philip ‘slightly improving’

Queen Elizabeth II’s husband Prince Philip was making slight progress after being admitted to hospital more than two weeks ago, his daughter-in-law.

Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, said the 99-year-old Duke of Edinburgh, who was moved to a specialist unit for heart tests on Monday, is “slightly improving.”

But she said on a visit to a vaccination centre in London that he “hurts at moments.”

“We keep our fingers crossed,” she added, with Philip’s stay



in hospital now his longest ever, raising fears for his health because of his advanced age.

The prince was first admitted to the private King Edward VII Hospital in central London on February 16. — AFP

#### RIGA

### Tighter coronavirus rules kick off in Estonia

Estonia has imposed new restrictions that kicked in on Wednesday, while health experts warn of rising coronavirus infections.

Indoor events are now banned and leisure, culture and entertainment venues, which have until now been open with limits, have to shut down. Schools largely continue to offer distance learning, except for grades one to four. Outdoor events are however still allowed with up to 10 people.

Restaurants may remain open



too and serve customers at half capacity, although takeaway service may continue later. From March 6, restaurants may only serve customers at 25 per cent capacity and only during the week. — dpa

# Oman-Saudi relations remain vibrant

The fraternity between the Sultanate of Oman and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has always been politically, economically and socially very strong. Whatever be the condition in the region, the two countries always enjoyed friendly relations. Any geopolitical and ideological conflicts and tensions in the region cast a dark shadow over the countries of the region, but it never affected the bonhomie between these two neighbours.

The relationship between Oman and Saudi is so deep rooted that no storm can affect it. Last several years are particularly witness to this confidence in this brotherly bonding between the two neighbours. Developments which took place during last few years in the region could not harm their closeness as it is based on the principles of regional and international peace and security.

The bilateral meetings between the two countries, their mutual visits and dialogues which took place between the leaderships of the two counties and their role in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and other regional and international forums are enough proof of the strength of the relationship between the two countries.

The governments of the two countries periodically hold talks and consultations with each other on



Ali Al Matani  
ali.matani2@gmail.com

THE  
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many issues. Perhaps the recent visit of the Saudi foreign minister to the Sultanate and the dialogue between the two countries during this visit was crucial. The two countries discussed issues related to the Gulf, the region and the world which could affect their mutual interests in future, including investments. The two countries tried to learn from each other's experience. These talks were important to set the course of these relationships so that they can address the aspirations of the people of the two countries and end ambiguity, if there are any, in these relationships.

It is gratifying that the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries have grown over the past 50 years with the support of late Sultan Qaboos and the Kings of Saudi Arabia. Now the two countries follow the same path under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and King Salman bin Abdulaziz. Both leaders fully realise the meaning and significance of the future prospects of these robust relationships. Now they are in pursuit of developing the relations further.

Oman and Saudi Arabia are geographically close and there is a concerted strategic coordination between the two counties on regional issues. They help sort out issues in the Gulf and the entire Arab region

together. Both Riyadh and Muscat are now further expanding these relationships with a focus on economic contact on various joint projects and investments in productive and services sectors.

Time has proved that if there was any difference of opinion while dealing with some political issues in the region, the official and people's level relationship remained above this disagreement. This is because the leaderships of the two countries shoulder major responsibilities of serving the interests of their countries.

These relations between the two counties have always attracted international interests while dealing with issues of the region. No political stand or military action is possible in the region without a discussion with them and making an effort to find out solutions with their help. During the last three decades whatever has happened in the region is witness to their roles.

When the Sultanate of Oman takes a stand on any issue, it is also assured that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia fully understood the reason behind that. This is the high level of confidence the two counties enjoy in their bilateral relationships. This is the mutual trust which has worked as a deterrent in the face of the malicious propaganda to rip them apart.

## WRITE FOR US

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## JOINING HANDS

# Finding 'right recipe' for zero-carbon industries

MEGAN ROWLING

Despite the pandemic slamming the brakes on flying, UK-based engineering firm Rolls-Royce — whose main clients include the aviation industry — has not backed away from its work to slash planet-heating emissions, according to its technology director.

Dave Smith said crafting a corporate strategy,



We might have a couple of difficult years where we have to go a little slower than we might have wanted to - but there is no changing the direction

DAVE SMITH  
Technology Director

due this year, to reach its net-zero goals had become an even bigger part of what he does than before Covid-19 hit the global economy. Rolls-Royce this month said it had conducted the first tests of 100 per cent sustainable aviation fuel in an engine for private business jets, as part of its ambition to play a leading role in enabling efforts to

reach net-zero carbon by 2050. It has pledged to make its own operations carbon-neutral by 2030.

Smith said that while the pandemic would saddle the aviation industry with debt and leave it in a weaker position to invest, the desire to decarbonise was growing, not diminishing.

"We might have a couple of difficult years where we have to go a little slower than we might have wanted to — but there is no changing the direction", he said.

"We are absolutely going (to net zero). By 2050 we'll get there", he said.

A new UN-backed initiative hopes to drive such transformation across 28 key sectors of the global economy, from cement to heavy goods vehicles, plastics, clothing, finance and technology. In January, the "Race to Zero Breakthroughs" effort launched with a paper that sets out tipping points for each sector, identifying what key players must do, and by when, to deliver changes needed to adopt a zero-carbon model by 2050 or earlier.

Nigel Topping, Britain's high-level champion for climate action, said the aim was to sign up large companies accounting for 20 per cent of revenue, production, volume or assets under management in all of the sectors by 2023, with at least 10 sectors there by the COP26 UN climate summit in November.

"This is an inevitable transition. If people are not engaged... and committed to it, they are going to lose", he said in a video interview.

The idea is to create a race within and between business sectors, with 20 per cent participation by major companies in a sector seen as a tipping point to catalyse faster change.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

## NO OTHER OPTION

# India's Kerala turns homes into 'mini-solar power stations'

K RAJENDRAN

Before Govindan Satheeshan installed solar panels on the roof of his home in southern India's Kerala state under a government scheme two years ago, the 70-year-old retiree was unsure. Would the panels produce enough electricity? Would they be too expensive? Would the system suffer technical glitches?

But his hefty electricity bills, of up to Rs 15,000 (\$205) every two months, motivated him to sign up — and today his bills have dropped close to zero.

Satheeshan is so happy with the results he invited anyone uncertain about installing a home solar system to visit him in Thiruvananthapuram, the state capital.

"People are still doubtful about the feasibility of rooftop solar panels. If anyone is interested but sceptical, they are welcome to visit my home and I will clarify (the benefits)", he said.

Kerala now hopes to convince more residents to make the switch, launching a new solar rooftop programme in January aimed at curbing carbon emissions and cutting the state's reliance on imported power.

The Soura (Sun) project aims to install solar panels on 75,000 homes, which will contribute 350 megawatts (MW) of power to the state's grid.

Combined with the 20,000 houses that already put in solar panels under an earlier initiative, the new Soura project will help Kerala cover about 10 per cent of its electricity needs through solar, according to KSEB, the state's electricity board.

Despite Kerala's solar innovations — from the world's first solar airport to India's largest floating solar power



Govindan Satheeshan stands under the solar panels installed on his rooftop in the southern Indian state of Kerala. – Reuters

THE SOURA (SUN)  
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WILL CONTRIBUTE  
350 MEGAWATTS  
OF POWER TO THE  
STATE'S GRID

plant — the state has lagged behind much of the country in wider uptake of the renewable energy source.

Kerala sits in the middle of a ranking of India's 28 states in terms of installed solar capacity, according to data from the country's Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).

Soura offers a subsidy to encourage residents to sign up for the project and dispel the common belief solar panels are only for the rich, explained A Nasarudeen, a KSEB project leader.

"We have streamlined this project, ensuring that ordinary people will benefit. Their houses will be mini-solar power stations. By exploring

solar energy, they can be self-reliant in their electricity needs", he said in an interview.

Any surplus electricity the rooftop systems generate can be sold back to KSEB at a rate of 3 rupees per kilowatt hour.

The project is part of the state's plan to generate 1,000 MW — about a quarter of its electricity needs — from the sun by 2022. KSEB figures show that about 30 per cent of the electricity Kerala uses is produced in the state, with the rest brought in from other states or the national grid at a cost of about 80 billion rupees per year.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

### HEAD OFFICE

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

### SALALAH OFFICE

Tel: 23292633  
Fax: 23293909

### NIZWA OFFICE

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

### ADVERTISING

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

### DISTRIBUTION AGENT

AL OMANEYA for Distribution &  
Marketing, P.O. Box 974, P.C. 100,  
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman  
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# AL SUWAIQ BOOK DHOFAR FINAL

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, MARCH 3

Al Suwaiq will lock horns with Salalah powerhouse Dhofar in the final clash of the 2020-21 season His Majesty's Cup football championship on Sunday at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex.

The final will be a repeat of the 2016-17 season as both teams met each other and Al Suwaiq had lifted the title after winning the match 2-0 at the same venue.

The three-time winners secured slot in the final after overcoming Al Ittihad 2-0 in the second leg of the semifinal at Al Rustaq Sports Complex late on Tuesday.

Essam al Subhi was the star of the Northern Batinah-based team as he scored both goals in the match. Al Ittihad won the first leg 2-1 at Al Saada Sports Complex.

Al Suwaiq head coach Hakeem Shaker said the triumph of his team in the home match was a result of the top performance by players to ensure a place in the final.

"We have benefited from the first leg match as we scored one away goal. I managed to position each player in the right place and they had the confidence to deliver good results. All these factors helped the team to advance to the final match", he said.

Responding on a query regarding the final against Dhofar, the Iraqi coach replied that match will be tough as expected. "Dhofar are holders of nine titles. We had drawn with them in the league and we have enough time to prepare the suitable tactics for the game", he ended.



JABER HAPPY TO  
'COME THROUGH'

Earlier on Tuesday, Dhofar booked the final after edging Seeb 2-1 at Al Saada Sports Complex. Rasheed Jaber, head coach of Dhofar, said the match against Seeb was very tough as they have top and experienced players.

"We were positioned in difficult situation during the first half as the opponents were leading the match. In the last half an hour of the second half, we could take control of the game and create many scoring attempts. From series of the chances, the strikers managed to score two goals which were enough to move into the final", he said.

The experienced national coach affirmed that there is no much time to prepare well for the all-important match.

"We will depend on the quick recovery during the upcoming three days. In the last few weeks, we were playing every three days in the league and HM Cup and this is very attractive environment for injuries. The players require suitable time for recovery and retain the required fitness to the next matches", he concluded.

The final match of the coveted cup will kick-off at 6:45 pm at Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex. Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, will preside over the final in presence of top dignitaries and other officials.

**"**  
**We have benefited from the first leg match as we scored one away goal. I managed to position each player in the right place and they had the confidence to deliver good results. All these factors helped the team to advance to the final match**

**HAKEEM SHAKER**  
*Al Suwaiq head coach*



### Lajovic dumps Medvedev out of Rotterdam

Daniil Medvedev became the latest big name to fall in the first round of the Rotterdam ATP after losing in straight sets 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 to Dusan Lajovic. The World No. 3 was the top seed in Rotterdam following his run to the Australian Open final but was dumped out in just 90 minutes by 27th seed Serbian Lajovic.



### Keys beats fatigued Bencic in Qatar

America's Madison Keys made a triumphant return to play against sixth seed Belinda Bencic, clinching three games in a row as she opened her campaign, winning her first match since September 6-4, 6-1. The fatigue of playing into the final at the Adelaide International and the flight to Qatar weighed on the Swiss.

# Kohli credits Test success to not grumbling about pitches

**AHMEDABAD, India:** India skipper Virat Kohli on Wednesday credited India's Test success to not moaning about pitches as he fuelled controversy over spin tracks that have dominated the series against England.

"There is always too much noise and too much conversation about spinning tracks," Kohli said on the eve of the fourth and final Test in Ahmedabad.

"The reason for our success has been that we haven't cribbed about pitches that we played on and we would continue to play like that as a team."

England captain Joe Root said Test players should be prepared to manage the outside noise by being level headed. "I think that's part and parcel of Test cricket now. There is always a lot of noise around the game. There is always a lot of opinion," said Root.

"As a player what you've got to do is find a way of dealing with it, whether you like it or not, and try to stay very level. It's very important that you manage that side of Test cricket really well."

India lead the series 2-1 after a crushing two-day, 10-wicket win on a viciously turning pitch at the same stadium in the day-night third Test last week.

Some pundits said the pitch was not up to standard and even England coach Chris Silverwood said it had pushed England's batsmen to "our extremes".

Kohli called for balance in



reporting on the state of the wicket. He said that if the media presented "views which say that it is unfair to criticise spinning tracks then I think it will be a balanced conversation".

"The unfortunate bit is that everyone sort of plays along that narrative and just keeps making it news until the time it is relevant."

Kohli insisted that when India lost a Test in New Zealand last year in three days, "none of our people wrote about the pitch, it was all about how India played badly in New Zealand and none of the pitches were criticised".

Spinners claimed 28 of the 30 wickets to fall in the third Test with the pink ball, used for day-night games, skidding off the surface.

**I think that's part and parcel of Test cricket now. There is always a lot of noise around the game. There is always a lot of opinion**

**JOE ROOT**  
*England captain*

Kohli insisted that the quick finish was due to "bizarre" batting by both teams.

### TRUST YOUR DEFENCE

"If you make a cricket ball helping the bowlers a focus, or the

pitch helping the bowlers a focus, you are not really reading the game properly," said Kohli.

"I still maintain the result in the last game was purely down to bizarre batting."

Kohli blamed white-ball cricket for the modern batsmen's faltering defence in the longer format. "I think because of the influence of white-ball cricket, more results are coming (in Test cricket). But I believe one by-product is that it has also compromised a batsman's defensive technique," said Kohli.

India need a win or a draw to book a clash with New Zealand in the inaugural World Test Championship final.

A win for England would put Australia into the decider at Lord's in June. — AFP



SAS Naqvi presents a memento to AHF CEO Tayyab Ikram.

## AHF chief appreciates Naqvi's contribution to game

### SPORTS REPORTER

MUSCAT, MARCH 3

Asian Hockey Federation CEO Tayyab Ikram, who was in town to attend the semifinals and final of His Majesty's Cup hockey championship recently, was received by SAS Naqvi, former Oman national hockey coach of Oman, at his sports museum.

Ikram, who is also the member of International Hockey Federation (FIH) Executive Committee and International Olympic Committee, appreciated the rare collection of hockey and Olympic records of Oman.

Ikram was accompanied by top hockey officials including Mohamed Shambah al Raisi, former member of FIH, AHF and treasurer of Oman Hockey Association, Abdul Rahman al Raisi, former national hockey coach of Oman and international hockey umpire and Shakir Munir, goalkeeping coach and technical advisor of OHA.

Naqvi, a former technical

advisor of Oman Olympic Committee, presented a memento to the AHF CEO. Golaf Rehman, the museum curator, was present.

Ikram acknowledged Naqvi's contribution to the game and sports in general.

"You have given so much to hockey and sports. Your roadmap will give the most important legacy for us and the future generation," the AHF chief wrote in the visitor's diary at the Naqvi museum.

Naqvi, a recipient of the lifetime contribution award from IHF and AHF in 2016, thanked top AHF official for his visit to the museum.

Ikram was also the star presence for the opening of the museum in 2018.

Naqvi also had received the AHF special award for contribution to Oman hockey during the Asian Champions Trophy held at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat in 2018.

# Alpha edge IT Works in sensational super over

**MUSCAT:** Arm Alpha rode on Aqib Ilyas' amazing power-hitting prowess to beat IT Works in a sensational super over contest after both the teams tied the Premier Division T20 League game played under the floodlights at OC Turf 1 in Amerat on Tuesday.

Requiring 17 to win in the super over, Alpha saw its talisman Aqib tonk two big sixes off Shakeel Ahmed in a successful chase off the last ball, sealing a nail-biting win.

Earlier, IT Works bowled exceptionally well to dismiss Alpha for 116 in 19.2 overs, Khawar Ali and Muhammed Nadeem taking three wickets each while Zeeshan Maqsood bagged two. Aqib and Sanuth Ebrahim were Alpha's main scorers with 29 and 26 runs respectively.

Defending a small total, Alpha came back hard on their opponent to set the tone for a pulsating contest.

Teetering at 35 for 5 in the 9th over, IT Works were staring at defeat before Oman captain Zeeshan Maqsood began to lead its fightback.

Facing a menacing attack full of Oman bowlers, IT Works had to rely on Zeeshan's experience and skill to tie the game off the last ball



Under 16 toppers MCCC Yellow

of the final over, taking the contest to a super over that they lost on the last ball.

Zeeshan was 61 not out and IT Works 116 for 9 when the 20-over tussle ended in a tie.

### OWCA TOO GOOD FOR PSM

Oman Women's Cricket Academy (OWCA) thrashed Pakistan School Muscat Women by 9 wickets in a one-sided Women's League game at OC Turf 1 in Amerat on Tuesday.

PSM were bundled out for a paltry 22 inside 12 overs. Shreya Dhuri started the slide with her magnificent spell of 4 overs in which she gave away only four

runs and took three wickets. Anshita Lalit and Saya Channa bowled well too, taking two wickets each.

OWCA raced to the target in just 2.4 overs, scoring 23 for 1 with Nayan Anil unbeaten at 8 with two boundaries. OWCA have won two of the three games they have played so far, occupying second position behind leaders ISC Women who have won all the three games they played so far.

### MCCC YELLOW END CAMPAIGN UNDEFEATED

Aaryan Nishit struck an unbeaten 109 off 76 as MCCC Yellow trounced MCCC Blue



Saya, Anshita, Shreya and Afida of OWCA.

by 159 runs, ending their Junior League Under-16 campaign without losing a game with a maximum 10 points to emerge on top of the table.

Indian School Muscat ended up second with 8 points from 5 games.

Aaryan's century and Dhyan Deepak's 82 were the highlights of MCCC Yellow's 253 for 5 in 30 overs.

Muhammed Hamza then picked up 3 for 8 as Yellow dismissed Blue for a meagre 94 in 30 overs. Pranaav Chintala bagged 2 for 18. Hardik Umesh top-scored with 18.

### BRIEF SCORES

#### Premier Division T20 League

Arm Alpha 116 all out in 19.2 overs (Aqib Ilyas 29 – 3x4, 2x6, Sanuth Ebrahim 26 – 3x4, 1x6. Khawar Ali 3-11, Muhammed Nadeem 3-22, Zeeshan Maqsood 2-08) tied with IT Works 116 for 9 in 20 overs (Zeeshan Maqsood 61 not out – 7x4, 2x6. Waseem Akhtar 12 – 2x4. Sanuth Ebrahim 3-14, Bilal Khan 2-14, Kaleemullah 2-19). **Super Over:** IT Works 16 for 1 (Zeeshan Maqsood 16 not out) lost to Arm Alpha 17 for 1 (Aqib Ilyas 17 not out).

#### Women's League T20

PSM Women 22 all out in 11.2 overs (Sadiah Hussain 6 not out. Shreya Dhuri 3-04, Anshita Lalit 2-02, Saya Channa 2-10) lost to OWCA 23 for 1 in 2.4 overs (Nayan Anil 8 not out – 2x4) by 9 wickets.



Aqib Ilyas of Arm Alpha

### Junior League U16

MCCC Yellow 253 for 5 in 30 overs (Aaryan Nishit 109 – 13x4, Dhyan Deepak 82 – 11x4, Jagan Sreekanth 2-42) beat MCCC BLUE 94 all out in 30 overs (Hardik Umesh 18 – 3x4, Muhammad Hamza 3-8, Pranaav Chintala 2-18) by 159 runs.

### Junior League U13

Indian School Muscat 297 for 0 in 20 overs (Pachisia Ojju 143 – 22x4, Shah Jeet 116 – 17x4) beat ISWK-B 118 for 8 in 20 overs (Gautham Midhun 28 – 3x4, Kuttiraja Giriharan 2-16) by 179 runs.

Bosher Sports Centre B 138 for 5 in 20 overs (Naushad Nalla 56 – 7x4, Asad Kashif 2-11) lost to PSM 139 for 6 in 19.2 overs (Syed Taha 28 – 1x4, Haseeb P 27 – 3x4, Mohammed Hanif 26 – 3x4, Yukta Muchandi 2-12) by 4 wickets.

# Agar takes 6 as Australia down Black Caps



Australian players celebrate New Zealand's Martin Guptill being caught during the third Twenty20 in Wellington. – AFP

## SCOREBOARD

|                                                                                                                                              |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| AUSTRALIA                                                                                                                                    |     |
| M Wade c Guptill b Boulton                                                                                                                   | 5   |
| A Finch c Jamieson b Sodhi                                                                                                                   | 69  |
| J Philippe c Guptill b Sodhi                                                                                                                 | 43  |
| G Maxwell c Seifert b Maxwell                                                                                                                | 70  |
| M Stoinis not out                                                                                                                            | 9   |
| M Marsh not out                                                                                                                              | 6   |
| Extras (b1, lb1, w2, nb2)                                                                                                                    | 6   |
| Total (4 wickets; 20 overs)                                                                                                                  | 208 |
| Fall of wickets: 1-6, 2-89, 3-153, 4-194                                                                                                     |     |
| Bowling: Southee 4-0-37-1, Boulton 4-0-39-1, Neesham 4-0-60-0, Jamieson 4-0-38-0, Sodhi 4-0-32-2                                             |     |
| NEW ZEALAND                                                                                                                                  |     |
| M Guptill c Agar b Zampa                                                                                                                     | 43  |
| T Seifert c Stoinis b Meredith                                                                                                               | 4   |
| K Williamson lbw Meredith                                                                                                                    | 9   |
| D Conway c Stoinis b Agar                                                                                                                    | 38  |
| G Phillips c K Richardson b Agar                                                                                                             | 13  |
| J Neesham c Wade b Agar                                                                                                                      | 0   |
| M Chapman c Zampa b Agar                                                                                                                     | 18  |
| T Southee c Maxwell b Agar                                                                                                                   | 5   |
| K Jamieson lbw Agar                                                                                                                          | 11  |
| I Sodhi c&b K Richardson                                                                                                                     | 1   |
| T Boulton not out                                                                                                                            | 0   |
| Extras (lb1, w1)                                                                                                                             | 2   |
| Total (all out, 17.1 overs)                                                                                                                  | 144 |
| Fall of wickets: 1-20, 2-48, 3-80, 4-109, 5-109, 6-110, 7-116, 8-138, 9-144                                                                  |     |
| Bowling: J Richardson 3-0-34-0, Meredith 4-0-24-2, Zampa 2-0-17-1, K Richardson 2-1-0-17-1, Agar 4-0-30-6, Stoinis 1-0-6-0, Maxwell 1-0-15-0 |     |



Australia's Ashton Agar takes a catch to dismiss New Zealand's Martin Guptill.

**WELLINGTON:** Spinner Ashton Agar produced the best bowling performance in Australia's Twenty20 international history in a 64-run win over New Zealand in Wellington on Wednesday.

Agar's match-turning six for 30, including three in one over, derailed a New Zealand fightback as Australia avoided a series loss in the third Twenty20 international.

Under-fire skipper Aaron Finch hit 69, his best T20 international score for more than two years, and Glenn Maxwell smashed 70 from 31 balls.

The result leaves the five-match series at 2-1 in New Zealand's

favour with two games to go.

Finch said the Australians, who have rested stars such as David Warner, Steve Smith and Mitchell Starc for the New Zealand tour, were still targeting a series win.

"To keep improving is all we can ask at the moment and we're still alive in the series," he said.

Australia finished their 20 overs at 208 for four after losing the toss and being asked to bat.

In reply, New Zealand were bundled out for 144 in 17.1 overs thanks to Agar's heroics.

"Once I started to have the courage to toss the ball up a little bit I got something out of it," he

**To keep improving is all we can ask at the moment and we're still alive in the series**

**AARON FINCH**  
*Australian captain*

said. "That was a good lesson I can take out of today moving forward."

Only four players have taken six wickets in a T20 international before, none of them from Australia.

**MAXWELL RUNS RIOT**

In the face of the Australian onslaught, the Black Caps lacked the swagger of the opening two matches, with shell-shocked all-rounder Jimmy Neesham conceding 28 runs in a single over as Maxwell ran riot.

"It was an all-round performance from them that was outstanding and it's important for us that we move on quickly," New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said.

The focus ahead of the match was Finch's poor form.

Critics including former great Mark Waugh had questioned

Finch's place in the team but Australia selector George Bailey this week insisted Finch would remain captain for the Twenty20 World Cup in India later this year.

The Australian captain was lucky to avoid an LBW dismissal on the first ball he faced.

But Finch responded to the close shave with controlled aggression, using his feet and attacking the ball to forge an 83-run partnership with Josh Philippe, who made a well-crafted 43.

Finch repaid Bailey's faith with his highest score in T20 internationals since July 2018, including a 43-ball

half century that was his first in more than a year.

Maxwell also shook off a lean spell bringing up a 25-ball half century.

"It was pretty ugly at the start but once I was able to get a bit of a read of the wicket I was able to clear the rope and hit to the fence a few times," he said.

Opener Martin Guptill's 43 and a Devon Conway knock of 38 were highlights for New Zealand.

But Agar snuffed out hopes of a home victory with six consecutive wickets that took the New Zealanders from 109 for four to 144 for nine. — AFP

# Williams, bowlers help Zimbabwe trounce Afghans



**ABU DHABI:** A century from skipper Sean Williams coupled with destructive pace bowling from Blessing Muzarabani and Victor Nyauchi led Zimbabwe to a rapid 10-wicket win over Afghanistan in the first Test in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday.

Williams hit 105 to guide Zimbabwe to 250 all out before Afghanistan — trailing by 119 — were bowled out for 135 in their second innings.

That left Zimbabwe to score 17

runs which they got without any loss to end the match inside two days. Afghanistan were bowled out for 131 in their first innings.

Lanky pacer Muzarabani finished with 2-14 — six wickets in the match — while his new ball partner Nyauchi took 3-30, also getting six in the match.

Afghanistan were facing an innings defeat at 81-7 but opener Ibrahim Zadran fought hard during his 76 — his second half century — and added 48 for the



eighth wicket with Amir Hamza who remained 21 not out.

Zadran batted for three hours and hit ten boundaries.

This becomes Afghanistan's third defeat in five Tests since gaining status to play the five-day format in 2017.

The writing was very much on the wall when Nyauchi had Abdul Malik in the second over for a duck for batsman's pair on debut.

Nyauchi then had Rahmat Shah (zero) and Hashmatullah

Shahidi (four) while Muzarabani had Munir Ahmad (one) and rival skipper Asghar Afghan (14) to leave Zimbabwe rocking at 47-6.

Nyuaci's previous best of 3-69 was on his debut against Sri Lanka at Harare last year.

Earlier, resuming at 133-5, Zimbabwe added 117 more runs to gain crucial lead.

Williams, who resumed on 54 lost his overnight partner Ryan Burl for eight but then found an able partner in Regis Chakabva

(44) as the duo added 75 for the seventh wicket.

Williams completed his third Test century, and second in successive Tests, soon after lunch with a single to square leg. But he fell while flicking spinner Amir Hamza straight to mid-wicket.

Williams had 10 boundaries while Chakabva smashed a six and six boundaries.

Left-arm spinner Hamza finished with career-best figures of 6-75. — AFP

## SCOREBOARD

|                                                                                                                                        |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| AFGHANISTAN 1ST INNINGS 131                                                                                                            |     |
| ZIMBABWE 1ST INNINGS                                                                                                                   |     |
| P Masvaure lbw Hamza                                                                                                                   | 15  |
| K Kasuza b Ahmadzai                                                                                                                    | 0   |
| T Musakanda b Hamza                                                                                                                    | 7   |
| S Williams c Hashmatullah b Hamza                                                                                                      | 105 |
| W Madhevere lbw Hamza                                                                                                                  | 0   |
| Sikandar Raza c Malik b Hamza                                                                                                          | 43  |
| R Burl lbw Zadran                                                                                                                      | 8   |
| R Chakabva c Malik b Zahir                                                                                                             | 44  |
| D Tripano c Zadran b Zahir                                                                                                             | 4   |
| B Muzarabani not out                                                                                                                   | 12  |
| V Nyauchi b Hamza                                                                                                                      | 0   |
| Extras (b2, lb8, nb1, w1)                                                                                                              | 12  |
| Total (overs 72; all out)                                                                                                              | 250 |
| Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-22, 3-38, 4-38, 5-109, 6-137, 7-212, 8-224, 9-250                                                              |     |
| Bowling: Ahmadzai 17.1-2-48-1, Hamza 25-3-75-6, Zahir 19-0-81-2, Wasi 8.5-0-23-0, Zadran 2-0-13-1                                      |     |
| AFGHANISTAN 2ND INNINGS                                                                                                                |     |
| I Zadran c Chakabva b Tripano                                                                                                          | 76  |
| Abdul Malik c Chakabva b Nyauchi                                                                                                       | 0   |
| Munir Ahmad lbw b Muzarabani                                                                                                           | 1   |
| Rahmat Shah lbw b Nyauchi                                                                                                              | 0   |
| H Shahidi c Madhevere b Nyauchi                                                                                                        | 4   |
| Afsar Zazai lbw b Williams                                                                                                             | 4   |
| Asghar Afghan b Muzarabani                                                                                                             | 14  |
| Abdul Wasi b Burl                                                                                                                      | 9   |
| Amir Hamza not out                                                                                                                     | 21  |
| Y Ahmadzai c Williams b Tripano                                                                                                        | 0   |
| Zahir Khan c Nyauchi b Tripano                                                                                                         | 0   |
| Extras (lb1, w5)                                                                                                                       | 10  |
| Total (overs 45.3; all out)                                                                                                            | 135 |
| Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-6, 3-15, 4-21, 5-21, 6-47, 7-81, 8-129, 9-129                                                                  |     |
| Bowling: Muzarabani 8-4-14-2, Nyauchi 7-1-30-3, Williams 6-0-28-1, Tripano 9-3-2-23-3, Burl 7-0-13-1, Raza 4-0-16-0, Madhevere 4-1-6-0 |     |
| ZIMBABWE 2ND INNINGS                                                                                                                   |     |
| P Masvaure not out                                                                                                                     | 5   |
| K Kasuza not out                                                                                                                       | 11  |
| Extras (lb1)                                                                                                                           | 1   |
| Total (overs 3.2, for no loss)                                                                                                         | 17  |
| Bowling: Hamza 2-0-11-0, Ahmadzai 1.2-0-5-0                                                                                            |     |

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# Ministerial delegation tours Khazaen Economic City



Investment destination: Dignitaries tour City to see its readiness in terms of infrastructure, key strategic projects, as well as milestones achieved

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MARCH 3

Khazaen Economic City hosted on Wednesday a ministerial delegation on a tour of the City to review its progress, infrastructural works, and study the scope it holds for varied domestic and foreign investments.

The list of dignitaries included Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; and Dr Khalfan bin Said Al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning.

The delegation saw the readiness of the City's infrastructure and learned more about the key strategic projects that Khazaen will host, such as the dry port and the Khazaen's Food City including the Central Fruits and Vegetables Market, in addition to the investment opportunities it will offer in the manufacturing, logistical and residential sectors.

As the ministers toured the City to learn about Phase I of infrastructural works which was completed before its deadline of 2020 year-end, they were briefed on the various components of the City.

This was followed by a comprehensive presentation by Khazaen officials on the City's main components, incentives and facilities provided to various categories of domestic and foreign investors.

Khazaen's executive

The visit of the ministers to Khazaen is of great importance to us and pushes us forward to achieve greater milestones in developing this City as one of the main pillars that will support the national economy and contribute towards achieving goals of Oman Vision 2040

KHALID AL BALUSHI  
CEO, Khazaen Economic City

management also shed light on the City's plans and programmes and highlighted the importance of this ambitious national project and its contribution towards supporting the government's goals and efforts in diversifying revenue sources for Oman's economy.

Commenting on this visit, Khalid al Balushi, CEO of Khazaen Economic City, said, "The visit of the ministers to Khazaen is of great importance to us and pushes us forward to achieve greater milestones in developing this City as one of the main pillars that will support the national economy and contribute towards achieving goals of Oman Vision 2040."

The CEO added: "During this visit, the ministers were briefed on the most important achievements of the City and the development it has witnessed, especially since the completion of Phase I and the relocation of several investors as well as businesses to Khazaen. Khazaen's executive management also shed light on the main government projects that are envisaged to be implemented during the next phase according to plans approved by the government."

# New industrial city planned in Oman's North Al Sharqiyah

Growing network: Consultancy firms bid for contract to master-plan infrastructure facilities for 14m sq metre development

CONRAD PRABHU  
@conradprabhu

The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) has kicked off plans for the establishment of a new industrial city at Al Mudhaibi in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate — the latest in an expanding network of manufacturing clusters that will help boost employment generation and GDP growth.

On Wednesday, Madayn invited qualified engineering consultancy firms to bid for its contract to design the infrastructure facilities for a 14 million sq metre industrial city planned for development in the governorate.

It is the first industrial park of its kind to come up in the governorate, providing a manufacturing and processing base for industries focused on, among other activities, commercialising the rich mineral potential of the wider region.

As part of its remit, the selected bidder will be required to master-plan the development of the new industrial city in several stages, as well as design the basic infrastructure and supervise the overall initial development as well.

The announcement comes



as Madayn prepares to begin construction work on a new industrial city at Ibri in Al Dhahirah Governorate — also the first such park in that part of the country.

A number of contractors are bidding for the Authority's tender for the construction of infrastructure facilities and utilities covering the first phase of the 10 million sq metre scheme.

Located on the road leading to the border between the Sultanate and Saudi Arabia, Ibri Industrial City will include a variety of industrial, commercial and service activities such as light and medium industries, commercial area, administrative offices, industrial workshops and warehouses.

A Vision 2040 plan outlined by Madayn earlier this year envisions an accelerated strategy for expanding Oman's industrial and manufacturing sector.

It calls for, among other things, the establishment of new industrial cities in Thamrait (Dhofar Governorate), Shinas (North Al Batinah Governorate) and Al Rawdah (North Al Sharqiyah Governorate), in addition to those coming up in Ibri and Al Mudhaibi. These new parks will complement industrial cities already established in Rusayl, Sur, Al Buraimi, Suhar, Raysut, Nizwa and Al Mazunah Free Zone.

Specialised complexes are also envisaged in existing hubs, including a plastics

industries complex in Suhar, a precision manufacturing and nanotechnology complex in Sur, and food and pharma clusters in various areas.

Also on the anvil is an integrated city, dubbed Motcar, devoted to activities encompassing the marketing of cars, automotive spares, accessories and services.

Planned to come up within Sohar Industrial City, Motcar will serve as a regional hub for the import and re-export of cars, machinery and related services. Significantly, Madayn's strategies set out in Vision 2040 plan will help drive investment to an estimated RO 15 billion in the country's network of industrial cities by 2040, up from RO 6.8 billion presently.

# Funding support for nanotechnology and ICT research projects

ADVANCED RESEARCH: The proposals focus on use of ICT and Nanotechnology in sectors like telecom, health, and oil and gas

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MARCH 3

Sultan Qaboos University recently selected research projects for the Omantel Grant, supporting faculty and researchers in the university who wish to pursue research projects identified in cooperation with Omantel in the areas of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and Nanotechnology.

A joint committee met recently to evaluate the year 2020's research proposals to receive the Omantel Grant for advanced research and chose six — three each from the University's Nanotechnology Research Centre and the Communications and Information Research Centre.

The research proposals selected from



the Nanotechnology Research Centre are 'Manufacture and Use of Modified Electrodes with a Zero-Dimensional Nanostructure for a Capacitive Deionisation System for Groundwater Desalination' by Dr Mohammed al Abri.

'A Study of Using Nanoparticles to Enhance Oil Extraction' by Dr Sanket Joshi, and "Using Iron-Based Nanocomposites to Develop an Effective Technology to Treat Contaminated Soil," by Dr Muhammad Othman.

The Communication and Information Research Centre's selected proposals are 'A

System for Artificial Intelligence in Education at Sultan Qaboos University', 'A Plan for Implementation and Challenges' by Dr Dhia Nader, 'Assessing the Coverage of Mobile Communications Networks Using Drones and Artificial Intelligence' by Dr Nasser al Tarhouni and 'Designing and Implementing a Mobile Application to Monitor and Follow Up on Cardiovascular Patients During Physical Activity' by Dr Khalid al Rasadi.

These research projects cover vital issues in essential sectors of Oman's economy, and thus their results will assume greater importance.

The joint committee has put its faith in the outcome of these research proposals and is confident that they will translate into real solutions for issues and challenges facing the Omani society, like the creation of a simple and cost-effective and straightforward water desalination system, an energy-efficient nanotechnology solution to prevent groundwater depletion in addition to creating a mechanism to prevent soil from pollution due to natural and man-made factors, and finding a low-cost and environmentally friendly way of oil extraction.

# Fisheries sector key to economic diversification

Oman is rich in a number of natural resources that can provide feedstock to various heavy industries. These resources, if suitably exploited, can attract sizable foreign investment, notably in the fisheries sector.

Given this abundance of fisheries wealth, the question is: Why do some Omani companies import certain types of fish abroad when these are available in Oman's waters.

Based on data published by the authorities concerned, Omani fish products were exported to 57 countries during 2019 compared with 49 countries in 2015. Thirty-five per cent of

total exports were shipped to the GCC states, 41 per cent to non-Arab Asian countries, 4 per cent to South America, 4 per cent to other Arab countries, 7 per cent to African countries and 2 per cent to European Union countries, among others.

If this is the case, why does Oman's leading fisheries company report losses annually? And why is the contribution of this vital sector to the annual GDP still paltry, especially since several companies are established in this sector, including Oman Fisheries Company in 1988?

These questions need to be answered transparently, given the reality that many expatriates continue to work in these companies, whether in fishing,



HAIDER ALLAWATI  
haiderdawood@hotmail.com

TODAY, THERE ARE MONITORING AND SUPERVISORY PROCESSES IN PLACE TO CORRECT THIS TREND, WHICH WE HOPE WILL PROVIDE MORE JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR OMANIS IN THE FIELDS OF FISHING, SALES AND EXPORTS

selling or marketing operations.

According to the Ministry's data, 80 per cent of total Omani fish exports are undertaken through foreign specialised companies, while Omani individuals working in these fields received only a 20-per cent share by transporting and marketing fish using vehicles fitted with refrigerated boxes.

Omani fish, as we all know, is popular in Arab countries as well as globally.

But most of the revenues from this sector go into the pockets of some beneficiary companies that harvest the Omani seas and carry out fishing, sales and export operations abroad.

Today, there are monitoring and supervisory processes in

place to correct this trend, which we hope will provide more job opportunities for Omanis in the fields of fishing, sales and exports. This requires that the concerned authorities should provide Omanis with more modern tools, ships and equipment to join this vital sector.

Our fish exports to some blocs such as the European Union are declining dramatically. According to previous figures, only 2 per cent of the total Omani fish exports go to EU countries.

There are certain requirements and standards imposed by these countries on imports, whether agricultural or fisheries related.

Does this mean that we have not been able to achieve these conditions and standards and

suitably market our sector and make it attractive to European markets? It seems Omani companies need to manage these issues more effectively.

No one denies that the fisheries sector is one of the main sectors in promoting economic diversification programmes, as it involves a sustainable resource that can contribute more to generating job opportunities for citizens and contributing to the country's food security and GDP growth.

Through the development of this sector, investments in professionally run commercial projects will increase, while the aquaculture segment, alongside fish processing and exports will flourish as well.

## Occidental Oman sponsors flu vaccine for frontline workers

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MARCH 3

In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Occidental Oman has recently sponsored the purchase of flu vaccine shots for high risk groups such as frontline workers in healthcare and other related fields, elderly individuals, and people with chronic diseases.

The sponsorship aims to



enhance the health standard of high risk groups by funding the

purchase of around 5,000 flu vaccine shots.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the sponsorship aims to protect the high risk groups during the influenza season in performing their daily tasks, and alleviate demand on the healthcare system with the onset of coronavirus cases.

"Occidental Oman is keen to support the urgent needs of our

frontline healthcare workers as well as other high risk groups, particularly with the current Covid-19 pandemic. We are grateful to our healthcare and essential workers for their efforts in keeping our communities safe, and we hope that the flu shot vaccine will support workers in staying protected," said Stephen Kelly, President and General Manager of Occidental Oman.

## Toyota breaks ground for futuristic 'Woven City' project

Toyota Motor Corporation (Toyota) and Woven Planet Holdings, Inc (Woven Planet), the Toyota Group company responsible for a wide range of mobility development projects anchored in software, held a ground-breaking ceremony (Jichinsai) recently for the construction of Woven City at the old vehicle yard adjacent to the former Higashi-Fuji Plant site of Toyota Motor East Japan, Inc (TMEJ).

Along with the Governor of Shizuoka Prefecture Heita Kawakatsu, Mayor of Susono City Kenji Takamura and other guests representing the local community, the ceremony was attended by Toyota President Akio Toyoda, Woven Planet CEO James Kuffner, TMEJ President Kazuhiro Miyauchi and others involved in the project.

Together, the leaders expressed their hopes for a safe and successful start to construction. "The Woven City project has officially started," said President



Toyoda. "I must express my deepest gratitude to all who have provided their whole-hearted support and cooperation to the project through today. The unwavering themes of the Woven City are 'human-centered,' 'a living laboratory' and 'ever-evolving.' Together with the support of our project partners, we will take on the challenge of creating a future where people of diverse backgrounds are able to live happily."

TMEJ President Miyauchi added, "I am deeply grateful for

having had our Higashi-Fuji Plant operate here for 53 years with the support of the local community.

"The knowledge and expertise we acquired from all of the people who worked at the plant must be carried on into the next chapter. With the conviction that Woven City will stand not on mere empty land but where the history of the Higashi-Fuji Plant lies, I will offer the greatest possible collaboration in the future."

Toyota announced the construction of the Woven City in January at CES 2020 in Las

Vegas, United States, to prepare for an era in which all ecosystems that support everyday life are connected with data. Woven City aims to continuously create advancements that will help better society by accelerating the cycle of technology and the development of services.

The project aims to demonstrate a human-centred approach to community development. As part of Toyota's shift from an automobile manufacturer to a mobility company, Woven City will bring new technology to life in a real-world environment across a wide range of areas including automated driving, personal mobility, robotics and Artificial Intelligence (AI). It is expected to provide a number of exciting opportunities for businesses and researchers around the world.

Those interested in learning more about Woven City can visit website: [www.woven-city.global](http://www.woven-city.global) or Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/WovenCity.GL](https://www.facebook.com/WovenCity.GL)

### PRESS RELEASE

#### NBO EMPLOYEES SELECTED FOR ETIMAD NATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME



Three of National Bank of Oman's (NBO) staff members have been selected to participate in Etimad, a national leadership programme to upskill and empower Omanis for middle and senior management positions.

Emerging from the recommendations of the Labour Market and Employment Lab at the National Programme for Enhancing Economic Diversification, the programme aims to train a total of 10,000 Omanis through a series of six-month sessions. Three promising individuals from the bank's IT, Brand Division and Investment Banking departments were chosen for the latest batch, part of NBO's commitment to cultivate a nurturing work environment that provides its employees with the opportunity to grow in their respective careers.

Abdullah bin Zahran al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer at NBO, said, "National Bank of Oman firmly believes in the role of the private sector in empowering young Omanis to take their place as future business leaders, while supporting the government's vision for economic development"

#### SOHAR INTERNATIONAL NEW VISA PREPAID CARD



Expanding its card portfolio to offer convenient payment solutions, Sohar International introduced its new Visa prepaid card in a bid to engage with a wider customer base.

The bank's newest proposition offers individuals everyday convenience, whether or not they are an account holder with the bank. Easily applied for through the bank's widespread branch network across Oman, the new Visa prepaid card offers customers the flexibility to manage spends and make payments easily and securely, using its contactless tap and go feature.

The Visa prepaid cards have been designed to encourage online transactions, including those for booking cinema tickets, gaming, shopping and much more.

The cards can be topped up simply by using the bank's ATMs, or by transferring from a Sohar International account.

Sharing his views on the new Visa prepaid card, Khalil al Hedaifi, Chief Retail Banking Officer, Sohar International, said, "Sohar International is constantly striving to develop innovative solutions to suit the evolving needs of our customers. The new contactless Visa prepaid card is an important milestone in Sohar International's digital transformation journey."

# From bad to worse: January passenger demand falls further

## Steep decline: Middle Eastern airlines saw demand plunge 82.3 per cent in January compared to January 2019

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, MARCH 3

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) announced that passenger traffic fell in January 2021, both compared to pre-Covid levels (January 2019) and compared to the immediate

month prior (December 2020).

Because comparisons between 2021 and 2020 monthly results are distorted by the extraordinary impact of Covid-19, unless otherwise noted all comparisons are to January 2019 which followed a normal demand pattern.

Middle Eastern airlines saw demand plunge 82.3 per cent in January compared to January 2019, which was broadly unchanged from an 82.6 per cent demand drop in December versus a year ago. Capacity fell 67.6 per cent, and load factor declined 33.9 percentage points to 40.8 per cent.



Total demand in January 2021 (measured in revenue passenger

kilometres or RPKs) was down 72.0 per cent compared to January

2019. That was worse than the 69.7 per cent year-over-year decline recorded in December 2020.

Total domestic demand was down 47.4 per cent versus pre-crisis (January 2019) levels. In December it was down 42.9 per cent on the previous year. This weakening is largely driven by stricter domestic travel controls in China over the Lunar New Year holiday period.

International passenger demand in January was 85.6 per cent below January 2019, a further drop compared to the 85.3 per cent year-to-year decline recorded

in December.

"2021 is starting off worse than 2020 ended and that is saying a lot. Even as vaccination programmes gather pace, new Covid variants are leading governments to increase travel restrictions. The uncertainty around how long these restrictions will last also has an impact on future travel.

Forward bookings in February this year for the Northern Hemisphere summer travel season were 78 per cent below levels in February 2019," said Alexandre de Juniac, IATA's Director-General and CEO.

**Exxon to cut Singapore workforce**

Exxon Mobil Corp plans to cut its workforce in Singapore by about 7 per cent amid the 'unprecedented market conditions' resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, it said. — **Reuters**

**Rio Tinto chairman to step down**

Anglo-Australian mining giant Rio Tinto announced that its Chairman Simon Thompson will step down from the role at the 2022 annual general meetings. — **dpa**

**Gold prices slipped**

Gold prices slipped on Wednesday. Spot gold eased 0.3 per cent to \$1,732.51 per ounce, having dropped to its lowest at \$1,706.70. Gold futures dipped 0.3 per cent to \$1,728.90. — **AFP**

**India's services growth at one-year high**

A waiter is seen working inside a restaurant in New Delhi. — **Reuters**

**BENGALURU:** India's dominant services activity grew at its fastest pace in a year last month, driven by an extended robust recovery in domestic demand though input costs rose at the quickest rate in eight years, a private survey showed.

Asia's third largest economy came out of a technical recession and expanded 0.4 per cent annually last quarter and the recovery is widely expected to gather pace in the year ahead amid hopes a successful vaccine rollout will boost business activity.

The Nikkei/IHS Markit Services Purchasing Managers' Index rose to 55.3 last month from 52.8 in January, its highest since February 2020, just before the coronavirus pandemic hit the economy.

It has stayed above the 50-level mark separating growth from contraction as a sub-index tracking new business orders hit a year high. — **Reuters**

# US gets 'C-' faces \$2.59 trillion in infrastructure needs over 10 years

**WASHINGTON:** The United States faces a \$2.59 trillion shortfall in infrastructure needs that requires a massive jump in government spending to address crumbling roads, bridges and other programmes, according to an assessment by an engineers group issued on Wednesday.

The 170-page report by the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) comes as President Joe Biden plans to seek a dramatic jump on infrastructure spending in the coming weeks — after his predecessors Donald Trump and Barack Obama failed to win approval for a major funding effort.

The report, published once every four years, gave the United States a 'C-' overall — up from a D+ in 2017 — and marked the first time in two decades the country received a 'C' range grade — but found the country is spending just over half of what is required, labelling overall US infrastructure in 'mediocre condition.'

The report urges the United States to increase investment from all levels of government and the private sector to 3.5 per cent from 2.5 per cent of US gross domestic product by 2025. The study graded 17 categories of infrastructure, ranging from a 'B' for rail to a 'D-' for transit.

"We risk significant economic losses, higher costs to consumers, businesses and manufacturers — and our quality of life — if we don't act urgently", said ASCE Executive Director Thomas Smith in a statement.

The biggest projected gap is in surface transportation, which



An aerial view show planes stand parked at terminals in La Guardia Airport in New York. — **Reuters**

**The report gave the United States a 'C-' overall — up from a D+ in 2017 — and marked the first time in two decades the country received a 'C' range grade — but found the country is spending just over half of what is required, labelling overall US infrastructure in 'mediocre condition'**

faces \$1.2 trillion in projected unmet needs over 10 years, while water systems face \$434 billion

and schools \$380 billion in funding gaps.

In total, 11 of 17 categories reviewed merited 'D' range grades — 'aviation, dams, hazardous waste, inland waterways, levees, public parks, roads, schools, stormwater, transit and wastewater.'

The report cited incremental gains in aviation, drinking water, energy, inland waterways and ports.

The infrastructure gap rose by \$359 billion over 2017. Biden plans to meet with lawmakers on Thursday to discuss infrastructure along with Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who said the report card documents "what Americans already know: Failure to fully

invest in our infrastructure over the years is now catching up to us.

Consequences are appearing nationwide, in the form of dangerously degraded roads, bridges, and other assets."

Biden wants a big jump in spending on US surface transportation, airports, transit systems, as well addressing high-speed broadband, electrical grids and water systems and boosting electric vehicles charging and high-speed rail.

Congress has not boosted the 18.4-cents-per-gallon federal gasoline tax since 1993, which is now worth 10.2 cents after adjusting for inflation. It remains unclear how Biden or Congress will fund new infrastructure spending. — **Reuters**

**Britain to ease listing rules to buttress London after Brexit**

**LONDON:** Britain will modernise its listing rules to attract more high-growth and "blank cheque" SPAC company flotations to London, Finance Minister Rishi Sunak said after a government-backed review said the capital was on the back foot after Brexit.

The London Stock Exchange is facing tougher competition from NYSE and Nasdaq in New York, and from Euronext in Amsterdam since Britain fully left the European Union on December 31.

In a bid to keep London globally competitive after Brexit, Sunak commissioned a review of listings rules last November. It was led by former European Commissioner Jonathan Hill and published its recommendations on Wednesday.

"The review has more than delivered and I'm keen we move quickly to consult on its recommendations, cementing the UK's reputation at the front of global financial services", Sunak said in a statement.

The Financial Conduct Authority will consult publicly on the proposed changes, though some would require legislation to implement.

— **Reuters**



A worker in an umbrella passes the London Stock Exchange in the City of London. — **Reuters**

# Opec oil has advantage over US shale during recovery



Two men work at an oil pipeline control valves at Saudi Aramco's North Pier Terminal in Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia. — **Reuters**

**WASHINGTON:** The once-brash US shale industry, which spent profusely in recent years to grab market share, is now focused on preserving cash, putting it at a disadvantage to low-cost Opec producers as the global economy begins to gear up again.

Prior to the pandemic-induced

downturn, Opec countries led by Saudi Arabia restrained their production, eager to bolster prices to fund national budgets dependent on oil revenue. Shale drillers took advantage, boosting US output to a record 13 million barrels a day.

But attendees of the year's top

energy conference made clear that even with a buoyant, \$60-per-barrel oil price, shale will not come roaring back from the Covid-19 pandemic as it did from the 2016 downturn.

By contrast, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies, known as



**Let's face it. Opec has had a very difficult time managing to accommodate the US shale players and their ability to grow at low prices**

**RAOUL LEBLANC**  
IHS Markit analyst

Opec+, has more than 7 million barrels of daily oil output sitting in reserve.

This positions them to boost production much more easily than shale players for the first time in years.

The concern about free-wheeling shale companies taking advantage of Opec's output curbs led to a brief supply war in March 2020.

Russia balked at a three-year agreement to extend production cuts, and Saudi Arabia responded by flooding the markets with oil,

leading US futures prices to slump to negative-\$40 a barrel.

"Let's face it. Opec has had a very difficult time managing to accommodate the US shale players and their ability to grow at low prices," said IHS Markit analyst Raoul LeBlanc, adding that the key debate within Opec is what oil price is just low enough to avoid a massive US response.

The pandemic destroyed a fifth of global fuel demand, and numerous shale companies declared bankruptcy, while others arranged mergers to offload debt.

Frustrated investors sent energy-related stocks slumping throughout 2020.

While shale executives expressed concern about reopening the wells too quickly, Opec nations are expected to ease supply curbs at their meeting later this week, without having to look over their shoulder at shale.

"The worst thing that could happen is that US producers start growing rapidly again", said ConocoPhillips Chief Executive Ryan Lance.

The market widely expects

Opec to ease production cuts, which were the deepest ever, by around 1.5 million barrels per day (bpd), with Opec's leader, Saudi Arabia, ending its voluntary production cut of 1 million bpd.

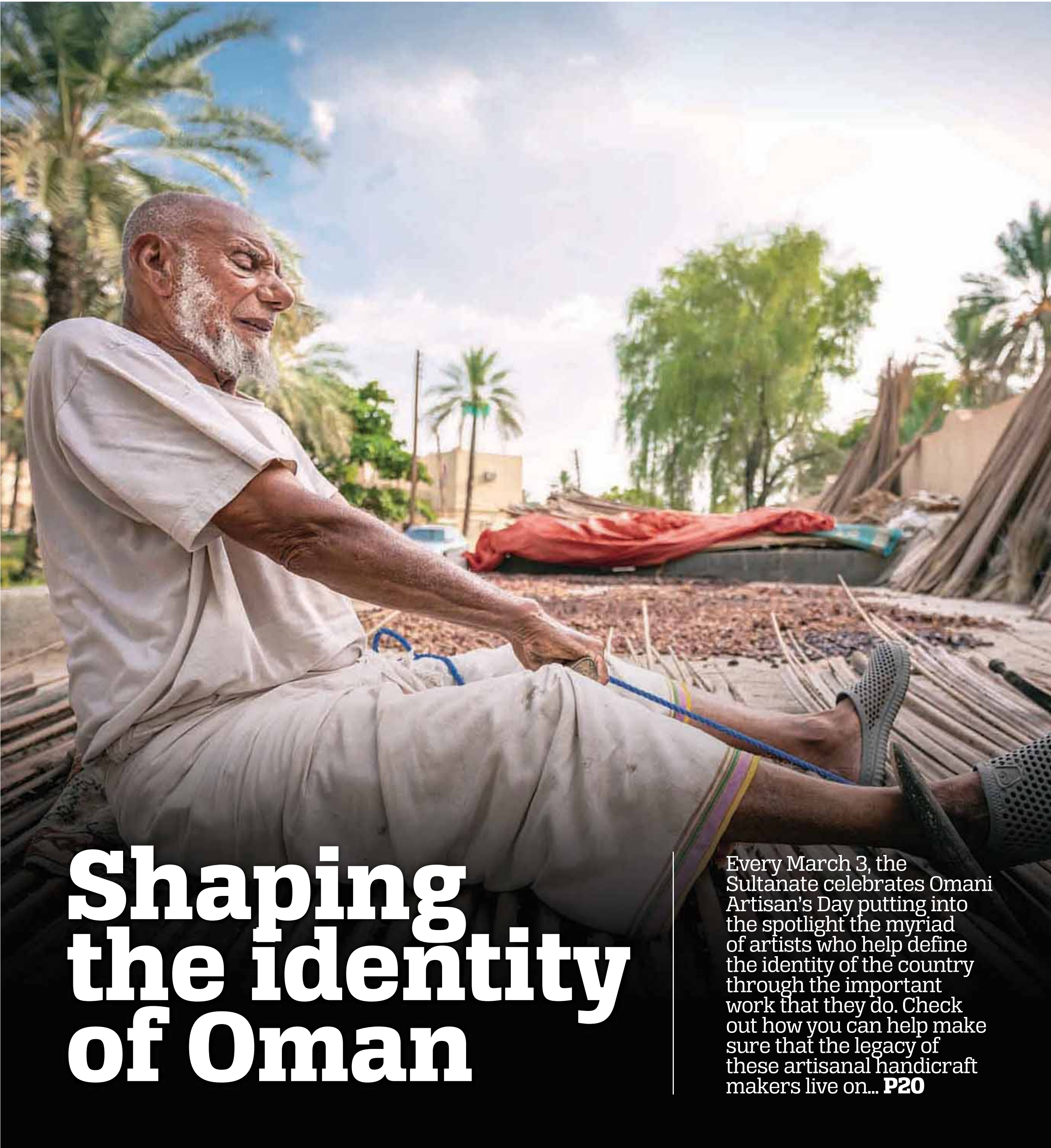
At CERWeek, Opec vs shale is often discussed as a showdown between competing interests, but the dynamic of Texas vs the Middle East is nearly invisible this year. Just one panel discussion in a five-day schedule focused on shale.

Neither the Exxon or Chevron CEOs mentioned shale during their talks. Both companies have cut spending in the US Permian Basin. Crude on Tuesday topped \$60 per barrel, up from \$44.63 at the start of December, high enough to bolster US producers' earnings given recent cost cuts.

In the past, rising prices have enticed shale companies to ramp up production even after they promised prudence, and \$60 oil would have once prompted companies to rush drilling rigs and frack fleets back to work.

— **Reuters**





# Shaping the identity of Oman

Every March 3, the Sultanate celebrates Omani Artisan's Day putting into the spotlight the myriad of artists who help define the identity of the country through the important work that they do. Check out how you can help make sure that the legacy of these artisanal handicraft makers live on... **P20**

## INSIDE STORIES

ART



**ROCK PHOTOGRAPHY MEETS STREET ART IN MICK ROCK, FIN DAC PROJECT**

Photographer Mick Rock, known for some of the most recognisable pictures of rock legends such as David Bowie and album covers of the 1970s, is marking his 51 years working in the music industry with a new project collaborating with urban artist Fin DAC... **Story on P19**

CHANGING WORLD



**ICE SURFERS CARVE UP FINLAND'S FROZEN SEA**

What to do if you are a windsurfing enthusiast in a country where the sea freezes over for months of the year?... **Story on P19**

READ



**ONE OF US IS LYING**

BY KAREN M. MCMANUS

Bronwyn, Addy, Nate, and Cooper are suspects in the murder of Simon Kelleher. Each of the high school students have secrets that they would do anything to protect, so how far would they go to make sure they're kept out of the spotlight?

DISCOVERY



**FOSSILS OF OLDEST MEMBER OF HUGE DINOSAUR GROUP FOUND IN ARGENTINA**

Scientists have unearthed in Argentina's Patagonian wilderness fossils of what may be the oldest-known member of the dinosaur group known as titanosaurs that includes the largest land animals in Earth's history... **Story on P18**

CELEBRATE



**HI, ROBOT: JAPAN'S ANDROID PETS EASE VIRUS ISOLATION**

Nami Hamaura says she feels less lonely working from home thanks to her singing companion Charlie, one of a new generation of cute and clever Japanese robots whose sales are booming in the pandemic... **Story on P18**



# Hi, Robot: Japan's android pets ease virus isolation

Nami Hamaura says she feels less lonely working from home thanks to her singing companion Charlie, one of a new generation of cute and clever Japanese robots whose sales are booming in the pandemic.

Smart home assistants such as Amazon's Alexa have found success worldwide, but tech firms in Japan are reporting huge demand for more human-like alternatives, as people seek solace during coronavirus isolation.

"I felt my circle became very small," said 23-year-old Hamaura, a recent graduate who has worked almost entirely remotely since April 2020.

With socialising limited, life in her first job at a Tokyo trading company was nothing like she had imagined.

So she adopted Charlie, a mug-sized robot with a round head, red nose and flashing bow-tie, who converses with its owner in song.

Yamaha, which makes Charlie, describes it as "more chatty than a pet, but less work than a lover".

"He is there for me to chat with as someone other than family, or friends on social networks, or a boss I needed to produce a report for," Hamaura said.

She is a pre-launch test customer for Charlie, which Yamaha plans to release later this year.

"Charlie, tell me something interesting," she asks

while typing at her dining table.

"Well, well... balloons burst when you spray lemon juice!" he replies, cheerfully tilting his head to each side.

**EVERY OBJECT HAS A SOUL**

Sharp said sales of its small humanoid Robohon were up 30 per cent in the three months to September 2020 compared with a year earlier.

"Not only families with children, but also seniors in their 60s and 70s" are snapping up Robohon, which talks, dances and is also a working phone, a Sharp spokesman said.

But the adorable android — first released in 2016 and only available in Japan — does not come cheap, with regular models priced between \$820 and \$2,250.

Charlie and Robohon are part of a new wave of robot companions pioneered by firms such as Sony with its robot dog Aibo, on sale since 1999, and SoftBank's friendly Pepper, which hit shelves in 2015.

Studies have shown that therapeutic robot pets designed in Japan, such as fluffy mechanical seals, can bring comfort to dementia patients

"Many Japanese people accept the idea that every object has a soul," said Shunsuke Aoki, CEO of robot firm Yukai Engineering.

"They want a robot to have a character, like a friend, family or a pet — not a mechanical function like a dishwasher."

Yukai's robots include Qoobo, a fluffy pillow with a mechanical tail that wiggles like a real pet.

They will soon release their latest home assistant "Bocco emo", which looks like a miniature snowman and allows families to leave and send voice messages through their phones.

Kaori Takahashi, 32, bought a Yukai robot-building kit for her six-year-old son to keep him occupied during the pandemic.

Robots feel normal in everyday life because they are in so many Japanese children's films and cartoons, she said.

"I grew up watching anime shows 'The Astro Boy Essays' and 'Doraemon',

which both feature robots, and my children love them too."

**HEARTWARMING FEELING**

Studies have shown that therapeutic robot pets designed in Japan, such as fluffy mechanical seals, can bring comfort to dementia patients.

But the makers of Lovot — a robot the size of a small toddler, with big round eyes and penguin-like wings that flutter up and down — think everyone can benefit from a bot that just wants to be loved.

It has more than 50 sensors and an internal heating system, making it warm to touch, which it reacts to with squeaks of joy.

Manufacturer Groove X said monthly sales shot up more than tenfold after the coronavirus hit Japan.

A single Lovot costs around \$2,800, plus fees for maintenance and software — but those without deep pockets can visit the "Lovot Cafe" near Tokyo instead.

One customer there, 64-year-old Yoshiko Nakagawa, called out to one of the robots fondly by name, as if to a grandson.

During Japan's virus state of emergency, the capital became "stark and empty", she said. "We need time to heal ourselves after this bleak period. If I had one of these babies at home, the heartwarming feeling would probably do the trick." — AFP

DISCOVERY

## Fossils of oldest member of huge dinosaur group found in Argentina



**BUENOS AIRES:** Scientists have unearthed in Argentina's Patagonian wilderness fossils of what may be the oldest-known member of the dinosaur group known as titanosaurs that includes the largest land animals in Earth's history.

Researchers said on Monday the fossils represent a dinosaur species named *Ninjatitan zapatai* that lived 140 million years ago during the Cretaceous Period. They identified *Ninjatitan* as a titanosaur, a group of long-necked plant-eating dinosaurs that walked on four pillar-like legs.

The dinosaur's incomplete skeletal remains were discovered south of the city of Neuquen. The researchers said *Ninjatitan* demonstrated that the titanosaurs as a group first appeared longer ago than previously known.

"It is the oldest record known, not only from Argentina but worldwide," study lead author Pablo Gallina, a researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research of Argentina (CONICET), said. "Titanosaurs are recorded on various sides of the world, but the oldest-known records were more modern than this find."

At a length of about 65 feet (20 metres), *Ninjatitan* was a large dinosaur, but much smaller than later titanosaurs such as *Argentinosaurus* that reached a length of around 115 feet (35 metres). The researchers also said the presence of such an early titanosaur in Patagonia supports the idea that titanosaurs originated in the Southern Hemisphere.

The findings were published in the scientific journal *Ameghiniana*.

Titanosaurs are part of a larger dinosaur group called saurpods that includes others with similar body designs such as *Brontosaurus* and *Diplodocus* that lived in North America during the Jurassic Period, which preceded the Cretaceous Period.

A number of the titanosaurs that inhabited Patagonia achieved gigantic proportions such as *Argentinosaurus*, *Patagotitan* and *Dreadnoughtus*.

José Luis Carbadillo, another CONICET researcher, told a local university publication here that the age of *Ninjatitan*'s remains could have led people to assume that the bones belonged to a dinosaur group that pre-dated titanosaurs.

"In Patagonia, titanosaurs are only known about from less than 120 million years ago," he said. — Reuters



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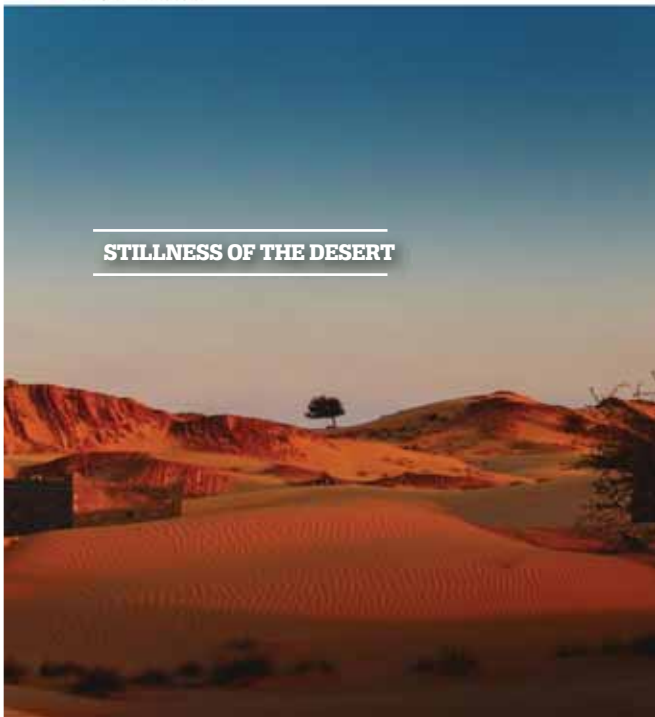
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## AROUND THE WORLD



## Rock photography meets street art in Mick Rock, Fin DAC project

**PHOTOGRAPHER MICK ROCK**, known for some of the most recognisable pictures of rock legends such as David Bowie and album covers of the 1970s, is marking his 51 years working in the music industry with a new project collaborating with urban artist Fin DAC.

"MIDARO" fuses photography with painting, with the Irish artist reworking Rock's photos of Bowie, Lou Reed, Iggy Pop and Debbie Harry to create a series of limited edition prints and canvas artworks.

Released on Tuesday, to coincide with what would have been Reed's 79th birthday, they each show a woman wearing a T-shirt adorned with one of Rock's photos of the music stars.

Rock said he had long been cautious when previously approached for artistic collaborations.

"All he (Fin DAC) (had) to do is show them to me, that was the deal. I had to approve of them," Rock said. "There was nothing not to approve."

London-born Rock, often referred to as "The man who shot the 70s", first picked up a camera as a student at Cambridge University.

He went on to photograph Bowie as Ziggy Stardust and album covers for Syd Barrett's "Madcap Laughs", Reed's "Transformer", Iggy and The Stooges' "Raw Power" and Queen's "Queen II".

"It wasn't like 'I'm going to be a rock and roll photographer'," Rock said. "These people weren't so well known when I first met them. It was all about age and timing."

More recently, New York-based Rock has photographed Kate Moss, Lady Gaga and Miley Cyrus.

As well as the collaborative images, which will be on show and sale on the West Contemporary Editions platform, Rock is also releasing a selection of photographs he snapped of Bowie, Reed, Harry and Pop between 1969 and 1980 as well as his own art pieces. —Reuters

## Fly me to the Moon: Japan billionaire offers space seats



**IT'S THE** sort of chance that comes along just once in a blue Moon: a Japanese billionaire is throwing open a private lunar expedition to eight people from around the world.

Yusaku Maezawa, an online fashion tycoon, was announced in 2018 as the first man to book a spot aboard the lunar spaceship being developed by SpaceX.

Maezawa, who paid an undisclosed sum for the trip expected to launch in 2023 at the earliest, originally said he planned to invite six to eight artists to join him on the voyage around the Moon.

But on Wednesday, in a video posted on his Twitter account, he revealed a broader application process.

"I'm inviting you to join me on this mission. Eight of you from all around the world," he said.

"I have bought all the seats, so it will be a private ride," he added.

Maezawa, 45, said his initial plan of inviting artists had "evolved" because he came to believe that "every single person who is doing something creative could be called an artist."

The Japanese entrepreneur said applicants would need to fulfil just two criteria: being ready to "push the envelope" creatively, and being willing to help other crew members do the same.

In all, he said around 10 to 12 people will be on board the spaceship, which is expected to loop around the Moon before returning to Earth.

The application timeline for spots on the trip calls for would-be space travellers to pre-register by March 14, with initial screening carried out by March 21.

No deadlines are given for the next stages — an "assignment" and an online interview — but final interviews and medical checkups are currently scheduled for late May 2021, according to Maezawa's website.

Musk 'highly confident' Maezawa and his band of astronauts will become the first lunar

voyagers since the last US Apollo mission in 1972 — if SpaceX can pull the trip off.

Last month, a prototype of its Starship crashed in a fireball as it tried to land upright after a test flight, the second such accident, after the last prototype of the Starship met a similar fate in December.

But the company hopes the reusable, 394-foot (120-metre) rocket system will one day carry crew and cargo to the Moon, Mars and beyond.

"I'm highly confident that we will have reached orbit many times with Starship before 2023 and that it will be safe enough for human transport by 2023. It's looking very promising," SpaceX founder Elon Musk said in Maezawa's video posted on Wednesday.

The mission will be the first private space flight beyond Earth's orbit, Musk said.

Because it will not land on the Moon, but loop behind it, "we expect people will go further than any human has ever gone from planet Earth," he added.

Maezawa, known for his eccentric comments and extravagant lifestyle including a penchant for pricey art, was last year valued around \$1.9 billion, making him one of Japan's richest people.

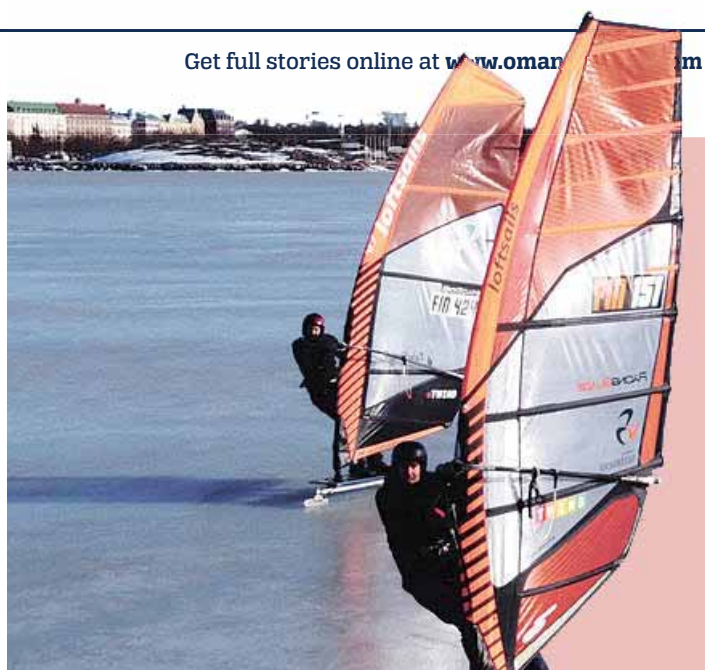
He made his fortune as founder of online fashion store Zozo, which he sold to Yahoo! Japan in 2019.

Maezawa has previously made headlines with an online ad for a girlfriend to join him on his SpaceX flight — only to abruptly cancel the hunt, despite attracting nearly 30,000 applicants.

US space agency NASA is intending to land astronauts on the Moon, including the first woman, in 2024.

One of the goals of its Artemis III voyage is to bring back a total of 85 kilograms (187 pounds) of lunar samples — more than the average 64 kilograms brought back by Apollo missions between 1969 and 1972. —AFP

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## Ice surfers carve up Finland's frozen sea

**WHAT TO DO** if you are a windsurfing enthusiast in a country where the sea freezes over for months of the year?

For a group of Finns, the answer is to kit out sailboards with skates and take to the ice, reaching speeds of up to 100 kilometres (62 miles) per hour in a burgeoning sport that can only be practised in a handful of places around the world.

"I call them happiness machines," Feodor Gurvits says, pointing to his self-made board which sits on three blades and has a windsurfing sail attached.

"They really make people smile, and it's such a joy, pure movement."

Good grip' required

Gurvits and around half a dozen fellow ice-surfers are soon criss-crossing the expanse of Baltic Sea ice off Helsinki's Hernesaari coastline, kitted out in crash helmets and body padding in case the blades slide out during a tight turn.

"It will hurt your hands and you have to have a good grip on the boom, but otherwise it's quite easy on the ice compared to summertime," Esa Harjula tells.

Harjula regularly teaches the sport to groups of beginners, and says there has been increased demand in recent weeks.

"It's so great to see people learning, how they can get it in a few minutes."

At 30 centimetres thick, the ice is currently strong enough to drive a "small truck" on, Gurvits says — although the warm sunshine and temperatures of plus 5 degrees Celsius (41 degrees Fahrenheit) mean that it is starting to melt along the shallower shoreline.

ENJOY THE FEEL

Ice surfer Mete Ciragan clocked up today's speed record of 71.6 kph (44 mph) in light winds of 8 metres per second (18 mph).

"It feels great and you forget to breathe sometimes," he tells. "But you need to concentrate on the surface so you don't hit a bump and fall."

"With a lighter wind you can go much faster than on the water, because there's so much less resistance," adds Marianne Rautelin, a former European windsurfing champion who also started surfing on ice in 2009 and has since notched up winter championship wins.

Rautelin, who regularly surfs with her husband Ian and the pair's adult daughter Riina, says she cannot choose a favourite between water or ice.

"The attraction in summer is that the waves make it more challenging, but in winter you can just start racing straight away," she says.

Gurvits estimates around 1,000 people currently practise ice windsurfing, of whom about 20 perform at the top level, mainly spread across the Nordics, Baltics and Poland, as well as the US, Canada and Russia.

In 2017, he fulfilled his dream of winning the World Ice Sailing Championship but says he's not packing his board away yet.

"My ambition is to keep sailing, enjoy the feel, try to build better gear and be competitive, and try to keep other people happy as well." — AFP



# Shaping the identity of Oman

Omani handicraft makers are some of the world's best. The potters of Bahla, for example, had been moulding clays into different shapes and vessels for generations. With conservation and support from the government, it has grown into a reliable industry and a source of income for small scale entrepreneurs.

Weavers can also be found all throughout the country — from the scenic coastal shores of Salalah, to historic Sur and even in the interiors that it has become an important part of Oman's heritage.

Omani artisans were also able to utilise many of the date palm's features using them to create not only household items but decorative bags and other items. A visit to any of Oman's souq offers an opportunity to take a glimpse into some of the country's finest artisanal works.

Even the creation of dhows — one of Oman's strong characters — lives to this day. While the production might not be as many as in the past, the importance of dhows can still be witnessed among local fishermen plying Oman's seas.

The Omani Artisans' Day that falls on March 3, every year is a reward for those dedicated Omanis using their hands and skills at shaping the identity of this country. Their

works are a mirror to the character of Oman as a whole and the

traditions and culture of the country.

The Sultanate's celebration of the event furnishes a context for protecting typical crafts industries, developing them, promoting and marketing their products within the Sultanate and abroad — a mission entrusted to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism under Royal Decree No 91/2020.

The celebration of the event this year reaffirms the significance of initiatives made to support contributions to the national crafts industries sector. Such contributions target enhancing artisans' sources of income, due to the fact that crafts industries serve as focal components that countries seek to conserve.

This is in addition to their effective role in providing society with highly prized and artistic products carrying symbolic values that enhance the national identity. crafts industries contribute to human communication among nations sharing cultural diversity.

As Oman celebrates Omani Artisans' Day you can one of the following to show your support:

**VISIT LOCAL SHOPS AND BUY OMAN MADE PRODUCTS.** This will help boost local production and also ensure that these small scale artisanal industries live on.

**TALK ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE OMANI HANDICRAFT MAKER ONLINE.** This will not only help the artists find an alternative platform but your own personal reach will connect them to a new audience who would have not known them otherwise.

**EDUCATE CHILDREN ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL ARTISTS.** By creating a culture of appreciation for these often neglected artists, you are nurturing a new generation who will have a better understanding of artisanal crafts. This will also ensure that interests in these crafts are passed down to future generations.

