

Exit scheme for expats ends today

Just as the period allowed for undocumented workers living in the Sultanate to exit without any fine or legal implications ends on Wednesday, the Ministry of Labour has urged those who have not yet registered to register online and avail of the opportunity. No applications for rectification of labour status will be entertained after Wednesday, said the ministry, noting that expatriate workers benefiting from the grace period should leave the country within three months, or by June 30, 2021. [DETAILS ON P2](#)



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NEW ZEALAND SEAL BANGLADESH T20 SERIES



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QURAYAT DIVERS SPREADING AWARENESS ON MARINE PRESERVATION



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PLAN TO CREATE 800 POWER SECTOR JOBS FOR OMANIS



HM, SAUDI CROWN PRINCE REVIEW ‘GREEN MIDDLE EAST’ INITIATIVE

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Tuesday evening received a phone call from Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defence of Saudi Arabia.

The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia conveyed the greetings of King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud and his wishes of good health and happiness to his brother His Majesty Sultan Haitham, wishing the Omani people more progress and prosperity.

His Majesty asked the Crown Prince to convey his greetings and best wishes of good health and happiness to King Salman wishing the brotherly Saudi people more progress and prosperity.

His Majesty the Sultan and the Crown Prince also reviewed the ‘Green Middle East’ initiative announced by the Crown Prince in partnership with the countries of the region which is considered the largest afforestation programme for confronting environmental challenges.

His Majesty the Sultan expressed his appreciation for the efforts of Saudi Arabia in preserving the environment, affirming the Sultanate’s support to the efforts exerted in this respect.

— ONA

Now get news on the go



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MISSILE RACE MAY LEAVE NORTH WITH TACTICAL N-WEAPONS

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The Environment Authority reviewed investment opportunities in various nature reserves including Al Jabal Al Akhdar Natural Landscape Reserve, Al Saleel Nature Reserve and Khor Taqah Sanctuary in the Sultanate. The meeting touched on ways of implementing sustainability based on social and economic pillars. Emphasis was laid on safeguarding biological and physiological diversity of the sanctuaries, encouraging specialised research, activating in-country economy. [SEE P3](#)

S U L T A N A T E R E C O R D S

1,173 NEW COVID-19 CASES, 7 DEATHS

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

All eyes are now on the Supreme Committee whether it will announce stricter restrictions to fight the pandemic.

Spike in new cases is the reason for nervousness among the public as the Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday reported 1,173 new cases of Covid-19, bringing the total number of cases registered in Oman to 158,056.

The ministry has reported seven new Covid 19-related deaths, bringing the total death toll to 1,669.

Eighty-eight patients were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, bringing the total number

Take vaccine, for you, for all: WHO

KABEER YOUSUF

[@kabeeryousef](#)

Fear surrounding vaccination is totally unfounded and one should take vaccine for his own safety, his family’s and that of the society, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). Speaking to the *Observer*, Jean Jabbour, WHO Representative to the Sultanate of Oman, said, “Contrary to what many of us believe, taking vaccine is harmless and there’s no evidence to prove otherwise. Every single citizen, as well as resident in the country, should be a part of the Covid-19 vaccination campaign,” the WHO Representative said.

TURN TO P1

of inpatients in hospitals to 507, including 154 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

Last week, the Supreme Committee said the period between April 1 and May 31 will be highly critical to the Sultanate. It will take a series of comprehensive measures which may include complete

ing rise in cases.

The Supreme Committee last Thursday reviewed the pandemic situation in the Sultanate, which saw a rise in the number of people in hospital wards and intensive care units, and the Covid-19 related deaths.

VACCINES

While Oman is yet to receive the new batches of vaccines, 120,878 people have been vaccinated so far, of which 35,502 are in Muscat, 15,942 in North Al Batinah, and 10,738 in South Al Batinah.

Meanwhile, health centres in Dhofar continue their efforts to vaccinate the target groups of citizens, residents, and medical personnel as part of the national campaign.

UN seeks \$10 billion for Syrians

BRUSSELS: International donors on Tuesday pushed to meet a United Nations call for \$10 billion in aid for Syria and refugees in neighbouring countries, as demands for assistance rise after a decade of conflict.

Germany led the way at a two-day video conference by vowing to contribute \$2 billion, ahead of \$600 million from the United States.

The UN warns the need for aid has increased on the back of the coronavirus pandemic and a slump in the value of the Syrian pound. That is despite the intensity of the fighting dropping inside in Syria after the forces of President Bashar al Assad have reconquered most of the country. [DETAILS ON P6](#)

A third of global farmland at ‘high’ pesticide pollution risk

PARIS: A third of the planet’s agricultural land is at “high risk” of pesticide pollution from the lingering residue of chemical ingredients that can leach into water supplies and threaten biodiversity, according to research.

The use of pesticides has soared globally as agricultural production has expanded, prompting growing fears over environmental damage and calls to cut hazardous chemical use. Researchers in



Australia modelled pollution risk across 168 countries with data on the usage of 92 active pesticide ingredients and found “widespread global pesticide pollution risk”.

They highlighted several acutely vulnerable ecosystems in South Africa, China, India, Australia and Argentina, at the nexus of high pollution risk, high water scarcity and high biodiversity.

The study, published in *Nature Geoscience*, found that overall

64 per cent of global agricultural land — approximately 24.5 million square kilometres — was at risk of pesticide pollution from more than one active ingredient, and 31 per cent is at high risk.

“It is significant because the potential pollution is widespread and some regions at risk also bear high biodiversity and suffer from water scarcity,” said lead author of the University of Sydney’s School of Civil Engineering.

— AFP

10th Five-Year Plan for Health Development launched

MUSCAT: The 10th Five-Year Plan for Health Development (2021-2025) and the Health Sector Strategic Plans were launched on Tuesday under the auspices of Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health.

The 10th Five-Year Plan for Health Development 2021-2025 is considered a paradigm shift of Oman's health system and planning as health is on the top of national priorities within Oman Vision 2040.

The 10th five-year plan aims at providing more comprehensive services to achieve health for all, better care and quality by collaborating with other health sectors and stakeholders.

Aligned with the strategic approaches, the 10th Health Development Plan is based on Oman Vision 2040, the Health Vision 2050 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in addition to the World Health Organization's (WHO) work programme, the Political Declaration of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Non-

Communicable Diseases (NCDs), as well as Salalah Declaration on UHC 2030.

The plan was also built on the global agreement towards achieving universal health coverage, the results and recommendations of the evaluation for the 9th five-year health plan 2020-2016.

The implementation of the 10th Health Development Plan 2021-2025 is supported by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the commitment of the directorates general to achieve the best indicators locally and globally to contribute in enhancing health services in the Sultanate.

The 10th plan is empowered by qualified national competencies to provide high quality health services and advanced systems and devices.

The availability of an operational budget with a systematic utilisation of its resources, along with facilitating the funding of innovations and research in the health field, in addition to engaging partners in all sectors would definitely contribute to the success of



PLAN COMPRISES
SIX STRATEGIC
PROGRAMMES CARRIED
OUT THROUGH
INITIATIVES AND
PROJECTS TO ACHIEVE
UNIVERSAL HEALTH
COVERAGE

this plan. The plan consists of six strategic objectives, key priority initiatives, and 43 expected results, carried out by the ministry including central directorates and directorates in the governorates, according to the levels of implementation.

The MoH's 10th Five-Year Plan has been developed in line with the National Health Plan that includes governmental and private agencies offering health services in the Sultanate. It aims to establish a culture of joint planning and implementation and emphasising that health is everyone's responsibility.

The plan comprises six strategic programmes carried out

through initiatives and projects to achieve universal health coverage, health sector governance and restructuring, a more sustainable efficient health sector planning and financing system, human resources development for health, sustainable availability of medical and pharmaceutical products and equipment, and digital transformation in the health sector.

The training and meetings regarding the development of the 10th Five-Year Plan for Health Development (2021-2025) and strategic programmes at the central level and at the level of operational plans for the governorates was carried out via video-conferencing due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The launching ceremony was attended by senior officials, representatives of the Unicef and the World Health Organization (WHO), Directors General of Health Services of the governorates, as well as senior officials from Ministry of Economy, hospitals' directors and Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-Up Unit.

Majlis Ash'shura Office reviews ministerial replies, standing committees' activities

MUSCAT: The Office of Majlis Ash'shura held its 14th regular meeting of the second annual sitting (2020-2021) under the chairmanship of Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura, on Tuesday.

The Office discussed a briefing request directed to the chairman of Oman Investment Authority regarding the implementation of the development project of the eastern side of Madinat Al Irfan as well as the completion deadline and the added value that the project will provide to the area.

During the meeting, the Office of Majlis Ash'shura also reviewed a report of the standing committees' activities for February 2021, and looked into a number of the members' messages including that pertaining to the provision of official data and information from some government's departments.

The Office reviewed messages submitted by the standing committees including a report



from the Services and Social Development Committee on the expressed desire for providing e-linkage between the government authorities for the presentation of construction permit applications in agricultural lands.

Besides, the Office reviewed a number of ministerial replies including from the minister of labour in response to a question about the agreement signed

between Asyad Group and the National Training Fund. In his response, the minister said the agreement aimed for capacity building and job-seekers qualification through work-related training.

The Office also reviewed a ministerial reply provided by the minister of economy in response to a parliamentary question on the mining sector's contribution

to the Sultanate's GDP.

Also discussed at the meeting was an answer to a parliamentary question on commercial bank loans. In addition, the Office reviewed a number of messages and external reports including a briefing on the results of the virtual seminar on interim regulations for containing Covid-19 impact on the small and medium enterprises. — ONA

Free exit scheme for expats ends today

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Just as the period allowed for the undocumented workers living in the country to exit without any fine or legal implications ends on Wednesday, the Ministry of Labour has urged those who have not yet registered to register online and avail the opportunity.

"No applications for rectification of labour status will be entertained after Wednesday," said the ministry, noting that expatriate workers benefiting from the grace period should leave the country within three months, or by June 30, 2021.

All undocumented workers and overstaying visitors can register at the ministry's website (www.mol.gov.om) or through Sanad offices.

"From April 1, all applications and approvals for the same will be cancelled. After that,

penalties prescribed in the law will apply," said Salim bin Said al Badi, Director General of Labour Welfare at the Ministry of Labour.

Meanwhile, representatives of different community welfare wings have told the Observer that nearly 70,000 expatriate workers have applied to rectify their irregular status and around 50,000 of them have been able to leave the Sultanate.

"Out of nearly 70,000 registered expatriates, there are only about 4,000 Indians. I am sure there are some more who are either not aware of the scheme or are not bothered about any facility," said PM Jabir, Secretary at the Social Welfare section of Indian Social Club. "Anyone who knows an overstaying migrant worker in Oman should ask him/her to make use of this scheme before they lose chance," he requested on social media.

Incoming travellers find quarantine bookings via Sahala expensive

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Some incoming passengers have indicated to the Observer that hotel bookings for institutional isolations via Sahala platform have become more expensive.

Ministry of Health (MoH) has issued guidelines for travellers coming to Oman to book hotel accommodation via the Sahala platform.

MoH also released visual tips as all arrivals into the Sultanate have mandatory to book accommodation in hotels and institutional isolation via the (Sahala) platform.

"I booked a room for a mother and child for seven days, and it

cost me around RO 230 (meals inclusive). A room of the same size cost only half of that, and it included airport transfers and PCR tests on the eight-day under the old system before March 29," said a travel operator based in the capital.

While the streamlining process is undoubtedly welcome, efforts must be taken to ensure that hotel charges are affordable for travellers, he said.

"I delayed my return to Oman as it will be difficult to pay so high rates for a quarantine. I hope that cases will come down with the arrival of vaccines and stricter measures imposed by the government, which will lead to doing away with institutional



isolation," said James, an expatriate who keeps travelling between the Gulf and India for business

Airlines are responsible for

ensuring that the passenger is holding a confirmed booking via the (Sahala) platform.

The Sahala platform gives travellers the option to book hotels

of their choice, requirements and make payments.

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has issued a decision stipulating regulation for hotel establishments and travel and tourism operators who violate the Supreme Committee's decisions on Covid-19.

A fine will be imposed on hotel establishments and travel agencies that violate the committee's decisions. The fine will be doubled in case of repetition, with the facility being closed for a month. The ministry will collect the fines and transfer them to the account dedicated to the pandemic.

Passengers from age of 18 and less if travelling alone, and

arrivals at the age of 60 and above, aircrew, subject to the precautionary measures issued by the Ministry of Health (MoH) and sick passengers whose health conditions require special attention as per the attached health form are exempted from the decision.

The exception includes two companions with female or under 18 years old patients and only one companion with male patients above 18.

For sea crews moored in the territorial waters of the Sultanate, airlines are obliged to ensure that there is a hotel reservation covering the duration of their stay in Oman based on the letter of the shipping agent.



Pact signed to finance mobile vet clinics

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources on Tuesday signed an agreement with Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) to finance the setting up of four mobile veterinarian clinics and vet equipment.

The agreement provides curative and guidance services for livestock herders in the wilayats of Al Kamil W'al Wafi, Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan and Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

Ali bin Salim al Hashmi, Director of Agricultural Development Department at Al Kamil W'al Wafi, said the agreement comes within the

context of existing cooperation between the public and private sectors in supporting various projects of the livestock sector.

Al Hashmi pointed out that the clinics will contribute to extending preventive, curative and instructional services to livestock herders in different villages. They will also help enhance the income of herders, develop the productivity of livestock and improve its health and safety.

The agreement was signed by Dr Ahmed Nassir al Bakri, Agriculture Under-Secretary, and Said Talib al Ma'awali, Board member of OMIFCO.

— ONA

Oman attends Arab Forum for Sustainable Development



MUSCAT: The Sultanate, represented by the State Audit Institution (SAI), is taking part in the Arab Forum for Sustainable Development (AFSD).

The three-day forum is being organised by the Economic Commission for Western Asia (ECWA) of the United Nations (UN) via video conferencing in the Lebanese Capital, Beirut under the theme (Accelerating Progress on the 2030 Agenda post-Covid-19).

SAI will present a paper on its role in auditing the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The forum's agenda includes several themes focusing on accelerating progress in achieving SDGs during the recovery period post Covid-19.

The forum also discusses effective measures to overcome the pandemic, which has become one of the obstacles hindering the achievement of SDGs.

The forum receives a wide international participation from different entities representing governments, parliaments, private sector, international and regional organizations, as well as civil society and youth.

— ONA

Investment opportunities in nature reserves reviewed

MUSCAT: The Environment Authority (EA) on Tuesday reviewed investment opportunities in nature reserves around the Sultanate.

A meeting held under the chairmanship of Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, EA Chairman, discussed general principles for investment in nature reserves.

The meeting touched on ways of implementing sustainability based on social and economic pillars. Emphasis was laid on safeguarding biological and physiological diversity of the sanctuaries, encouraging specialised research, activating in-country economy, exchanging foreign-local investor benefits



and considering the interests of other parties involved in operations and supply of products and services.

During the meeting, investment opportunities were reviewed in a number of nature

reserves, including Al Jabal Al Akhdhar Natural Landscape Reserve, Al Saleel Nature Reserve and Khor Taqah Sanctuary.

The meeting saw the participation of Aseela bint Salim al Samsami, Investment

Promotion Under-Secretary, Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, CEO of the Capital Market Authority, and Hashil Obaid al Mahrooqi, CEO of Oman Tourism Development Company (Oman). — ONA

■ FROM PAGE 1

Take vaccine, for you, for all

"It's better to be inoculated than exposing oneself to the dangers of the virus, and I would suggest all to come forward and support this national initiative," he added.

Earlier, Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, said plans are on to exempt those who received both doses of the vaccine from institutional quarantine to attract more to vaccination campaign.

Oman has categorically

stated that there are no reported casualties from vaccines, and there were reports of normal side effects after taking the vaccine, and that vaccination is totally harmless.

After covering more than 85 per cent of the target groups, the ministry is adding more target groups for the vaccination, and new group of 60-year-old will be listed in the vaccination during the next week and the target groups for vaccination were distributed in several stages.



Oman Air to resume flights to Riyadh



MUSCAT: Oman Air, the national carrier of the Sultanate of Oman, will resume flights to Riyadh in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from Thursday, April 1 by operating 4 flights per week. Flights to Dammam were resumed on March 28, operating 4 flights per week.

Oman Air will maintain its comprehensive safety programme throughout all elements of the travel journey to ensure that guests fly confidently.

Masks are required when

guests are on board the aircraft and in Oman's airports. Distancing is maintained while guests board and exit the aircraft, which are carefully cleaned after each flight and at the end of every day.

Cabin crew all wear a full set of personal protective equipment, meal service has been modified to further ensure safety, and a number of other measures have been implemented to ensure that the airline's guests and crew are safe at all times. — ONA

Student campaign to increase public confidence in Covid vaccine

SUR: Public relations students at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Sur launched an awareness campaign, 'Be Well' (kon moaafa), to educate and motivate the general public about the importance of taking the Covid-19 vaccine.

The campaign logo was released by Dr Salma bint Khamis al Musharfiyah, the Dean of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Sur, at the event held via Google Meet. The Dean, teaching staff, students and external public of the college attended the launch event.

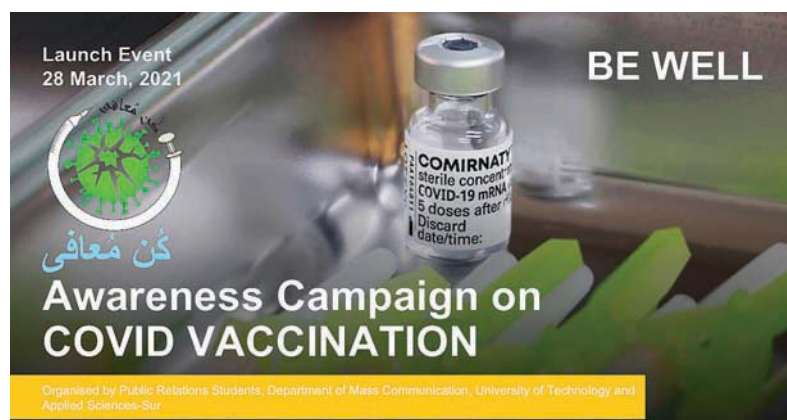
The campaign aims to correct the misconceptions and stop disinformation related to the Covid-19 vaccine by raising

awareness of the importance of having the vaccine and build vaccine confidence among the public.

The campaign activities will be held online via the social media accounts of the campaign. The campaign plans to disseminate video testimonial of vaccinated people, conversations with doctors and nurses, online awareness posters, webinars and competitions for the public.

Dr Al Musharfi said, 'the campaign's theme is very significant, not only locally but also globally. It is a matter of high priority to operationalise this campaign to motivate people to take the vaccination.'

Sultan al Saraai, the Head



of the Mass Communication Department, said: "The online launch event of the "Be Well" campaign was excellent and well organised. I have noticed that all details were well planned, and the event was very professional."

Manal al Hadabi, a Public

Relations student and organising member of the campaign, said, "The campaign will help to motivate people to take vaccination and reduce the infection rates and death toll. Vaccination is vital for reducing the risk of infection in elderly

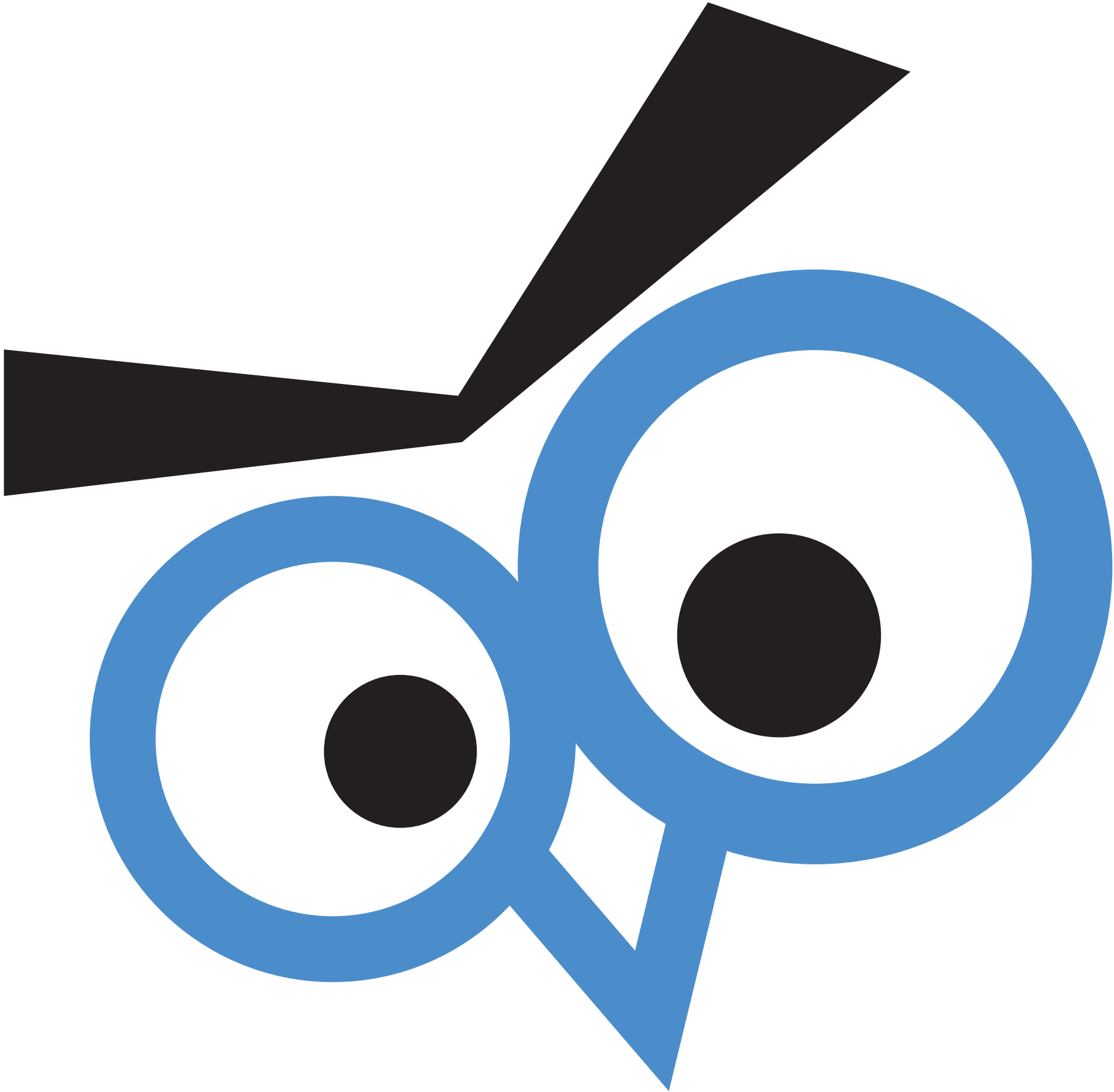
who are having respiratory or chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension."

The target of the campaign are community groups with a focus on people at risk of contracting the disease, including elderly from the age of 60 and above, medical workers, individuals suffering from chronic diseases, and youths with age from 18 to 35 as they have the power to influence their parent's acceptance of the vaccine.

Sami al Battashi, a faculty member at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Sur, said: "I'm very proud to see that our students are aligning their campaign theme with the pandemic, which

is relevant not only locally but also globally. I am sure that the campaign will make such a contribution in encouraging citizens to get vaccinated and save their lives. It is in line with the efforts exerted by the Supreme Committee dealing with Covid-19 and the Ministry of Health to increase vaccination rates among Omanis, especially elders. So, let's take the vaccine and be well."

Balqis bint Said al Battashiyah, a member of the public relations campaign, said, "Today I am pleased because as a public relations student, I gained practical experience on campaign planning by participating in this campaign launch."



THE CALL OF THE OWLS



Owls are good birds to have around the neighbourhood. Their hunting skills can be very beneficial for mankind as they keep a population check on pests

NASSER AL KINDY

Bird watcher, author and a photographer

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

“You don’t want to see an owl because it is a bad omen!” That perception needs to change, says Nasser al Kindy, a keen bird watcher in Oman who is also an author and a photographer.

“I remember when I was young, they used to say an owl is a wizard in disguise”, said a young man from Musannah.

“Spotting an owl meant bad news”, said a lady from Rustaq.

“In Syria if we come across a negative person, we would say, ‘don’t be a boom (owl), be positive”, said Ali from Syria.

In some cultures, owls are considered a sign of bad luck, and a lot of time an owl was also associated with death news.

Was it because it is a bird of the night, was it because of their eyes or the ability to turn around its neck? Or could it have been their eerie hoot in the middle of the night?

Almost all cultures of the world have something to say about owls.

Now Nasser would like to differ. “Owls are good birds to have around the neighbourhood”, he said.

“We need to preserve them”, he added.

Owls, at least a large proportion of them, are nocturnal. Their hunting skills can be very beneficial for mankind as they keep a population check on pests.

He is an environmentalist and an active volunteer. He remembers 2011 when he developed an interest in the environment due to owl. “Funnily enough, I had begun to take an interest in photography when I took a picture of an owl much before, maybe around 2009. We

had stopped to take coffee near the water well and it was around 11 am. There was this owl very close to us and I started taking pictures of it. When I came back to Muscat I tried my best to learn more about it. That is how I became more interested in birds and environment and their fascinating lives as well as biodiversity.”

Nasser continues to travel extensively throughout Oman, particularly in winter and autumn when temperatures are more relaxed, and the seasons for the migrating birds coming to Oman.

“In summer, we have birds migrating to the southern parts of Oman because of the monsoon in Dhofar. We get to see nice colourful birds coming from Africa to make use of the banquet provided by the monsoon”, Nasser explained.

Covid-19 has limited a few things just like many other activities. However, Nasser feels it has provided him and the other photographers with the opportunity to spend more time with nature. Many other outlets closed, but nature was always available.

Even while you are in Muscat one can come across an owl.

“I once photographed a Barn owl. Barn owls have white plumage so they are effortless to identify. And some people told us they live close to Grand Hyatt and we see them everyday”, noted Nasser.

According to Nasser, in Oman about 14 species of owls can be sighted. The Lillith’s owls have also been spotted in Muscat and are found to be abundant. The popular one is the Omani owl then there is the desert owl, which was formerly known as Hume’s owl. Owl enthusiasts are known to visit Oman just for them as one blogger writes about

hearing them first before spotting them, such as Arabian scops-owls, Arabian eagle-owl. Still, all of their calls come at night and the enthusiasts do not mind moving around to spot them as one blogger writes — iainsowls.blogspot.com.

There is a need for more statistics on owls in Oman. A first time study published in Zoology in the Middle East on the diet of the Omani owl, Strix butleri, revealed total of 22 individual prey items which represented three mammals (rodents), at least two undetermined gecko species and one scorpion.

The study was conducted by Zuhair S Amr, Magnus S Robb, Joao Nunes, Mohammad Abu Baker and Alyn Walsh.

“They begin to get active before sunset. If you are lucky, one or two hours before sunset as well as in the early hours of the morning after the sun has risen, some owls continue to hunt. They have different types of nests and breeding grounds.

The myths about owls are not positive and because we call them myths, they are not valid. Owls are actually good for humans because they help us get rid of many pests such as mice. An owl can eat up to 10 mice a day. So let us help them thrive and leave them to do what they do. Owls are considered as bad omen, just like cats, but they are not. Owls are good”, pointed out Nasser.

He says so keep an eye on the owls but also keep a safe distance not to disturb them. Owls are not aggressive and most humans are mesmerised by them if not for the myths. Today owls, however, are becoming fashion statements as jewellers have found great inspiration in them.

The data on owls is deficient. Maybe it is time to listen to the call of the night guard.



Shoppers line up outside a Woolworths store as greater Brisbane has been ordered into a snap three-day lockdown after four more cases of Covid-19 emerged in the community, in Brisbane, Australia. – Reuters

Australia's Queensland warns of more virus cases

SYDNEY: Australia's Queensland state warned on Tuesday that more cases of Covid-19 were expected to emerge as authorities scrambled to contain an outbreak linked to the virulent UK variant, throwing Easter travel plans into disarray.

Officials reported eight new locally acquired cases on Tuesday, taking the total in the latest outbreak to 15 so far. All of the cases were linked to two distinct virus clusters, one related to a doctor and the second to a nurse, authorities said.

"The fact that we have these cases that are linked is good news," Queensland state Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk told reporters. "Do we expect to see more cases? Probably. Probably, we will see more."

Brisbane, the state capital, has been placed under a three-day lockdown until Thursday, requiring more than 2 million city residents to stay home except for essential work, healthcare, grocery shopping or exercise.

The restrictions upended holiday plans for thousands as

THE RESTRICTIONS
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IN AUSTRALIA, A
POPULAR TIME FOR
VACATIONS

the lockdown is scheduled to end just a day before the Easter long weekend and the school term break in Australia, a popular time for vacations.

Several states closed their borders with Queensland, while others will require travellers from the virus hotspots to self-isolate for two weeks on their return.

Brisbane Airport forecast a steep drop in the number of domestic travellers passing through the airport by the weekend compared with its pre-lockdown expectations.

"This week we had forecast 35,000 to 40,000 per day.

However, today this number was closer to 15,000 and we anticipate this may drop to under 10,000 per day by the weekend," a spokeswoman told Reuters.

Lockdown and border controls could put the state's businesses under more strain as the government's A\$90 billion (\$69 billion) job subsidy scheme ended on Sunday.

Neighbouring New South Wales (NSW) state, Australia's most populous, is also on alert after two of the Queensland cases, a nurse and her sister, travelled while unknowingly infectious to Byron Bay, a tourist town just south of the Queensland border and home to Hollywood A-listers such as Chris Hemsworth.

Health alerts have been issued for a hotel, cafe and restaurant exposed to the virus as officials urged patrons to test and isolate.

"I hope that we do not have any cases emerge in New South Wales, but I won't be surprised if we did. So, we need to brace ourselves," NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian said.

— Reuters

Witness to arrest of Floyd returning to stand in Chauvin murder trial

MINNEAPOLIS: A professional mixed martial arts fighter who witnessed the deadly arrest of George Floyd in Minneapolis last May is due to return to the stand on Tuesday for the second day of testimony in the murder trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin.

Donald Williams can be heard on a bystander's cellphone screaming at Chauvin, who kept his knee on Floyd's neck for about nine minutes during the arrest on May 25, 2020, shortly after Floyd was accused of passing a fake \$20 bill.

Williams calls Chauvin a "bum" in the video, accuses the white police officer of "enjoying" his restraining of Floyd, a 46-year-old handcuffed Black man, and told jurors on Monday he believed that Chauvin was using his knee in a "blood choke" on Floyd, a wrestling move to knock an opponent unconscious.

The video, which prosecutors say shows excessive force, sparked outrage and daily demonstrations in the United States and around the world protesting police brutality against Black people. The trial is being watched as a litmus test for the US justice system.

Chauvin's lawyers are expected to counter that Williams has no knowledge of



A poster with George Floyd's picture and a sign reads that "I can't Breathe" hang from a security fence outside the Hennepin County Government Center on Monday in Minneapolis, Minnesota. – AFP

police manoeuvres.

Chauvin, 45, has pleaded not guilty to second-degree murder, which carries up to 40 years in prison, as well as third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter. He and the three other officers on the scene were fired the day after Floyd's death.

In opening arguments on Monday, a prosecutor said Chauvin betrayed his badge "when he used excessive and unreasonable force upon the body of George Floyd."

Chauvin's lawyers argued he was simply following training from his 19 years on the force and that the main cause of

Floyd's death, which the county examiner ruled a homicide caused by police restraints, was a drug overdose.

With access to the courtroom limited by the coronavirus pandemic, Hennepin County District Judge has allowed a live video of proceedings to be broadcast to the public, something normally prohibited in Minnesota courts.

However, Cahill agreed to a request by prosecutors not to show four eyewitnesses on video: two of whom were under 18 when the saw Floyd die, and two of whom are still minors.

— Reuters



Majan College SAOG

BOARD REPORT FOR THE SECOND QUARTER ENDED 28 FEBRUARY, 2021

Respected Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Majan College SAOG, I am pleased to present this report on Majan's financial performance and the accompanying un-audited interim condensed financial statements for the six month period ended 28 February 2021.

Financial Performance

Majan financial performance was affected in the core business due to the impact of change in entry criteria of postgraduate students, however, that was counter balanced through controlling the expenses. In comparison to the same period in previous financial year, total income has decreased by 27% to be OMR 2.44 Million mainly from decrease in new and returning postgraduate students. Total expenses have decreased by 16% to be OMR 1.94 Million mainly from the decline in postgraduate fees income and corresponding reduction in affiliation fees and control of salaries and related cost offset against the impact of depreciation of the new facilities. Taxation has decreased by 156% to make an income of OMR 0.08 Million mainly because of deferred tax income on provisions on the impairment of fee receivables & fair value adjustment of investments FVPTL. Consequently, overall net profit after tax has decreased by 32% to be OMR 0.58 Million. Earning per share is decrease from 9 baisa per share to 6 baisa per share.

Appreciation

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to his Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq for his unlimited support and guidance to higher education. Our sincere thanks to the Ministry of Higher Education for its support to the private higher

education sector. This resulted in tremendous growth in the sector. It is our intention that Majan College SAOG continues to support to achieve the vision of his Majesty by continuously improving and enriching the standards of its academic programmes and its resources.

Naser Al Marri
Chairman

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION

	28TH FEB. 2021 OMR	29TH FEB. 2020 OMR	31ST AUG. 2020 (AUDITED) OMR
Assets			
Non-current assets			
Property and equipment	3,897,968	4,162,020	4,084,898
Deferred tax asset	265,888	91,022	84,940
Investments at fair value through other comprehensive income			
Total non-current asset	4,163,856	4,253,042	4,169,838
Current assets			
Receivables & prepayments	4,576,005	3,514,192	2,262,179
Cash & bank balance	1,426,942	3,661,328	4,267,508
Investments at fair value through profit and loss	889,639		
Investments at amortised cost	4,249,044	4,249,044	4,249,044
Total current assets	11,141,630	11,424,564	10,778,731
Total assets	15,305,486	15,677,606	14,948,569
Equity			
Share capital	9,000,000	9,000,000	9,000,000
Legal reserve	1,393,533	1,258,840	1,335,492
Retained earning	1,049,465	1,142,233	527,102
Proposed Dividend			1,305,000
Fair value reserve			
Total Equity	11,442,998	11,401,073	12,167,594

UNAUDITED CONDENSED INTERIM STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

	SEP 20 - FEB 21 OMR	SEP 19 - FEB 20 OMR
Income		
Fee Income	2,356,965	3,020,289
Other Income	22,751	107,217
Investment Income	64,946	202,132
Total Income	2,444,662	3,329,638
Expenses		
Salaries & related cost	-1,165,888	-1,345,146
Administrative & general expenses	-554,082	-858,958
Expected credit losses	-18,750	-8,225
Depreciation	-197,661	-119,449
Foreign Exchange	-11,299	3,696
Total expenses	-1,947,680	-2,328,082
Net profit before tax	496,982	1,001,556
Taxation	83,422	-150,042
Total comprehensive income	580,404	851,514
Basic earning per share	0.006	0.009

Note: The complete accounts are available on Muscat Securities Market (www.msm.gov.om)

SpaceX Starship test fails

WASHINGTON:

SpaceX chief Elon Musk confirmed on Twitter on Tuesday that the latest prototype of the company's Starship rocket series had crashed, after the video feed of its test flight cut out.

"At least the crater is in the right place!" he joked, in acknowledging the fourth failed test of the prototype.

"Something significant happened shortly after landing burn start. Should know what it was once we can examine the bits later today," he added. The rocket, SN11, launched from the company's south Texas facility began its ascent to 10 km, experiencing some video glitches.

— AFP

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS IN RELATION TO SUPPLY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PALO ALTO FIREWALL AND FORTIGATE FIREWALL HARDWARE



The Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOG (OPWP), a member of Nama Group, is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatisation of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 2004/78 as amended and the OPWP licence.

Tender Description	Oman Power and Water Procurement Company is looking to implement a Next Generation Firewall (NGFW) that provides a deep level of security, visibility and intelligence to counter all threats arising from the rapidly evolving cyberattacks. To provide scalability for computing, OPWP will work to regenerate its perimeter using the Palo Alto Firewall and FortiGate as the primary firewall infrastructure.
Tender Number	5 / 2021
Tender Purchase Period	31 March 2021 to 12 April 2021
Tender Fee	50 OMR
Submission date	2 May 2021 at 11:30 am (GST)
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents will be provided in electronic format upon evidence of payment. The payment can be processed by local/international bank transfer and evidence of the bank transfer submitted by email to the procurement officer through procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om
Bank Guarantee	A bid bond or a bank certified cheque of not less than 1% of the tender value, to be valid for a period of 120 days from the submission deadline date referred to above. The bid bond or certified cheque shall be enclosed as part of the bid

Bank account details:
Local Bank account details:
Account Name: Oman Power & Water Procurement Company SAOG
Beneficiary Bank: Bank Muscat
Branch: Corporate
Account number: 0423011072740015
Swift code: BMUSOMRXXXX

International Bank details:
Correspondent Bank: JP Morgan Chase Bank, New York
Address: 4 New York Plaza, Floor 15, New York
ABA No: 000021 021
Chips No: CPO002
SWIFT Code: BMUSOMRXXXX
Beneficiary Bank: Bank Muscat
Beneficiary Name: Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOG
Beneficiary Bank Account No: 0423011072740015



Oman Power And Water Procurement Co. S.A.O.C.
5th Floor, Building 5, Muscat Grand Mall, Tilal Complex (Office)
P.O. Box 1388, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman Ruwi.
Tel.: 8400 2450 968+ | Fax: 9946 2439 968+ | www.omanpwp.com

■ FOR LAND RIGHTS



A Palestinian demonstrator scuffles with an Israeli border policewoman during a protest marking 'Land Day', in Sebastia near Nablus, in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on Tuesday. – Reuters

Iran rejects ending 20% enrichment before US lifts all sanctions

DUBAI: Iran will not stop its 20 per cent uranium enrichment before the United States lifts all sanctions, Iranian state TV quoted an unnamed official as saying on Tuesday, after a US media report said Washington would offer a new proposal to jump-start talks.

The Biden administration has been seeking to engage Iran in talks about both sides resuming compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal. The agreement removed economic sanctions on Tehran in return for curbs on Iran's nuclear programme to make it harder to develop a nuclear weapon — an ambition Tehran denies.

“A senior Iranian official tells Press TV that Tehran will stop its 20 per cent uranium enrichment

only if the US lifts ALL its sanctions on Iran first”, state-run Press TV said on its website.

“The official said Tehran will further reduce its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal if the US does not lift all sanctions, warning that Washington is rapidly running out of time”, it added.

Separately, Iran's United Nations mission tweeted: “No proposal is needed for the US to rejoin the JCPOA (nuclear agreement). It only requires a political decision by the US to fully and immediately implement all of its obligations under the accord.” Politico earlier reported a US proposal, the details of which are still being worked out, would ask Iran to halt some of its nuclear activities. — Reuters

UN seeks \$10 bn for Syrians as humanitarian needs soar

BRUSSELS: The United Nations urged international donors to pledge up to \$10 billion on Tuesday to help Syrians fleeing a decade of civil war in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, saying that the need for humanitarian support has never been so great.

In the fifth annual conference to keep Syrians refugees from starvation, the event hosted by the European Union will seek \$4.2 billion for people inside Syria and \$5.8 billion for refugees and their hosts in the Middle East.

“For ten years, Syrians have endured death, destruction, displacement and deprivation”, United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in a video message.

“And things are getting worse, not better. More than 13 million people need humanitarian assistance to survive this year. That's over 20 per cent more than last year, and the majority of the population is now facing hunger.”

The fifth Brussels Conference on Syria, co-hosted by the European Union and the UN, brings together more than 50 countries and 30 international organisations in the biggest annual drive for pledges to assist those hit by the war.

The goal this year is to raise \$10 billion (8.46 billion euros) — \$4.2 billion for humanitarian relief inside Syria, and the rest for refugees sheltering in the region.

The level of violence has fallen inside Syria as the Russia-backed forces of President Bashar al Assad have reconquered most of the country.



(From left) UN General Assembly President Volkan Bozkir, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield hold a virtual meeting via videoconference from the State Department in Washington, on Monday. – Reuters

But the coronavirus pandemic and a slump in the national currency have exacerbated the suffering of millions of Syrians at home and in neighbouring countries.

“Plummeting living conditions, economic decline and Covid-19 result in more hunger, malnutrition and disease”, UN humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock said in a statement Monday.

“There is less fighting, but no peace dividend. More people need more help than at any point during the war.”

Overall the UN says that 24 million people need support in

Syria and across the region — a rise of four million from last year.

Syria's neighbours including Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq struggle to cope with the burden of housing most of the millions of refugees who have fled the conflict.

EU KICKS OFF PLEDGES

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell kicked off the pledges by saying Brussels would in 2022 match the funds promised last year of 560 million euros from the bloc's central budget.

“I would like to ask for generous pledges at today's conference, so we can somewhat alleviate the

suffering of the Syrian people”, Borrell said.

The previous donor conference last June overall raised pledges of \$5.5 billion for 2020, according to the United Nations.

The European Commission counted a total of \$7.7 billion, with just under a third carried forward to 2021.

The EU and its 27 member states — which worry that failure to help refugees in the Middle East could see them come to Europe — provided two-thirds of the funds.

The bloc says overall it has mobilised around \$29 billion since 2011. — Reuters/AFP

Suez Canal races to clear backlog as shipping convoys resume

ISMAILIA, Egypt: The Suez Canal expects to see 140 more ships pass through the waterway on Tuesday after traffic restarted overnight following the release of a grounded container ship, its chairman said.

Shipping convoys through the canal resumed on Monday evening after tugs pulled the 400-metre-long *Ever Given* container carrier free from the spot where it became wedged on March 23. The *Ever Given's* stranding across a southern section of the canal forced a halt to all traffic, leading to a build-up of 422 ships at either end of the canal and along its course.

Suez Canal Authority Chairman

President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi promised that his country would buy equipment to avoid any repetition of the past week's closure of the Suez Canal

Osama Rabie said 95 ships would pass by 1900 local time (1700 GMT) on Tuesday and a further 45 by midnight, reasserting that he hoped a backlog caused by the blockage would be cleared in three to four days.

Egyptian President Abdel



A man waves an Egyptian flag as ship *Ever Given*, one of the world's largest container ships, is seen after it was fully floated in Suez Canal on Monday. – Reuters

Fattah al-Sisi promised on Tuesday that his country would buy equipment to avoid any repetition of the past week's closure of the Suez Canal as he visited Ismailia, en route to the vital trade artery.

The promise came a day after the refloating of the giant container vessel *MV Ever Given*, which hit the eastern bank of the narrow shipping lane last Tuesday and became wedged diagonally across its span for nearly a week.

“We will acquire all the necessary equipment for the canal”, to avoid similar incidents, Sisi declared during his visit to Ismailia, home to the Suez

Canal Authority (SCA). Egyptian authorities have presented the freeing of the mega-ship on Monday as a vindication of the country's engineering and salvage capabilities.

Sisi claimed “success” in the operation after the stern was freed, several hours before the bow of the ship was finally dislodged.

Traffic on the canal began moving again on Monday evening, after tailbacks totalling 425 ships built up to the north and south. On Tuesday morning, maritime tracking sites showed ships exceeding 200,000 tonnes navigating the narrow waterway.

— Reuters/AFP

SHORT TAKES

TEL AVIV

Israel reopens border crossing with Egypt

Israel reopened its border crossing with Egypt on Tuesday, a year after it was shut to slow the spread of the coronavirus. For the time being, 300 vaccinated people are allowed to pass through the Taba crossing every day, Israeli media reported.

Thanks to a steadily decreasing number of infections, Israel has been steadily loosening its coronavirus measures, including lifting the daily quota on the number of arrivals at its main airport.



Just more than three months after the start of the vaccination campaign in Israel, more than 56 per cent of the population has received a first dose and 51 per cent a second dose. — dpa

RAMALLAH

Palestinians get 100,000 Chinese vaccine doses

The Palestinian Authority received 100,000 doses of the Chinese Sinopharm jab on Monday, the largest single batch of coronavirus vaccines yet to reach the Palestinian territories. The PA's vaccination campaign was launched this month after the delivery of thousands of vaccines through the UN's Covax programme for poorer nations.

The Palestinian vaccine roll-out has lagged well behind that of Israel. The latest jabs “represent a commitment to the prom-



ise China made to put vaccines at the service of the world”, Chinese Ambassador to the PA, Guo Wei, told reporters in Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. — AFP

GAZA CITY

Hamas unveils own list for Palestinian polls

Hamas on Monday unveiled its list of candidates for Palestinian elections, ending speculation over a joint list between the movement ruling Gaza and Fatah that runs the West Bank. Legislative polls have been called for May 22 and a presidential vote on July 31, the first Palestinian elections in 15 years.

Hamas won a surprise victory in 2006 but the result was not recognised by Fatah's leader, President Mahmud Abbas,



intensifying divisions. Hamas took power in the Gaza Strip in a week of bloody clashes in 2007, while Fatah has retained control in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. — AFP

In brief

■ MUMBAI

**INDIA RECORDS
56,211 NEW
COVID-19 CASES**

India recorded 56,211 new cases of coronavirus, a slight dip from the country's record-breaking tallies over the last three days, data from the health ministry showed on Tuesday. The country's tally dipped below the 60,000 mark after three days, a Reuters tally showed, with its richest state, Maharashtra, accounting for more than 31,000 of the 56,211 cases reported in the last 24 hours.

Deaths in the last 24 hours stood at 271, and 162,114 have died so far in the pandemic, the health ministry said. Authorities in Maharashtra were considering whether to impose stricter curbs starting on Thursday — **Reuters**

■ ISLAMABAD

**PAKISTAN'S PRESIDENT,
DEFENCE MINISTER
COVID-POSITIVE**

Pakistan's President Arif Alvi said on Monday he had tested positive for Covid-19 after receiving his first dose of an unnamed vaccine, just over a week after a similar announcement from the prime minister.

Soon after on Monday, the country's defence minister Pervez Khattak also said he had tested positive. "We all need to take this third wave very seriously. May Allah protect us all," Khattak added in his message.

Coronavirus cases are rising quickly in the South Asian nation. — **Reuters**

■ TOKYO

**MINISTER APOLOGISES
FOR STAFF BREAKING
PROTOCOLS**

Japan's health minister apologised on Tuesday after media reported ministry employees had gathered at a restaurant late at night in Tokyo in violation of the government's Covid-19 contagion protocols.

Norihiro Tamura confirmed that 23 ministry employees ate dinner together on March 24 and that he would investigate the matter quickly, Kyodo reported.

Tokyo and three surrounding prefectures emerged from a state of emergency over Covid-19 infections on March 21, but the government has continued to ask restaurants to close early at 9 pm and for the public to limit gatherings. — **Reuters**

Asian countries scramble for vaccine

SEOUL/MANILA: Several Asian countries scrambled to find alternative sources for Covid-19 inoculations on Tuesday after export restrictions by manufacturer India left a World Health Organisation-backed global vaccine sharing programme short of supplies.

South Korea, Indonesia and the Philippines are among the countries to be hit by shipment delays to vaccines they have been promised under the COVAX programme, which was created mainly to ensure supplies for poorer countries.

"Our planned increase in daily vaccinations will be affected," Carlito Galvez, Philippines' vaccination chief, told reporters.

India, the world's biggest vaccine maker, put a temporary hold on exports of AstraZeneca's vaccine being manufactured by the Serum Institute of India (SII), as officials focus on meeting rising



A man receives the Sinovac Covid-19 vaccine in front of the Baiturrahman grand mosque in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, on Tuesday. — **AFP**

domestic demand.

The Serum Institute was due to deliver 90 million vaccine doses to COVAX over March and April and, while it was not immediately clear how many would be diverted

for domestic use, programme facilitators warned that shipment delays were inevitable.

South Korea confirmed it would only receive 432,000 doses of the 690,000 it had been promised and

delivery of those would be delayed until around the third week of April.

"There's uncertainty over global vaccine supplies but we're working on a plan to ensure no disruptions

in the second quarter and making efforts to secure more vaccines," Kim Ki-nam, head of South Korea's Covid-19 vaccination task force team. Officials said they were in talks with AstraZeneca to accelerate shipments procured through a separate deal.

Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte loosened government restrictions on private sector imports of vaccines, pleading with companies to obtain supplies no matter the cost, as his country battles a resurgence of the pandemic.

In Vietnam, officials have similarly asked the private sector to step in after their COVAX supplies were slashed by 40% to 811,200 doses and shipments were pushed back by weeks.

In Indonesia, health ministry official Siti Nadia Tarmizi said that 10.3 million doses from COVAX were likely delayed until May.

— **Reuters**

China okays HK's electoral overhaul

BEIJING/HONG KONG: China finalised a sweeping overhaul of Hong Kong's electoral system on Tuesday, Xinhua news agency reported, as authorities seek to ensure "patriots" rule the global financial hub.

The changes would see the number of directly elected representatives fall and the number of Beijing-approved officials rises in an expanded legislature.

As part of the shake-up, a powerful new vetting committee will monitor candidates for public office and work with national security authorities to ensure they



Flags of China and Hong Kong flutter in the wind outside the Legislative Council complex in Hong Kong on Tuesday. — **AFP**

are loyal to Beijing.

Maria Tam, a senior Hong Kong politician who works with China's parliament on matters relating to Hong Kong's mini-constitution said the Committee for Safeguarding National

Security would help the new vetting committee to "understand the background of all of the candidates, specifically whether they had complied with the National Security Law."

— **Reuters**

Pakistan PM replaces finance minister

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan removed his finance minister on Monday as part of a government shake-up aimed at bringing in policies to control "rising inflation", the information minister said.

The removal — the second of a finance minister in the 2-1/2 years of Khan's tenure that witnessed GDP growth falling from 5.6% to -0.4% — coincides with the restart of a \$6 billion IMF bailout programme that had been suspended for one year over questions about fiscal and revenue reforms.



Abdul Hafeez Shaikh

Pakistan is also preparing to float Eurobonds worth around \$2 billion to raise capital from international markets about two months before presenting a budget amid historical remittances and good debt inflows helping to shore up foreign reserves to assist its currency's recovery against the

dollar.

"There has been rising inflation, and the prime minister thinks that we need to bring in a fresh team which could devise pro-poor policies," information minister Shibli Faraz told Dunya News TV.

Faraz said the minister for industries and production Hammad Azhar would replace Abdul Hafeez Shaikh.

"This wasn't expected as investors thought that after the IMF deal Mr Shaikh will present the next budget also," said analyst Mohammed Sohail of Topline Securities. — **Reuters**

Myanmar protesters launch 'garbage strike'

YANGON: Rubbish piled up on the streets of Myanmar's main city on Tuesday after activists launched a "garbage strike" to oppose military rule as the toll of pro-democracy protesters killed by the security forces since a February 1 coup rose to more than 500.

Out of 14 civilians killed on Monday, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) said at least eight were in the South Dagon district of the biggest city, Yangon.

Security forces in the area fired a heavier calibre weapon than usual on Monday towards protesters crouching behind a barricade of sandbags, witnesses said. It was not immediately clear what weapon it was but it was believed to be some type of grenade launcher.

State television said security forces used "riot weapons" to



A relative cries during the funeral of a protester, who died amid a crackdown by security forces on demonstrations, in Taunggyi in Myanmar's Shan state. — **AFP**

disperse a crowd of "violent terrorist people" who were destroying a pavement and one man was wounded.

A South Dagon resident said

on Tuesday security forces had been cracking down in the area overnight, raising concern of more casualties.

"There was shooting all night,"

said the resident who declined to be identified.

Residents found a badly burned body on a street in the morning, the resident said, adding it was

not known what had happened to the person and the military took the body away. Police and a junta spokesman did not answer calls seeking comment.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged Myanmar's generals to stop the killings and repression of demonstrations.

In a new tactic, protesters sought to step up a civil disobedience campaign by asking residents to leave garbage at main road intersections.

"This garbage strike is a strike to oppose the junta," read a poster on social media. "Everyone can join." Pictures posted on social media showed piles of rubbish building up in Yangon.

The campaign comes in defiance of calls issued via loudspeakers in some neighbourhoods of Yangon on Monday urging residents to dispose of garbage properly.

— **Reuters**

Leaders of 23 countries back pandemic treaty



A couple wheel a pram past daffodils in Greenwich Park, southeast London on Tuesday, as England's third Covid-19 lockdown restrictions ease, allowing groups of up to six people to meet outside. — AFP

BRUSSELS: Leaders of 23 countries and the World Health Organization on Tuesday backed an idea to create an international treaty that would help the world deal with future health emergencies like the coronavirus pandemic now ravaging the globe.

The idea of such a treaty, which would ensure universal and equitable access to vaccines, medicines and diagnostics for pandemics, was floated by the chairman of European Union leaders Charles Michel at a G20 summit last November.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus endorsed the idea at its Governing Body in January but formal negotiations have not begun, diplomats say.

The WHO has faced criticism for its handling of the Covid-19

pandemic and was accused by the former US administration of helping China shield the extent of its outbreak, which the agency denies.

On Tuesday, the treaty proposal got the formal backing of the leaders of Fiji, Portugal, Romania, Britain, Rwanda, Kenya, France, Germany, Greece, Korea, Chile, Costa Rica, Albania, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, the Netherlands, Tunisia, Senegal, Spain, Norway, Serbia, Indonesia, Ukraine and the WHO.

“There will be other pandemics and other major health emergencies. No single government or multilateral agency can address this threat alone,” the leaders wrote in a joint opinion article in major newspapers. — **Reuters**

Biden warns ‘we’re in a life-and-death race’

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden implored Americans to maintain precautions and expanded federal efforts to vaccinate the country as signs of a potential new surge in coronavirus cases spawned fears of a deadly fourth wave of infections and deaths.

The president announced on Monday that in three weeks, by April 19, his administration will more than double the number of pharmacies where people can get shots. He also said 90 per cent of American adults will have become eligible for the vaccine by that point, and the final 10 per cent after May 1.

The faster timetable and expanded network of inoculation sites represent an effort to outrun the coronavirus as states loosen restrictions on public gatherings and people are eager to return to normal life. New infections, hospitalisations and deaths are all on the rise, fuelled by looser behaviours and the virus's contagious variants.

“The war against Covid-19 is far from won,” Biden warned at the White House complex. “This is deadly serious.”

“We’re in a life-and-death race with a virus that is spreading quickly,” he added, and “we’re giving up hard-fought, hard-won gains.” Biden urged states to stop loosening restrictions on public gatherings and admonished people against “reckless behaviour.”

He spoke soon after a White House briefing where Rochelle



US President Joe Biden, with Vice-President Kamala Harris, delivers remarks after a meeting with his Covid-19 Response Team on the coronavirus pandemic and the state of vaccinations, on the White House campus in Washington, on Monday. — **Reuters**

“
The war against Covid-19 is far from won... This is deadly serious
JOE BIDEN
US President

Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, told reporters that she felt a sense of “impending doom.”

Her voice cracked as she talked about treating dying patients and seeing the extra mobile morgue parked outside the hospital where she had previously worked in Massachusetts.

“We have so much to look forward to, so much promise and

potential of where we are and so much reason for hope,” she said. “But right now, I’m scared.”

For weeks, public health officials have been warning the country to remain on guard, especially as caseloads stopped declining after winter’s spike of infections.

Numbers are now rising again, and Walensky acknowledged that Americans are tired of the isolation caused by anti-coronavirus restrictions more than one year after the disease was declared a pandemic. But she pleaded for people to continue wearing masks and to keep their distance from one another.

“I’m asking you to just hold on a little while longer, to get vaccinated when you can, so that all of those people that we all love will still be there when this pandemic ends,” she said. — **dpa**

Women dominate judicial nominees

WASHINGTON: President Joe Biden released his first slate of 11 federal judicial nominations on Tuesday, nine of them women of diverse backgrounds including several Black candidates and an Asian American.

“This trailblazing slate of nominees draws from the very best and brightest minds of the American legal profession,” Biden said in a statement that emphasised their “broad diversity of background experience and perspective.”

The nominees, which include nine women, must be confirmed by the US Senate.

The three Black women nominated for federal circuit court vacancies are Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson for the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, Tiffany Cunningham for the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit and Candace Jackson-Akiwumi for the US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit.

Jackson is widely expected to be one of Biden’s top picks if a seat opens on the US Supreme Court.

Zahid N Quraishi, a New Jersey magistrate judge, would be the nation’s first Muslim American to serve on a federal district court.

Judge Florence Pan would be the first Asian-American judge to serve on the US District Court for the District of Columbia, the White House said in a statement. — **Reuters**

Covid probably came to humans from animals: WHO experts

GENEVA: A team of international experts was to present details on Tuesday of their findings from a mission to China, which concluded Covid-19 probably passed to humans from a bat via an intermediary animal, all but ruling out a laboratory leak.

But the report, drafted by World Health Organization-appointed international experts and their Chinese counterparts, offers no definitive answers on how the new coronavirus jumped to humans.

AFP obtained a copy of the final report ahead of its official publication on Tuesday.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the international experts

would hold a press conference on Tuesday at 1400 GMT to discuss their findings, adding that all hypotheses on the pandemic’s origins remained open and needed further study.

Covid-19 has killed more than 2.7 million people worldwide in the 15 months since it emerged, forcing governments around the world to introduce restrictions that have battered the global economy.

Ahead of a meeting with world leaders, UN chief Antonio Guterres called on Monday for more debt relief for the poorest countries struggling with economic fallout from the pandemic.



WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

In the United States, there was good news about progress of its vaccine roll-out, but President Joe Biden warned Americans the battle was far from over.

Mexico, meanwhile, released

Experts believe the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes the Covid-19 disease originally came from bats. The report authors judged that the most likely scenario was that it had made a direct leap to humans

new figures on excess deaths that suggest its official coronavirus death toll — already the third-highest in the world — is a massive underestimate.

The expert report on the origins of Covid-19 has had a troubled birth, with publication

delays adding to the hold-ups and diplomatic wrangling that plagued the WHO’s attempts to get experts into Wuhan — the city at the center of the initial outbreak.

They finally arrived on January 14, more than a year after the first cases surfaced.

Experts believe the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes the Covid-19 disease originally came from bats.

The report authors judged that the most likely scenario was that it had made a direct leap to humans, while not ruling out other theories.

Beijing’s theory that the virus did not originate in China at all but was imported in frozen food was judged “possible” but very

unlikely.

Claims promoted by former US president Donald Trump’s administration that the virus escaped from a research lab were judged “extremely unlikely.”

Meanwhile, UN chief Guterres called for a “new debt mechanism” allowing such options as debt swaps, buy-backs and cancellations to help worse-off countries.

Addressing an online forum that included dozens of world leaders, he said the pandemic has pushed the world to “the verge of a debt crisis” and required “urgent action.”

“We need to change the rules,” he argued. — **AFP**

SHORT TAKES

ROME

Italy to tighten entry curbs from EU countries

Italy wants to tighten the rules for people entering the country from other EU nations. Those travelling to Italy from EU countries will need a coronavirus test on departure and will be quarantined for five days, Health Ministry sources said on Tuesday.

Health Minister Roberto Speranza plans to sign an order to this effect on Tuesday. After the five days, another coronavirus test is to be carried out. A quarantine regulation already applies to travellers from outside the European Union.



ion. It was not initially announced when the regulation would come into force and until when it would be valid. A lockdown applies to the entire country for the Easter weekend. — **dpa**

DUBAI

Bahrain appoints head of mission to Israel

Bahrain has appointed Khalid Al Jalahma as head of its diplomatic mission to Israel, state news agency BNA reported on Tuesday following a deal to establish relations last year. Jalahma was previously director of the operations directorate at Bahrain’s foreign ministry and had also served as deputy chief of mission at the kingdom’s embassy in the United States.

The Israeli foreign ministry said that a team from Bahrain would arrive in Israel in coming



weeks to make the necessary arrangements for the Bahraini embassy.

Bahrain’s move closely followed the UAE’s naming of an ambassador to Israel. — **Reuters**

PARIS

French air strike in Mali killed 19 civilians: UN

The French defence ministry said on Tuesday that an air force strike in Mali had targeted only armed terrorists and said it had reservations about the methodology used in the compilation of a UN report about the case.

According to excerpts from the UN investigation, a French air strike in central Mali on January 3 killed 19 civilians and three armed men, contradicting earlier French statements that only militants were hit.



“The defence ministry reaffirms strongly that on January 3 French armed forces made an air strike targeting an armed terrorist group,” the ministry said in a statement. — **Reuters**

Joy as megaship refloated finally...

HAGER HARABECH
AND MONA SALEM

The *MV Ever Given* was refloated and the Suez Canal reopened to traffic on Monday, sparking relief almost a week after the huge container ship got stuck and blocked a major artery for global trade.

Tugboat crews sounded their foghorns in celebration after the Japanese-owned mega-ship the length of four football fields was fully dislodged from the sandy banks of the Suez.

World oil prices eased on the news of the reopening of the waterway that connects the Mediterranean and the Red Sea and through which more than 10 per cent of world trade passes.

Suez Canal Authority official Khaled Taha told reporters in the city of Ismailia on the Suez that maritime traffic had restarted after the “successful refloating”.

The SCA cautioned, however, that it will take more than three days to clear the traffic jam of ships stuck at the northern and southern ends of the canal. In the hours before the ship was

CANAL SERVICES PROVIDER LETH AGENCIES SAID IN A TWEET THAT THE MV EVER GIVEN HAD BEEN “SAFELY ESCORTED TO GREAT BITTER LAKE” BY THE AUTHORITY

dislodged, the tailbacks had reached 425 vessels.

Canal services provider Leth Agencies said in a tweet that the *MV Ever Given* had been “safely escorted to Great Bitter Lake” by the authority. Forty-three vessels were expected to leave the transit area heading south, it added.

Maritime data company Lloyd’s List said the blockage had held up an estimated \$9.6 billion worth of cargo each day between Asia and Europe.

In the small canal-side village of Manchiyet al Rougoula, residents watched in amazement as the immense container ship left the bank. A father and his family climbed to the roof of their red brick house to get a better view as the ship with at least nine levels of containers slowly passed by.

“We are happy to see the boat move (and) thank God,” said one resident who asked not to be named.

A former SCA chairman, Mohab Mamish, expressed pride in the operation, telling AFP: “I am well and truly overjoyed ... We were able to get

out of a very tight jam.”

On social media too, Egyptians greeted the news with jubilation and shared a flurry of memes, including a video montage of a man representing Egypt triumphantly carrying the ship on his shoulders, to applause from the world.

Ahmed Abbas, a Suez canal employee, shared live footage from the scene on his Facebook account, exclaiming: “Praise be to God, the vessel is finally out! Well done to the SCA boys!”

Egypt has lost some \$12-14 million in transit revenues each day that the ship was stuck, according to the canal authority. Dutch company Boskalis, which played a key role in the rescue operation, said its “team of experts, working in close collaboration with the Suez Canal Authority, successfully refloated” the *MV Ever Given*.

The operation, carried out under time pressure and “the watchful eye of the world”, required 13 tug boats and the dredging of some 30,000 cubic metres of sand, said Peter Berdowski, CEO of Boskalis.

— AFP

WRITE FOR US

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HIGH RISK

Rich nations driving tropical deforestation

MARLOWE HOOD

Rising demand in wealthy countries for dozens of commodities ranging from coffee to soybeans has stepped up the pace of deforestation in the tropics, researchers said.

Even as North America and Europe expand forest cover within their own borders, efforts to slow forest loss in the global south through offset schemes and direct payments have been overwhelmed by these appetites, they reported in the journal *Nature Ecology & Evolution*.

The first country-by-country quantification of how rich-nation imports drive deforestation

showed that each person in G7 nations accounts for, on average, the loss of four trees somewhere else in the world per year.

In 2015, the last year for which figures were available across all the datasets examined, that totalled more than three billion trees, the researchers found.

In five of

those G7 nations — Japan, Germany, France, Britain and Italy — 91 to 99 per cent of their “deforestation footprint” was in foreign countries, half of that in the tropics. That footprint has grown most rapidly in China and India, but per capita, tree loss is still far below that of rich nations.

“Most forests are in poorer countries that are overwhelmed with economic incentives to cut them down,” lead author Nguyen Tien Hoang, an expert in environmental modelling and mapping at the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature in Kyoto, said.

Combining data on forest loss and global supply chains, Hoang and his colleague Keiichiro Kanemoto showed which nations were buying what commodities from where.

Cocoa consumption in Germany, for example, “poses a very high risk to forests” in Ivory Coast and Ghana, Hoang noted. Deforestation in coastal Tanzania, meanwhile, is directly linked to Japanese demand for agricultural products.

In Vietnam, forest loss in the Central Highlands is mainly driven by coffee drinkers in the US, Germany and Italy, while in northern Vietnam the culprit is exported to China, South Korea and Japan.

Palm oil is the main instigator of forest loss in Indonesia, while large swathes of forest in Brazil are destroyed to make way for beef, soybean and sugarcane production.

Among wealthy nations, France has the highest rate of per capita tropical deforestation, with 21 square metres lost in 2015. Germany and Norway were close behind, with Japan, Mexico and the US responsible, per capita, for about 16 square metres.

— AFP

ROCKET RIVALRY

Inter-Korean missile race may leave North Korea with tactical N-weapons

JOSH SMITH

North Korea has surged ahead during recent years in an inter-Korean arms race that has led to a proliferation of short-range missiles on the peninsula and left Pyongyang closer than ever to deploying tactical nuclear weapons.

North Korea’s years-long quest to develop precision missiles capable of evading detection and striking targets in South Korea has accelerated in the wake of the country’s 2018 self-imposed moratorium on testing its larger intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs).

Meanwhile, a 2017 agreement between Washington and Seoul lifted bilateral limits on South Korean missile payloads, leading to the development of at least one heavier weapon that could play a key role in strategies aimed at preempting North Korean attacks or “decapitating” its leadership. The new missiles tested by North Korea last week appear aimed at matching or surpassing South Korea’s quietly expanding arsenal, and are the first such tests since leader Kim Jong Un declared in January that the country could miniaturise nuclear warheads to fit on tactical weapons, underscoring the high stakes for the Biden administration as it mulls options for reducing tensions.

South Korean officials see bigger and better short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) as a way to reduce their dependence on the United States, which stations around 28,500 troops in South Korea. In a speech last year, South Korean Defence Minister Jeong Kyeong-doo boasted that the country had developed a missile with “sufficient range and the world’s largest warhead weight to protect peace on the Korean Peninsula,” referring to the new Hyunmoo-4’s 800-kilometre range and 2-ton payload.



A suspected missile is fired, in this image released by North Korea’s Korean Central News Agency on March 22. — Reuters

A 2017 AGREEMENT BETWEEN US AND SEOUL LIFTED BILATERAL LIMITS ON SOUTH KOREAN MISSILE PAYLOADS, LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AT LEAST ONE HEAVIER WEAPON

It was likely no coincidence, analysts noted, that North Korea said its newest SRBM could carry a 2.5-ton warhead.

In a statement on Tuesday, Kim Yo Jong, the leader’s sister and a powerful politician in North Korea, cited Jeong’s speech in defending the North’s right to develop its own missiles.

“As Seoul has developed new capabilities of this type, Pyongyang has been close behind,” said Joshua Pollack, a researcher at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) who co-wrote a report last year warning that advances in

conventional, precision strike missiles in both Koreas have helped create a new pathway for a crisis to escalate into war.

North Korea says its missiles are for self-defence and has accused South Korea and the United States of threatening its safety with joint military drills, arms purchases, and other hostile policies.

At January’s ruling party congress, Kim announced that North Korea had accumulated technology to “miniaturise, lighten and standardise” nuclear weapons.

— Reuters

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OHA Chairman Talib al Wahaibi with the ambassadors for the Oman bid for Hockey5s World Cup 2023. – Pictures by Faisal al Balushi

Oman launches Hockey5s World Cup bid

OMAN SAIL PARTNERS OHA IN EFFORTS TO LAND THE HOSTING RIGHTS FOR 2023 EVENT

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, MARCH 30

The Sultanate has officially launched its bid to host the first ever Men's and Women's Hockey5s World Cup 2023.

Oman Sail, the sailing body with experience of hosting top-class international events in the country, has joined arms with the Oman Hockey Association (OHA) to prepare and present this bid to the International Hockey Federation (FIH).

Until now, it is learned that apart from Oman, India, Malaysia, South Africa and the Netherlands are in fray to win the rights to host the inaugural World Cup of the fast-paced and shorter format of hockey.

"We believe in our strengths and hope to win the rights to host this prestigious tournament in Oman," OHA Chairman Talib al Wahaibi told a press conference at the Oman Olympic Committee headquarters in Muscat on Tuesday.

Unveiling the details of the bid, Captain Talib said the OHA has the experience of hosting the hockey5s tournaments, a comparatively new format of the game.

"We had organised some club

events of hockey5s like Gulf Cup Fiesta, involving teams in Oman and GCC. So this format is not new for the OHA," he said.

HOCKEY5s LEAGUE

The OHA has also earmarked this season for some hockey5s events and training.

"In fact we were prepared to hold some hockey5s events in last season. But due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation we had curtailed several plans. Anyway, the OHA will include the hockey5s schedule in the upcoming season, including a separate league for hockey5s," Al Wahaibi said.

"The OHA will seek the government support in adding the new league. We thank the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for approving our bid for the World Cup," he added.

He said Oman has a rich pool of young hockey players to fit in for the hockey5s squad.

"We are also looking to get a new coach for hockey5s from the local experts. Local coaches have done a commendable job in the recently concluded His Majesty's Cup."

Shaikh Rashad al Hinai, Under-Secretary for Sports at the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, will head the bid presen-



tation team with the OHA chairman as the assistant.

Three ambassadors were unveiled for Oman's bid with former administrators and players getting the honour.

Eng Dawood al Raisi, Abdul Hussain al Lawati and Tarmah Abdul Hussain will be the ambassadors for the Sultanate's bid at the FIH.

GOOD CHANCE

In reply to a query, the OHA chief said: "We believe Oman has a good chance to win the bid. We are capable of staging the big event and the OHA has the enough expertise to hold it successfully after our success stories in hosting Asian Games qualifiers and Asian Champions Trophy."

He said Oman's existing hockey facilities will be expanded and at least 10 new stadiums will be set up if Oman wins the World Cup rights.

Though Oman have hockey facilities across the country, the event will be staged in Muscat according to the bid file.

"Whatever be the end result of the bid, the OHA is keen on setting up a permanent platform for the hockey5s with a dedicated league, team, coach and facilities," he concluded.



Perera becomes first Lankan to hit six sixes in an over

All-rounder Thisara Perera has become the first Sri Lankan cricketer to hit six sixes off one over during a domestic match in Colombo. The 31-year-old, playing for the Sri Lanka army team, cleared the ropes a total of eight times in his whirlwind unbeaten 52 off 13 balls against the Bloomfield Cricket and Athletic Club.



Smith eyes return to Australia captaincy

Australia batsman Steve Smith has admitted for the first time he wants to regain the captaincy role that was stripped from him in the wake of the ball-tampering scandal. The sanction expired in March last year and Smith said he was ready to wear the captain's armband again if asked.

New Zealand seal Bangladesh T20 series

Black caps were looking shaky at 55 for three before Glenn Phillips smashed an unbeaten 58 off 31 balls

NAPIER, New Zealand: New Zealand downed Bangladesh by 28 runs in a rain-affected second Twenty20 International in Napier Tuesday to secure the three-match series and complete a home sweep against all comers.

New Zealand made 173 for five off 17.5 overs after losing the toss and batting, before the weather ended their innings prematurely.

As a result, Bangladesh's run chase was set at 170 from 16 overs under the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern formula.

There were bizarre scenes as Bangladesh began their innings without a clear target being set, then officials halted play after 1.5 overs while they worked out the sums. "I've experienced a few things in cricket and this is not one of them", New Zealand veteran Ross Taylor said on commentary.

The tourists made 142 for seven before the required run rate proved too much and their innings petered out.

"In the last five or six overs we didn't finish well enough", Bangladesh skipper Mahmudullah said. "There were a few chances that we needed to capitalise on then we might have got away."

Bangladesh will have a final chance to notch their first ever win in New Zealand on Thursday in Auckland.

The result means the Black Caps have won all seven of their home series this season, an unbroken run of success on New Zealand soil that extends to nine if results against India last year are included. It includes defeats over the West Indies, Pakistan and India in Tests, Bangladesh and India in one-dayers and the West Indies, Pakistan, Australia and



New Zealand's Glenn Phillips in action. — AFP

Bangladesh in T20s.

"It's been a great summer to be part of, so it'd be good to finish it on the right note", said stand-in captain Tim Southee.

Mahmudullah said before the match that he was wary of "flying Kiwis" and openers Martin Guptill and Finn Allen proved him right, slogging 36 off the first four overs.

But the Black caps were looking shaky at 55 for three before Glenn Phillips smashed an unbeaten 58 off 31 balls. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

NEW ZEALAND	Liton Das c Phillips b Bennett6
M Guptill c Taskin b Saifuddin21	Soumya Sarkar c Milne b Southee51
F Allen c Naim b Taskin17	Mahmudullah b Milne21
D Conway c Mithun b Shoriful15	Aff Hossain b Milne2
W Young st Liton Das b Hasan14	M Mithun c Conway b Southee1
G Phillips not out58	Mahedi not out12
M Chapman c & b Mahedi7	M Saifuddin c Southee b Bennett3
D Mitchell not out34	Taksim Ahmed not out0
Extras: (b1, lb2, w2, nb2)7	Extras: (b1, lb1, nb1, w5)8
Total: (5 wickets; 17.5 overs) 173	Total: (7 wickets; 16 overs) 142
Fall of wickets: 1-36, 2-55, 3-55, 4-94, 5-111	Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-94, 3-110, 4-123, 5-124, 6-126, 7-137
Bowling: Nasum 4-0-25-0, Saifuddin 3-0-35-1, Taskin 3.5-0-49-1, Shoriful 3-0-16-1, Mahedi 4-0-45-2	Bowling: Southee 4-0-21-2, Bennett 3-0-31-2, Milne 3-0-34-2, Sodhi 3-0-34-0, Phillips 3-0-20-1
BANGLADESH	
M Naim c Guptill b Phillips38	



Kraigg Brathwaite of West Indies hits a four during the first day of the second Test against Sri Lanka at Vivian Richards Cricket Stadium in North Sound. — AFP

Patient Brathwaite on 99 against 'disciplined' Sri Lanka bowling

NORTH SOUND, Antigua and Barbuda: Kraigg Brathwaite batted through the day for an unbeaten 99 as the West Indies reached a respectable 287 for seven at stumps on the opening day of the second and final Test against Sri Lanka at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua on Monday.

Personifying patience and perseverance in a manner so typical of the right-handed opening batsman, Brathwaite did all he could to defy a bowling attack in which senior seamer Suranga Lakmal again led the line. Put in on a pitch which offered some assistance to the seam bowlers, Brathwaite's gritty defiance was necessary after Lakmal had claimed the early honours for the visitors with two early wickets and added the scalp of the struggling Jermaine Blackwood in the afternoon session to end the day with three for 71 from 20 overs.

With opening partner John Campbell gone along with first Test century-maker Nkrumah

Bonner within the space of a few deliveries to Lakmal in the first hour, West Indies captain Brathwaite was content to let the attacking Kyle Mayers have his way in a third-wicket partnership of 71. The left-hander riding his luck to 49 only to fall in the first over of the afternoon to Vishwa Fernando.

Dhananjaya de Silva, fellow spinner Lasith Embuldeniya and Sri Lanka's other seamer, Dushmantha Chameera, took a wicket each to then have the West Indies languishing at 222 for seven in the final session of the day.

However Brathwaite found another resolute partner in Rahkeem Cornwall, the burly off-spinner enhancing his claims to becoming a genuine all-rounder with an unbeaten 43 in a partnership which has realised 65 runs so far for the eighth wicket.

Brathwaite's innings has spanned six-and-a-half hours in which he faced 239 balls and struck 11 fours. — AFP

Orient take on Maniz Azad, Aflag face Pitspot in finals

MUSCAT: Orient Travels thrashed Douglas OHI in the semifinal of the Senior Knockout tournament by 75 runs at Muscat Municipality ground 1, setting up a title showdown on April 2 at the same venue with Maniz Azad, who won a walkover against Al Hail CT A in the other semifinal on March 26 in Al Amerat.

The Junior Knockout final will see Aflag Group taking on Pitspot at Muscat Municipality ground 2 the same day.

Orient Travels posted an imposing total of 199 for 8 on the board thanks to brilliant batting by Adil Khan (80), Gurvir Singh (47) and Nadeem Karamat (32). Abdul Rehman was the pick of OHI bowlers, taking 4 for 36.

Facing a big total, OHI failed to rise to the occasion, folding up for a dismal 124 in the final over. Mohsin Alimamad top-

scored with 26. Ihsan Khan, Gurvir and Nadeem Karamat all bagged two wickets each.

Arif bowls Aflag to vital win

Mohammed Arif Khattak's superb 3 for 27 was instrumental in Aflag Group's 5-wicket win over Israr Ghala in the first semifinal of the Junior Knockout tournament at Muscat Municipality ground 3 on Friday.

Invited to bat first, Israr Ghala scored 171 all out in 20 overs with Muhammed Sagheer (43) and Muhammed Abubakar (39) making major contributions. Apart from Arif's brilliant bowling, Arnold Lewis and Junaid Iqbal bowled well too, taking two wickets each.

Determined to make the most of the opportunity to reach the final, Aflag batted



Mohazin Moosa of Pitspot

well to surpass the total in the final over, scoring 173 for 5 thanks to vital knocks from Farrukh Jamal (34), Haris Alam (31) and Thyagu Subramanian (27).

Moosa, Fasil star in Pitspot victory

In the other Junior Knockout semifinal, Mohazin Moosa's crucial 40 and Valiyapee Fasil's 3 for 26 were the highlights of Pitspot's thrilling 4-wicket victory against Vanderlande at Muscat Municipality ground 4 on Friday.

Fasil's superb spell was the reason Vanderlande was restricted to 151 for 8 despite a solid 63 by Barathwaj Vinayagam.

Pitspot's successful chase was led by Mohazin's 28-ball 40 and Wajid's 32 off 29 as they sealed victory in 19.4 overs, scoring 152 for 6. Rahul Chadha took 2 for 30.

BRIEF SCORES

1st semifinal – Knockout Senior

Orient Travels/Gitacs 199 for 8 in 20 overs (Adil Khan 80 – 9x4, 1x6, Gurvir Singh 47 – 4x4, 3x6, Nadeem Karamat 32 – 2x4. Abdul

Rehman 4-36) thrashed Douglas OHI 124 all out in 19.4 overs (Mohsin Alimamad 26 – 2x4, Santosh Wishwakar 25 – 4x4, Abhishek Rai 24 – 4x4. Ihsan Khan 2-21, Gurvir Singh 2-22, Nadeem Karamat 2-26) by 75 runs.

2nd semifinal – Knockout Senior
Maniz Azad International reached the final as Al Hail CT A did not turn up for the game.

1st semifinal – Knockout Junior
Israr Ghala 171 all out in 19.3 overs (Muhammed Sagheer 43 – 4x4, Muhammed Abubakar 39 – 3x4, 1x6, Mohammed Wajid 31 – 5x4, 1x6. Mohammed Arif Khattak 3-27, Arnold Lewis 2-22, Junaid Iqbal 2-23) lost to Aflag Group 173 for 5 in 19.4 overs (Farrukh Jamal 34 – 5x4, Haris Alam 31 – 3x4, Thyagu Subramanian 27 – 1x4, 1x6) by 5 wickets.

2nd semifinal – Knockout Junior
Vanderlande 151 for 8 in 20 overs (Barathwaj Vinayagam 63 – 5x3, 1x6, Sebastian Cyril 31 – 3x4, Asfak Ahamed 29 – 2x4. Valiyapee Fasil 3-26, Aneesh Chaziyottil 2-35) lost to Pitspot 152 for 6 in 19.4 overs (Mohazin Moosa 40 – 3x4, Wajid Ali 32 – 3x4, Gopakumar Gopala 24 – 3x4. Rahul Chadha 2-30) by 4 wickets.



Sergio Aguero

Aguero's City exit Kick-starts Manchester race to sign Haaland



Erling Haaland

MANCHESTER, England: Sergio Aguero's departure from Manchester City looks set to kick-start a "derby" between City and Manchester United for the signature of Europe's hottest striking talent - Borussia Dortmund's Erling Haaland.

City announced on Monday that their all-time top scorer Aguero would leave the club at the end of the season, leaving manager Pep Guardiola, who has only one other central striker in Gabriel Jesus, badly in need of a top-quality striker.

The 20-year-old Haaland, widely reported to be City's number one choice, was close to joining local rivals Manchester

United last January before moving to Dortmund.

United remain firmly interested in signing the prolific forward who worked under their Norwegian manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer as an emerging talent with Molde.

Haaland's goalscoring record is extraordinary: Since joining Dortmund from RB Salzburg he has scored 49 goals in 49 games in all competitions. At the highest level, in the Champions League, Haaland has scored 12 goals in eight games.

The blond-haired striker made his mark with eight goals in six Champions League games with Salzburg along with 29 in 27 appearances in the Austrian

CITY ANNOUNCED ON MONDAY THAT THEIR ALL-TIME TOP SCORER AGUERO WOULD LEAVE THE CLUB AT THE END OF THE SEASON

league. Last year he was available for just 20 million euros based on a buyout clause in his deal with Salzburg, and given Solskjaer's relationship with Haaland, United were confident of signing the continent's most exciting goalscorer at a bargain price.

But Haaland's agent Mino Raiola, who is also Paul Pogba's representative, has had a turbulent

relationship with the Old Trafford hierarchy, whom he has publicly criticised.

The forward opted to join Dortmund, but Raiola suggested on Tuesday that may have been a mistake.

"With Haaland, everybody was wrong. He did things much quicker than everybody imagined," the Dutch-Italian

agent told The Athletic website.

"Haaland is in front of his own development. He is ahead of his own schedule. Maybe I was too careful when I said, 'Oh no, let's move to Dortmund instead of I-don't-know-where,'" he said.

"I'm 100 per cent convinced and everybody's convinced — (he) can move to any club, wherever he wants, already on this level. And he could have done that last year," he said.

United recently promoted John Murtough to be their Football Director, effectively heading the club's transfer strategy, and he will quickly be under pressure to deliver some major upgrades for Solskjaer ahead of next season.

United have struggled to land high-profile targets in recent years, and as well as missing out on Haaland, failed to reach agreement with Dortmund on England winger Jadon Sancho last year.

City have a much better record in signing their top targets, and adding to the mix, Haaland's father Alf-Inge also played for the club.

United and City each have the resources to make the right offer to both Dortmund and the player, but it would be no surprise if other top European clubs were to join the race in what could become a record-breaking deal.

— Reuters

Osaka advances, Barty ousts Azarenka at Miami Open

MIAMI: Reigning US and Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka advanced to the Miami Open quarterfinals on Monday, stretching her win streak to 23 matches by defeating Belgian 16th seed Elise Mertens 6-3, 6-3.

The second-ranked Japanese star will next face Greek 23rd seed Maria Sakkari, who outlasted US 29th seed Jessica Pegula 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (8/6) at the WTA and ATP Masters Series event.

"I started off really well and then for some reason I became a little sluggish. My speed didn't really feel the same," Osaka said.

"I thought it was really mental from then on. In the end, it was who fought the hardest."

Four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka broke at love for a 2-0 lead and broke again for a 5-1 edge but Mertens broke Osaka at love in the seventh game and denied four set points for Osaka to hold in an eighth game that lasted almost 10 minutes.

Osaka, seeking her first Miami crown, saved a break point with her third ace and finally finished off the first set on her seventh chance with a service winner.

In the second set, Osaka needed her fifth chance of the third game to break Mertens, only for the Belgian to quickly break back to 2-2 and hold to 3-2 before requiring treatment for a right shoulder injury.

Osaka won the last four games



Naomi Osaka of Japan hits a forehand against Elise Mertens of Belgium at the Miami Open.
— USA Today Sports

after that, breaking at love in the seventh game, holding at love in the eighth and breaking again to end matters after 88 minutes when Mertens netted a forehand.

Top-ranked defending champion Ashleigh Barty battled into the quarter-finals by outlasting former world number one Victoria Azarenka 6-1, 1-6, 6-2. Australia's Barty broke five times, the last when Azarenka netted a forehand volley to end

matters after one hour and 52 minutes at Hard Rock Stadium.

Barty, who had to save a match point on the way to a three-set victory over Kristina Kucova in the second round, plays on Tuesday against seventh seed Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus, who downed Czech 19th seed Marketa Vondrousova 6-1, 6-2. "I'm just excited I get to be in another quarterfinal of a big event," Barty said. "I still feel like there's a lot

better tennis left out there for me. I still don't feel like I'm playing my very best just yet, but I'm fighting through and I'm finding ways to win, which is great."

Ukraine's fifth-seeded Elina Svitolina rallied to defeat Czech ninth seed Petra Kvitova 2-6, 7-5, 7-5. "I'm really happy with how I bounced back from being a set down," Svitolina said. Svitolina's quarterfinal foe will be Latvia's 57th-ranked Anastasija Sevastova,

who eliminated Croatia's 338th-ranked Ana Konjuh 6-1, 7-5.

TSITSIPAS, RUBLEV WIN

On the men's side, Greek second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas defeated Japanese 28th seed Kei Nishikori 6-3, 3-6, 6-1 after an hour and 56 minutes to reach the last 16.

Tsitsipas will next face Italian 24th seed Lorenzo Sonego, who dispatched Colombian Daniel

Galan 7-6 (8/6), 6-3.

Russian fourth seed Andrey Rublev routed Hungarian 29th seed Marton Fucsovics 6-2, 6-1, to reach the fourth round.

"I've played some great tennis last couple of months," Rublev said. "We'll see if I can keep going."

The 23-year-old from Moscow will next face Croatia's 32-year-old Marin Cilic, the world number 45 who beat Italy's 19-year-old Lorenzo Musetti 6-3, 6-4. — AFP

ATP/WTA MIAMI OPEN RESULTS

Men (third round)

Diego Schwartzman (ARG x5) bt Adrian Mannarino (FRA x25) 6-1, 6-4; Sebastian Korda (USA) bt Aslan Karatsev (RUS x17) 6-3, 6-0; Marin Cilic (CRO) bt Lorenzo Musetti (ITA) 6-3, 6-4; Andrey Rublev (RUS x4) bt Márton Fucsovics (HUN x29) 6-2, 6-1; Hubert Hurkacz (POL x26) bt Denis Shapovalov (CAN x6) 6-3, 7-6 (8/6); Milos Raonic (CAN x12) bt Ugo Humbert (FRA x20) 6-4, 7-5; Lorenzo Sonego (ITA x24) bt Daniel Galán (COL) 7-6 (8/6), 6-3; Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE x2) bt Kei Nishikori (JPN x28) 6-3, 3-6, 6-1

Women (third round)

Ashleigh Barty (AUS x1) bt Victoria Azarenka (BLR x14) 6-1, 1-6, 6-2; Aryna Sabalenka (BLR x7) bt Markéta Vondrousová (CZE x19) 6-1, 6-2; Anastasija Sevastova (LAT) bt Ana Konjuh (CRO) 6-1, 7-5; Elina Svitolina (UKR x5) bt Petra Kvitová (CZE x9) 2-6, 7-5, 7-5; Bianca Andreescu (CAN x8) bt Garbine Muguruza (ESP x12) 3-6, 6-3, 6-2; Sara Sorribes (ESP) bt Ons Jabeur (TUN x27) 6-4, 0-6, 6-1; Maria Sakkari (GRE x23) bt Jessica Pegula (USA x29) 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (8/6); Naomi Osaka (JPN x2) bt Elise Mertens (BEL x16) 6-3, 6-3

features



Painting with a humanitarian message

At 18, Jood al Hinai wanted to be an artist that makes a difference. Not only working on developing her originality, she has also ventured into tackling art that speaks about different relevant social issues. She has also used some of this art to launch some merchandise... **P14**

INSIDE STORIES

HUMAN INTEREST



A YOUNG FILIPINO ARTIST'S DEATH REKINDLES MEMORIES OF HIS LOVE FOR OMAN

His friends and the artist circle in Oman will always remember him to be a sweet soul. To their recollection, he is a kind of person who is passionate about his work and gave out several mesmerising works... **Story on P16**

TRAVEL TALES



SAKURA SELFIES: TOKYO ENJOYS CHERRY BLOSSOMS DESPITE VIRUS WARNING

People in Tokyo flocked to admire cherry blossoms in full bloom at parks, shrines and rivers on Friday, despite coronavirus warnings against holding traditional parties under the delicate flowers... **Story on Page 15**

READ



THE FAULT IN OUR STARS

BY JOHN GREEN GENRE

This book is about a young teenage girl who has been diagnosed with lung cancer and attends a cancer support group. Hazel is 16 and is reluctant to go to the support group, but she soon realises that it was a good idea. Hazel meets a young boy named Augustus Waters.

LOCAL SCENE



OURAYAT DIVERS SPREADING AWARENESS ON MARINE PRESERVATION

The volunteer diving team in Qurayat Club carried out 11 campaigns and initiatives to clean up debris, waste and nets at the bottom of the sea while practising their diving exercise... **Story on Page 15**

CONSERVATION



BULLDOZERS AND LOOTING THREATEN LIBYA'S ANCIENT TREASURES

The spectacular ruins of the ancient Greek city of Cyrene survived Libya's 2011 revolution and an ensuing decade of lawlessness, but today they face new threats: plunder and bulldozers... **Story on Page 14**



Painting with a humanitarian message

BY AL ANOOD AL WAHAIBI

For young Omani artist Jood al Hinai, originality in art is very important. One might take inspiration from others, but a real artist should stop imitating others and create their own. At 18, Jood has already been establishing herself as one of the emerging artists in Oman. Launching her own page Joodcreations on social media, she showcases her realistic acrylic painting but it's not just the style and design she focuses on, she has an even bigger message to send across. At her young age, Al Hinai believes that artists should stay relevant which is why she considers herself painting for a humanitarian cause. Through her work, she highlights some important issues plaguing the world today. One of these paintings with a message is called "Child Sewing", her way of putting into conversation the issues of child labour. For Jood, in order to stop this very despicable trade, people should be made aware of what is considered child labour and only when people are exposed to the truth will they be forced to confront it. By confronting it, there is a bigger chance to revolve it.

The theme of the painting is "realism" and this movement of art appeared in the 19th century representing different activities of life and child labour was one aspect. "Although in the painting, the two little girls seem very content, child labour is one of the alarming issues happening at a global level and some countries had been fighting it. Luckily, this is not an issue here in Oman", she explained. She added, "The two girls, who are my two little sisters, seem to enjoy sewing because they are doing it willingly. I wanted to show the innocence that many children around the world are deprived of." "Child Sewing" was completed with mixed emotions according to Jood. It took her almost one month to finish it due to her chores and school works. According to Al Hinai, for her to finish an artwork, "it depends on the level of excitement I show towards the painting and also my other commitments. Sometimes it takes days, weeks, and sometimes it goes till months." Al Hinai has been exploring different mediums and techniques to paint on when it comes to acrylics painting. One of her artworks was a painting on doughnuts and macaroons rather than a canvas, where she was inspired by an artist on the

social media platform Instagram, called Petrichoro. When painting on macaroons and doughnuts, it was Al Hinai's first time trying something different than painting on canvas. She further adds that the experience was "very fun and exciting to try, and something that is out of the box". Jood started sharing her artwork across social media in 2017. She was not as confident as she is now but she thought that one should start from somewhere. "People were just looking for perfection", she explained. However, after a while, her confidence began to grow and a huge transformation has been seen now compared to the beginning of her journey. "Social media is full of different kinds of people, some will support you and others will discourage you. You need to understand that there will be negative and positive sides", Al Hinai said. Al Hinai said that some negative criticisms had an impact on artists. When one is thrown so many criticisms, it can make them feel discouraged to showcase their art.



"I had my share of critics and there was a point I almost stopped. However, there were those sweet people who kept sending me good feedback. I decided to continue and accept negative reviews. I started with a humble number of followers, then the number jumped as many came to appreciate my work", she said. Today, Al Hinai sells bags with three of her paintings printed on them. The support and the excitement coming from her friends, family and her followers on social media is one of the reasons that made her start printing on tote bags and selling them. "I'm very grateful for every bit of support I received from my social media followers", Al Hinai expressed. You can find Jood al Hinai's paintings on Instagram: **joodcreations** and Twitter: **Joodalhinai_**

CONSERVATION

Bulldozers and looting threaten Libya's ancient treasures



THE SPECTACULAR ruins of the ancient Greek city of Cyrene survived Libya's 2011 revolution and an ensuing decade of lawlessness, but today they face new threats: Plunder and bulldozers. Under balmy spring sunshine, a handful of tourists take advantage of the North African country's months-old ceasefire to wander around the temple of Zeus, perched atop a wind-battered hill near the eastern end of Libya's Mediterranean coast. There are no queues here. The scarce visitors — all Libyans — amble through the sanctuary of Apollo and the amphitheatre, before visiting a museum housing faceless busts of Greek divinities and naked statues in marble. Founded in the seventh century BC, Cyrene "was one of the principal cities in the Hellenic world", according to the UN's cultural agency Unesco, which added the site to its World Heritage List in 1992. "A thousand years of history is written into its ruins", it said. Yet beyond the fence marking out the protected part of Cyrene, residents of modern-day Shahat are taking possession of lands held in trust by the state, then selling them on to property developers. Other areas are being dug up by treasure-seekers hoping to smuggle looted artefacts to sell abroad. "Some people are coming in and bulldozing areas containing artefacts, dividing them and selling them, then building housing blocks on top of these priceless sites", said Adel Abu Fejra, of the Cyrene department of antiquities. **THIS IS OUR LAND** Abu Fejra said his department "can't even measure" how much has been lost, as the plots "are outside the fenced area under our protection". Cyrene lies between the Egyptian border and Benghazi, one of the key cities that rose up against longtime dictator Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. The country has since fallen into anarchy and violence which sparked fears for its rich ancient heritage. Unesco in 2016 added Cyrene and four other sites in Libya to its List of World Heritage in Danger. The war saw the country splinter into fiefdoms under the control of a kaleidoscope of militias — including the IS group which at one point held a stronghold in Derna, just 70 kilometres (45 miles) further east. Today, despite the signing of a peace deal between Libya's main factions and the creation of a unity government this month, many residents have more immediate concerns than protecting ancient heritage. "They want us to stop using our land around the ruins, saying there are still artefacts underneath them — but this is our land, and we have the right to exploit it", said Saad Mahmoud, who owns farmland nearby. "It's up to the state to find solutions and pay land-owners compensation that fits with the rising prices of real estate, which have made it hard for us to find alternatives."

GRAFFITI AND LOOTING Like Mahmoud, many of Shahat's 50,000 residents see the pressing need for housing as a higher priority than preserving old ruins. A town plan last updated in 1986 has been largely ignored. Ismail Dakhil, an official at the museums department of eastern Libya, says as much as 30 per cent of the ancient city may have been built on. And that is not the only problem. "There has been graffiti on the ancient ruins, and lots of informal digs, where antiquities are dug up and smuggled out of the country", he said. Libya does have laws aimed at protecting its ancient heritage, overseeing archaeological digs and sanctioning violators. But Dakhil says they have little effect, with "derisory fines and prison sentences" of up to a maximum of a year. Some are now hoping that after a decade of violence the new government will also improve protection of precious historical sites. "The policies on protecting heritage must be reviewed", says researcher and historian Ahmad Faraj. "I hope this government will come up with a new vision."

— AFP



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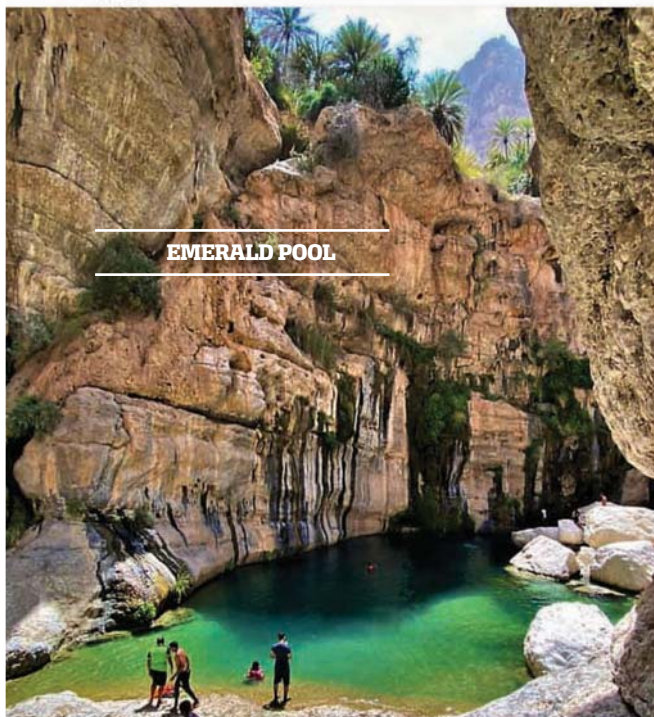
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CHANGING WORLD

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TRAVEL TALES

Qurayat Divers spreading awareness on marine preservation

THE VOLUNTEER diving team in Qurayat Club carried out 11 campaigns and initiatives to clean up debris, waste and nets at the bottom of the sea while practising their diving exercise.

The team strives to achieve leadership in spreading marine awareness in order to preserve marine environmental life to keep our seas blue, clean and safe.

The idea of forming this team was necessary based on the observations of divers in the wilayat as they were concerned about the status of the deep waters in the Sultanate. In previous dives, they have spotted lots of waste in the deep.

Jumah al Ameri, a diving coach and chairman of the volunteer diving team, said, "The team included a group of Omani youth and it started with 27 members, including a diving instructor, diving guide, rescue diver and an advanced trained diver." He added that the team carried out its first initiative in the Ras Abu Dawud marine



area in Qurayat. The team remove the stuck nets in the coral reefs and pulled out anchors stuck between the rocks and lifted the piles of ropes. The team also removed the waste that negatively affected marine life, and they prepared the place for divers who practice diving in these sites to encourage them to practice their hobby in a clean and safe marine environment, noting that the volume of waste that was recovered in the first campaign was

about 800 kilograms.

Khalid al Haddabi, Director of the Department of Fisheries Development in the Wilayat of Qurayat, said, "The volunteer diving team offers clear initiatives for the marine environment in order to preserve and sustain it, and to create a cooperative society which is reflected in enhancing the economic return for the fisherman and society."



Sakura selfies: Tokyo enjoys cherry blossoms despite virus warning



PEOPLE IN Tokyo flocked to admire cherry blossoms in full bloom at parks, shrines and rivers on Friday, despite coronavirus warnings against holding traditional parties under the delicate flowers.

Annual festivals have been cancelled, fluorescent tape used to cordon off picnic spots and signs put up urging people to "refrain from gathering to enjoy the cherry blossoms".

But many people, mostly wearing masks, decided to make the most of Friday's clear blue skies to snap "sakura" selfies, stroll down

infections recorded on Thursday.

"We fear there may be a sudden spread of infections — bigger than the third wave — if the number of people going out increases, as it does each year with cherry blossom viewing, welcome parties (for new employees and students) and graduation trips", said Norio Ohmagari, Director of Japan's Disease Control and Prevention Centre, on Thursday.

Japan's sakura or cherry blossom season is feverishly anticipated by locals and visitors alike, although this year



blossom-lined paths or take boat rides under the pink-and-white blooms.

Despite a third wave of Covid-19 infections over the winter, Japan has had a comparatively small outbreak overall with around 9,000 deaths and has not imposed the blanket lockdowns seen in other countries.

The Japanese government this week lifted a virus state of emergency in the Tokyo area but city Governor Yuriko Koike has warned residents to "avoid cherry blossom viewing parties" to prevent a resurgence of the disease.

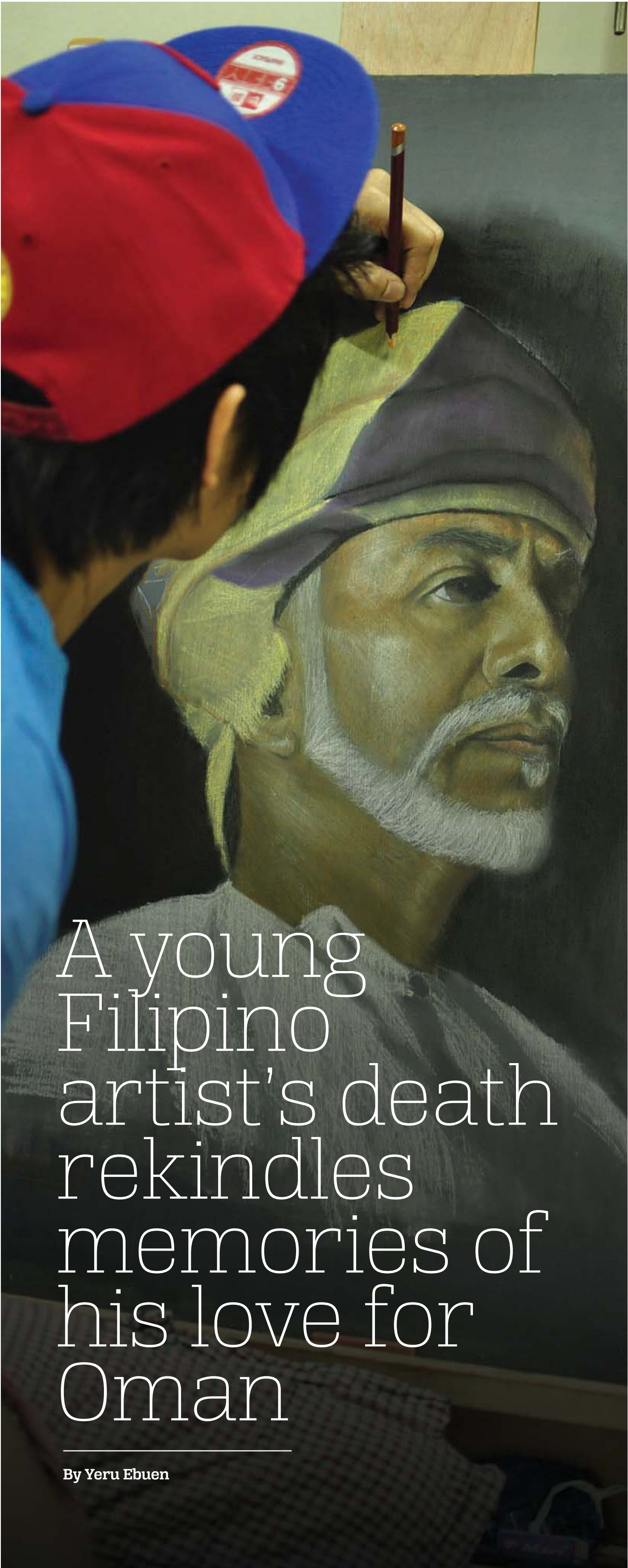
The number of coronavirus cases in Tokyo is gradually rising, with 394 new

foreign tourists have been kept away by virus border restrictions.

Cherry blossoms symbolise the fragility of life in Japanese culture as full blooms only last about a week before the petals start falling off trees.

It is traditionally celebrated with hanami, or viewing parties, with picnics — and sometimes boozy festivities — organised beneath the trees.

The season is also considered one of change as it marks the start of the new business year, with many university graduates starting their first full-time jobs and older colleagues shifting to new positions. — AFP



A young
Filipino
artist's death
rekindles
memories of
his love for
Oman

By Yeru Ebuen

His friends and the artist circle in Oman will always remember him to be a sweet soul. To their recollection, he is a kind of person who is passionate about his work and gave out several mesmeris-

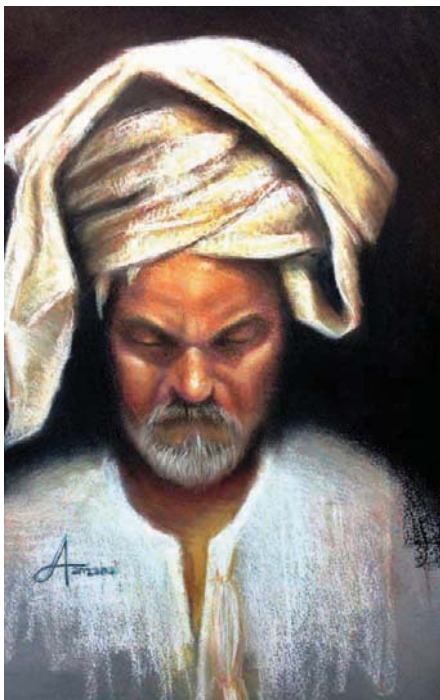
through his Youtube channel where he did timelapse of his artwork. Amongst the many comments, one fellow artist commented his detailed artwork describing his drawings as 'perfect.' Another commented



ing works. The fact is, Aryel Llanzana loved Oman — its people, its culture, its history and was very fond of the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos. It's possible that he saw a shared connection between Oman and the Philippines, his home country, from the warmth to the hospitality and for a deep appreciation for the nostalgic past.

At one point in his career,

on his potential as an artist and one lamented that his death is a great loss to the art world. In a video interview shared by fellow artist Gailani Ibrahim, Aryel showed the creative and pained artist who took inspiration from a sad experience — the passing of his mother. This experience would resonate with many of his art — the nostalgia and the longing, the soft



while in Oman, he was part of the 46th National Day art special called "A Tribute to Oman: Places, People & Passion" where he showcased different works that symbolised Oman to him. Held in City Seasons Hotel in Muscat between November 2 and December 5, the artwork he displayed was only a very curated few of the many other works he did — all showcas-

side and appreciation for old people. Aryel, while in Oman, and wherever he went after, had been an avid supporter of other artists and had constantly been sharing techniques with fellow artists. Even while in Muscat, he was teaching art classes to children passing what he knew to the younger generation. Gone at a young age, Aryel's



ing Oman in a very good light, all showcasing his mastery of light and techniques. Aryel's untimely passing was said to be due to Pneumonia and an outpouring of appreciation on social media speaks to the impact he has made not only on people he met but people who have seen his art especially

contribution to Oman are some of his unique artworks detailing his love for the country. From beautifully drawn Arabian horses to laboured faces of old Omani men and women to the kind face of HM Sultan Qaboos — Aryel left the kind of legacy that is now sung with appreciation by his peers.

business

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Plan to create 800 power sector jobs for Omanis

KEY TARGET: Omanisation to rise to 90 per cent at end of training programme

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 30

Nama Holding, the umbrella organisation of state-owned power generation, transmission, distribution and related businesses, has embarked on a strategy to train as many as 800 Omanis for jobs in the electricity sector.

This was announced by the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), the sector regulator, citing Article 22 of the Law on Regulating and Privatizing the Electricity and Related Water Sector promulgated by Royal



An Omanisation strategy drawn up by Nama Holding and licensed electricity companies calls for subcontractors and service providers to gradually Omanise positions held by expatriates in different parts of the Sultanate

Decree 78/2004. Article 22 commits licensed companies and service providers to supporting Omanisation in the power sector.

An Omanisation strategy drawn up by Nama Holding and licensed electricity companies calls for subcontractors and service providers to gradually Omanise positions held by expatriates in different parts of the Sultanate.

This programme aims to

provide an opportunity to train and employ 800 young Omanis in various technical positions. Nama Holding, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, will select the candidates and train them through specialised programmes that include practical and theoretical training.

Thereafter, the trainees will be enrolled in on-the-job training programme ahead of their regularisation. Significantly, the programme will contribute to raising the current Omanisation rate from 47 per cent to nearly 90 per cent upon its conclusion. This target is in line with the Authority's strategy to raise the Omanisation rates in the electricity sector — part of its strategy to implement Oman Vision 2040 by developing Omani skillsets in the electricity sector.

Duqm Port an ideal 'safe haven' for ships impacted by Suez blockage



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 30

Port of Duqm, which anchors the sprawling special economic zone at Duqm overlooking the Arabian Sea, has invited shipping lines affected by the backlog of vessels making their way through the newly reopened Suez Canal to make use of the Omani port as a 'safe haven' until normality in services is fully restored.

The announcement came early on Monday, just before news emerged that the Ever Giver, the mega containership that had been wedged for nearly a week in the canal, had been refloated.

"Port of Duqm is ready to mitigate the challenging situation being faced by the shipping operators who have their ships stuck on the Red seaside of the Suez Canal, due to the grounding of the vessel in the key transitway connecting the East and West trade route.

These ships, mostly carrying shipments bound for Europe, N Africa and US East Coast, can explore the options of offloading their containers or their cargo at Port of Duqm for temporary storage and later on, through the deployment of specific Relief ships of varying sizes, decide to clear these back

logs for final delivery to the destination points," the Omani port said in a series of posts on Twitter.

"By doing so, the major take away for the shipping operators would be a lesser disturbance to the service rotation of the round voyage so that ships on the East-West long-haul services which are the major ones greatly affected can get back to their proforma schedule as quickly as possible," it stated.

Duqm Port, a partnership between the Omani government and Port of Antwerp, Belgium, cited its "excellent nautical access and marine services including bunkering, five terminals (Multipurpose, RoRo, Container, Navy, DryBulk), a Dry Dock capability within the port," as ideally placed to serve as a sanctuary for ships impacted by the blockage.

"Port of Duqm is a deep draft port of 18m which can handle mega ships up to 20,000 TEU capacity. Today, it is equipped with enough handling equipment such as harbour cranes to operate independently 24/7.

"The container berth measuring approximately 1,200m, out of a total quay length of 2,200m, has a storage yard capacity designed to hold over 1.2million TEU," it stated.

Further clarity awaited on VAT for Oman's oil and gas industry

Executive regulations: While upstream and midstream activities are zero-rated for VAT, downstream activities likely to be standard rated at 5 per cent

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](https://twitter.com/conradprabhu)

Oil & Gas activities will be zero-rated for Value Added Tax (VAT) only for the upstream and midstream segments of Oman's hydrocarbon business — a key source of revenue for — Omani economy.

According to tax experts of leading multinational professional services network PwC, downstream elements of the business — encompassing refining and petrochemicals — are likely to be standard rated at five per cent VAT, going by the Executive Regulations issued by the Tax Authority recently.

The tax experts however hastened to stress that further clarity on the applicability of VAT for the Oil & Gas industry when sector-specific tax guides are issued by the Tax Authority ahead of the formal implementation of VAT starting from April 16, 2021.

The comments came in a recent podcast, titled 'PwC Energy, Utilities & Resources Series — What do the new Oman VAT regulations mean for the Oil & Gas industry?'

A number of PwC tax executives offered their perspectives on the implications of VAT for the Sultanate's pivotal energy sector. While the VAT Law promulgated last October allows for zero rating on oil and gas



products, Executive Regulations issued last week further build on this definition by affirming that supplies of Oil & Gas, along with their derivatives, can also be zero rated for VAT.

Accordingly, the zero rating will apply to related goods and services linked to the supply of oil and gas, they noted. Significantly, this zero-rating applies only to primary and intermediate oilfield activities, which correspond to the upstream and midstream segments of the Oil & Gas business, an executive said.

"So for upstream producers, the supplies with relation to exploration and production and extraction will be zero rated; the domestic production of oil and gas also will be zero rated, and any subcontractors involved in services in the production of

Accordingly, the zero rating will apply to related goods and services linked to the supply of oil and gas, they noted.

Significantly, this zero-rating applies only to primary and intermediate oilfield activities, which correspond to the upstream and midstream segments of the Oil & Gas business, an executive said

oil and gas will be able to zero rate their supplies for upstream activities."

What's unclear at this stage is how far down that supply chain will zero rating apply. The keenly anticipated tax guides are also expected to shed further light on the need for service providers to be registered with the Ministry of Energy and Minerals to benefit

from zero-rated VAT.

In the Sultanate, contractors, vendors and service providers to the industry must necessarily register on the Joint Supplier Registration System (JSRS) in order to qualify to compete for oilfield contracts.

The tax guides, according to the PwC experts, will also help address questions left unanswered by the executive questions, such as, for example, the treatment of VAT to Exploration & Production Sharing Agreements (EPSA), farming arrangements, and what the new levy means for operators and non-operators, and so on.

Nevertheless, given the penalty regimes prescribed under the Law, businesses are encouraged to be fully compliant with the requirements of the new tax from the outset of its implementation, they added.

Global CEOs: ‘UK market is more attractive after Brexit’

An international study of financial centres finds London has held on to the second spot despite Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. According to PwC’s survey of 5,000 business leaders across the globe, the UK is a more attractive investment proposition than it was before Brexit.

London sits behind only New York and remains Europe’s major global financial centre, ahead of Frankfurt and Zurich. But Asian competitors Shanghai, Hong Kong and Singapore are closing on the capital.

“Our financial services sector has demonstrated resilience over the past year, providing stability amid considerable economic uncertainty. We remain confident in the City’s future and our long-term fundamentals,” Catherine

McGuinness, policy chair at the City of London Corporation said. “But we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. It is vital that policymakers focus on the UK’s competitiveness, by investing in infrastructure and skills across the country.”

There have been concerns that the lack of an equivalence deal for financial services in the UK’s Brexit deal has meant the City has lost out on business.

However, talks on equivalence are on-going. Amsterdam surpassed London as Europe’s largest share trading centre in January, trading an average of €9.2 bn shares a day.

While much was made of London losing its crown, Amsterdam is still a relative minnow placing 28th in Z/Yen’s Global Financial Centres Index.

London secured the top spot for financial sector development



ANDY JALIL
andyjalil@aol.com

THERE HAVE BEEN CONCERNS THAT THE LACK OF AN EQUIVALENCE DEAL FOR FINANCIAL SERVICES IN THE UK’S BREXIT DEAL HAS MEANT THE CITY HAS LOST OUT ON BUSINESS

while being recognised for infrastructure, which includes regulation. PwC’s annual survey of global chief executives revealed the UK has overtaken India as the fourth most attractive growth target to bosses, behind the US, China and Germany.

London’s fintech offering has also been recognised coming in fifth place behind New York, Shanghai, Beijing, and Shenzhen. It has become an important part of the UK economy with London attracting more private funding than all other European cities combined.

“The UK needs to ensure our regulatory framework keeps pace with technological change and innovation,” said McGuinness. PwC’s annual survey of global chief executives also showed 11 per cent of them selected the UK as one of their top three targets, up from nine per cent last time

the survey was conducted in 2019.

Chief executives based in China have increased their interest in the UK market post-Brexit: 13 per cent selected the UK as a growth target compared to just three per cent in 2019.

“The findings are a vote of confidence in certainty and stability, which have undoubtedly increased on the trade front. Not only has the UK grown in appeal to some of our newer trade targets, but it remains an important market among our European neighbours,” PwC chairman Kevin Ellis said.

This certainty is translated into UK chief executives’ own optimism. UK executives are now even more optimistic about the global economy and their organisations’ growth prospects than their global peers.

The vast majority — 89 per

cent — are confident revenue prospects will improve to some extent over the next year and the three-year outlook is even more bullish. The optimism is likely in large part due to the success of the UK’s vaccine rollout which has allowed companies to plan for normality to resume.

“CEOs are largely confident the crisis has turned a corner, this improvement is fuelling activity and momentum, as chief execs plan ahead,” Ellis said.

“We’re seeing this evident in deal activity which is building apace, and it should also translate into headcount increases in growth sectors like tech,” he added. More than half of chief executives anticipate hiring more staff over the next year while 44 per cent of global leaders expect it to increase. *(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)*

GHEDEX 2021 launches online hub

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

GHEDEX, celebrating its 20th anniversary, began online the ten-day 24-hour exhibition on Sunday, March 28. The Global Higher Education Exhibition this year has gone virtual and sees the participation of universities, institutes, skill development centres. Considered as the longest serving Oman’s Human Capital Development Agenda Event, GHEDEX is held under the patronage of Oman’s Ministry of Higher Education, Innovation and Research and Supported by the Ministry of Education.

“For the past 19 years, it has been a great opportunity for accredited International, Regional and Local Universities, Colleges and Academic Training providers to interact, recruit & connect with students, parents, young professionals, officials & academic representatives from the region.

This year’s GHEDEX will be held twice now and again in August,” said Amr Abdullah Babood, Group CEO - Arabian Research Bureau (OITE Group).

GHEDEX’s Virtual VR 3D Virtual Expo is the Arab World’s first Virtual Expo with Artificial Intelligence (AI), Data Science & Real-time Physics powered algorithms & Machine Learning will run until 6 April 2021.

The Hybrid Version includes face to face as well as virtual and the application will be held on August 29 – 31, 2021 at OCEC



Muscat and from September 1 – 2, 2021 at Radisson Blu, Suhar.

To beat the restrictions of the ongoing pandemic on the exhibitions sector, Arabian Research Bureau/OITE has also launched the GHEDEX Hub.

“This marketplace Application, available on Apple and Android, is Oman and the GCC’s first higher education, training and skills network meeting place for education providers, students and parents. The GHEDEX Hub App will be available from now up to nine months even after the event dates,” explained Sadiq Khan Group COO, Arabian Research Bureau (OITE Group).

Both the Virtual Expo & the App is expected to have the participation of higher secondary and college students, parents, young professionals, education professionals attending from all parts of Oman, the GCC (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar) as the promotions cover the entire region.

Eng Said Salim al Shanfari, CEO, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) said,

“The world and Oman have seen face to face exhibitions closed down since March 2020 due to coronavirus pandemic; we were not able to hold exhibitions in the year 2020 and this continues till date in 2021. I am so pleased that the digital transformation like the one we are witnessing now has allowed organisers to connect with exhibitors and visitors once again in 2021 albeit virtually. OCEC supports all exhibition organisers in their initiatives to keep the business ongoing in these challenging times and looks forward to the industry coming back to normal as it is a big contributor to Oman’s economic development.”

GHEDEX events include TRAINEX - Technical Education and Vocational Training Exhibition, FUTURE SKILLS Oman Expo & Conference and EdTech Education Technologies Exhibition as well as International Conference on Quality in Higher Education, Awards for Excellence in Higher Education and Data Driven Research MENA Awards.

BANK NIZWA’S CEO JOINS INDUSTRY LEADERS AND EXPERTS AT CIBAFI – UAB FORUM



Representing Oman’s pioneer and most trusted Islamic bank, Khaled al Kayed, Chief Executive Officer of Bank Nizwa, participated in the 2nd CIBAFI – UAB forum.

Organised by the General Council for Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions (CIBAFI) and Union of Arab Banks (UAB), the event was themed around ‘Islamic Finance for Sustainable Economic Growth in the MENA Region: From Crises to Opportunities’.

The forum, held virtually, witnessed valuable discussions by internationally well-known leaders and industry experts on the future of the Islamic finance and banking industry in light of the current operating environment in the MENA region. During his session, Al Kayed spoke about the role played by Islamic Financial Institutions in enabling the sector’s growth in Oman as well as the Middle-East, and in managing crisis situations like the one the world is currently going through.

PRESS RELEASE

OAB ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF HASAAD SAVINGS SCHEME FOR FEBRUARY



Oman Arab Bank announced the results of the first draw of its Hasaad Savings Scheme for 2021. 101 customers won prizes of RO 500 each, alongside 5 winners of RO 1,000 each from the salary transfer segment. As for Elite account holders, two customers won RO 10,000 each from the Barka and Al Qurum branches.

Rashad al Shaikh, Head of the Retail Banking Division at OAB, said, “We are delighted to see a huge number of our customers continue to save, especially given the prevalent conditions. This way, they can ensure that they have a form of finance to rely on, for themselves and their families. As always, we strive to reward them for their efforts towards saving with an array of exciting benefits every month and giving them a greater chance of winning by having them save more. The Hasaad Savings Scheme 2021 will see 101 lucky winners each month from the 54 branches winning RO 500 each, as well as 5 winners of RO 1,000 each, from those who transfer their salaries to Oman Arab Bank.”

NBO APPOINTS NEW HEAD OF ASSET MANAGEMENT



National Bank of Oman (NBO) has announced the appointment of Abdullah al Jabri as its new Head of Asset Quality Management.

Abdullah’s career spans for over 30 years, where he held many leadership positions in various government agencies, and Board memberships in government, finance, human resources, information technology, and other more.

Bringing his wealth of knowledge and experience to his new role at the bank, he is anticipated to drive the strategy across the total company’s asset portfolio.

Abdullah al Hinai, Chief Executive Officer at National Bank of Oman, said, “We warmly welcome Abdullah to his new role at the bank, where we look forward to benefitting from his impressive track record. We have one of the most experienced Asset Management Units in Oman, and are confident that his mix of perspective, skills and expertise make him the ideal candidate to control the bank’s asset quality.”

A way to accelerate economic growth and productivity

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 30

Around the world, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has laid bare the limitations of existing social welfare systems, and increased pressure on governments to secure and improve social protection for their citizens, placing significant strain on government resources.

This is particularly true in the GCC, where countries use a social welfare model that creates a strong sense of dependence among nationals, according to the latest

report published by the Ideation Centre Strategy& think tank in the Middle East.

Countries in the GCC have an opportunity to build a new approach to social programmes and human capital productivity. They can move from the social welfare model, in which the burden falls mostly on the government, to social investment.

Moreover, the government can create a market to enhance societal well-being. This approach emphasises human capital productivity as critical to



economic growth, which aims to maximise social impact while generating positive financial

returns. “Social investment involves the entire life course of citizens:

Investments that will enhance citizens’ well-being are the ones that address the root causes of the issues at hand, rather than treating them after they emerge,” said Fadi Adra, partner with Strategy& Middle East, part of the PwC network, and the leader of the firm’s government and public sector in the UAE.

To this effect, governments need a cohesive set of policies that are applied at an early age, preparing citizens into the transition to adulthood; enhancing their productivity levels

and contribution to the economy. The study shows that over 80 per cent of young GCC nationals expect governments to subsidise their social needs, including education, healthcare, housing and energy usage, among other benefits.

In addition to direct spending, governments bear significant indirect costs under the current system. Social investment can maximise the impact and effectiveness of social programmes while reducing costs in the long run.

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RENOVATED Villa at Wadi Al Kabir is available for rent. Containing six large rooms with new tiles and four new toilets. The villa can accommodate two families if both renters are negotiable. The rent is three hundred OMR per month. Gas, a new cooker and refrigerator are offered free. A good place for parking for four cars is available in front of the house. Please contact 99503460 or 79783125.

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AN apartment for rent in Al Ghubrah Ash'shamaliyah. It's separated in second floor and overlooking the sea. It has two bedrooms, a living room, two toilets and a kitchen. Contact: 99773958.

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MBA Graduate with 28 years of rich Administration experience (including 18 years in Oman) seeking for an opening. Extensive experience in Office Management, General Administration and HR Domain. Currently residing in Muscat, Oman Driving licence available. NOC available and can join immediately. Contact : 93248477

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

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MANAGER Sales and Distribution seeks suitable placement. Sales Professional with 25 years' experience in Oman, includes 12 years in Sales Management, with LEADING FMCG, Consumer Durables Companies. Currently working with a leading group as Branch Manager for Retail and Distribution. Accountable for the total business and P&L. NOC available. 99369127.

FINANCE Manager/ CFO. Indian Chartered Accountant and Cost Accountant with 25 years of experience in Trade Finance, MIS, Budget, Planning, Strategy, Projects, Procurement, Admin, seeks suitable placement. Contact. 99884291 / 99741875 Email vipul70@gmail.com

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

THREE years experienced in administration / sales and marketing seeking placement. Omani D/L, and NOC available. Gsm- 98270993

INDIAN male, 24 years of total experience in which 16 years in a Multinational Freight Forwarding and Logistic Co., worked under the capacity of Senior Operation Executive/ Senior Accountant having thorough knowledge in Ocean Freight, Air Freight, Land Transport, Warehouse Operations and Finance & Accounting. NOC available. Contact 93587605

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INDIAN, male, Master Degree in Accounting, 15+ years of experience in Oman, UAE & India as Finance / Accounts Manager / Chief Accountant. looking for a job and have noc on visit. contact: 79007124 / 78039524. email: kadercok@outlook.com

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Albayan Alwdh Trading Company registred at the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion under No. 1029134, announces that it is transferring its legal form from a joint liability company to a one-person company in accordance with Article No. 30 of the Commercial Companies Law 18/2019 and its amendments on all. Anyone who objects to this must submit the reasons for his objection to the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within a period of one month from the date of the publication of this announcement.

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

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ANNOUNCEMENT

this must submit the reasons for his objection to the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within a period of one month from the date of the publication of this announcement.

Nama Liwa Litjara wa Al Moqawlat Company announces its registration with the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion under No. 1191302, announces that it is transferring its legal form from a joint liability company to a one-person company in accordance with Article No. (30 of the Commercial Companies Law 18/2019 and its amendments on all. Anyone who objects to this must submit the reasons for his objection to the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within a period of one month from the date of the publication of this announcement.

Announcement of Capital Reduction. IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company White Coincidence Foundation (LLC), which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 1279369, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO 480,000.000 to 5,000.000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

What Alawan Company announces its registration with the Commercial Registry Secretariat at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion under No. 1212557, announces that it is transferring its legal form from a joint liability company to a one-person company in accordance with Article No. (30 of the Commercial Companies Law 18/2019 and its amendments on all. Anyone who objects to

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Dollar hits 1-year high vs yen

The dollar climbed to a one-year high against the yen on Tuesday amid a spike in Treasury yields. The dollar rose to a cusp of 110 yen, a level not seen since March 2020. — Reuters



Gold prices slid 0.9 per cent

Spot gold slipped 0.9 per cent to \$1,696.73 per ounce on Tuesday. Earlier in the session, bullion fell by as much as 1 per cent to its lowest since March 9 at \$1,695.10. — Reuters



Indian rupee at 3-week low

The Indian rupee weakened to its lowest level in three weeks on Tuesday tracking strength in the US dollar. The rupee was trading at 73.19/20 per dollar, its weakest since March 9. — Reuters

Saudi wants Opec+ to extend oil cuts into June

DUBAI: Saudi Arabia is prepared to support extending oil cuts by Opec and its allies into June and is also ready to prolong its own voluntary cuts to boost prices amid a new wave of coronavirus lockdowns, a source briefed on the matter said on Monday.

After steady oil price gains earlier this year, Opec and its allies, known as Opec+, had hoped to ease output cuts. But a fresh wave of lockdowns to prevent a new surge in the virus has pushed oil off this year's highs, and four Opec+ sources said this would most likely encourage the group to extend cuts into May when it meets on Thursday.

The source briefed on the matter said on Monday that Saudi Arabia was keen to extend cuts beyond May and into June. "They don't see demand as yet strong enough and want to prevent prices from falling," the source said.

A Saudi oil source said on



General view of Saudi Aramco's Ras Tanura oil refinery and oil terminal in Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

Tuesday Opec+ had not taken any decision yet and discussions about policy had yet to start.

Under existing curbs, Opec, led by Saudi Arabia, and non-Opec producers, led by Russia,

At a meeting on March 4, Opec+ surprised the market by deciding to hold output broadly steady, although Russia and Kazakhstan were allowed slight increases

Oil slips as Suez opens

LONDON: Oil prices fell on Tuesday as the Suez Canal reopened to traffic, while focus turned to an Opec+ meeting this week.

Brent crude was down 50 cents, or 0.8 per cent, at \$64.48 a barrel by 0851 GMT. US oil was off by 58 cents, or 0.9 per cent, at \$60.98 barrel.

Ships were moving through the Suez Canal again on Tuesday after tugs refloated the giant *Ever Given* container carrier, which had been blocking a narrow section of the passage for almost a week, causing a huge build-up of vessels around the waterway. — Reuters

have cut just over 7 million barrels per day (bpd), while Saudi Arabia has made an additional voluntary reduction of 1 million bpd.

Last year, the group agreed to cut 9.7 million bpd, or about 10 per cent of world output, but then eased back as demand recovered. At a meeting on March 4, Opec+ surprised the market by deciding to hold output broadly steady, although Russia and Kazakhstan were allowed slight increases.

A source familiar with Russia's thinking said on Monday Moscow would support extending cuts again while seeking another small rise in production for itself.

Benchmark Brent crude, which climbed above \$71 a barrel shortly after the Opec+ decision, reaching its highest since the pandemic began, is now trading around \$65 per barrel.

Alongside concerns about the pandemic's impact on demand, a rise in Iranian oil exports is also prompting caution. — Reuters

Credit Suisse in firing line after Archegos losses



A construction worker carries a ladder beneath the logo of Credit Suisse bank in Zurich. — Reuters

ZURICH: Pressure was mounting on Credit Suisse on Tuesday over losses linked to the downfall of Archegos Capital, with analysts warning its dividend and share buyback plans may need to go on hold and investors advised to vote against management pay.

Losses at Archegos, a family office run by former Tiger Asia manager Bill Hwang, sparked a sell-off in bank stocks on Monday as investors feared they would be forced to take big write-downs after extending billions of dollars in leverage to the fund.

Global lenders may lose more than \$6 billion on

Archegos, sources familiar with trades involving the US investment firm have said.

Credit Suisse and Japan's Nomura are set to bear the brunt of this, according to statements from the banks and sources, with one source close to the Swiss lender saying its losses could be as high as \$4 billion.

The brokerage arm of Japan's Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group on Tuesday flagged potential losses of around \$300 million related to a US client at its European subsidiary, declining to comment on whether that client was Archegos. — Reuters

Germany's energy drive criticised over expense, risks



The lignite power plants of German energy supplier and utility RWE are pictured in Neurath, north-west of Cologne, Germany. — Reuters

FRANKFURT: Germany's energy transition has proved too costly and underestimated the risks to supply, a federal audit office report has found. Reforms are needed to state taxes and fees to fix a system that has left Germany with Europe's highest retail electricity prices and at risk of grid blackouts, the as-yet unpublished report said.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to abandon nuclear power by 2022 following Japan's Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011 has forced the sector to radically restructure. The audit office's report is a warning about the state of that transition and comes as Germans prepare to go to the polls in September.

Economy Minister Peter Altmaier likes to underscore Germany's role in moving to green energy under his stewardship. "There is a risk of losing Germany's competitiveness and acceptance of the energy transition," the report said.

Germany's energy-intensive industries, including the likes of steelmaker Thyssenkrupp and chemicals firm BASF, enjoy partial exemptions from some of the costs of supporting the rollout of wind and solar power.

However, more than 50 per cent of householders' power bills are made up of taxes and fees, most of which support the transition away from coal, gas and nuclear power.

This makes them 43 per cent more expensive than the average of those across the 27-nation European Union.

The audit office also warned of a looming energy supply shortfall as utilities prepare to turn off the last of their nuclear reactors and the government spurs a pullout from coal. — Reuters

Americans want the government to buy US-made goods, even if they cost more

LOS ANGELES: A year of pandemic-driven shortages of vital safety goods and medicines — not to mention consumer items like bikes and electronics — has not made Americans more willing to pay extra for US-made goods. Yet a large majority think the government should do so.

A new Reuters-Ipsos poll found 63 per cent of Americans want US agencies to buy American-made products in general, even if they cost significantly more, and 62 per cent think the government should strictly buy US-made vaccines. That enthusiasm dims a bit when it comes to other types of safety equipment, such as face masks: A majority, 53 per cent, agree it is fine to buy personal protective equipment — or PPE — from foreign sources, while 41 per cent disagreed.

The poll shows a longstanding contradiction: Americans like the idea of buying American goods — but not if it means paying more personally for it. It also underscores a challenge facing the Biden administration, which has vowed to bolster manufacturers of crucial safety goods and pharmaceuticals as part of its larger push to revive the US factory sector.

One of President Joe Biden's first acts was an executive order aimed at closing



Painted wheelbarrow buckets arrive at the end of the assembly line at the AMES Companies factory in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. — Reuters

loopholes in existing "Buy American" rules, which cover about a third of the \$600 billion in goods and services the federal government buys each year.

The US government is the world's biggest single buyer of goods and services.

Past administrations have also sought to shift more government spending towards domestic goods, with mixed results. Biden, when signing the order, told reporters that he did not "buy for one second that the vitality of American manufacturing is a thing of the past."

The pandemic has highlighted the risks of long supply chains, including many that rely on dominant Chinese producers. Early in the crisis, hospitals struggled to find enough gowns, gloves, shields and masks to protect medical workers.

But efforts to build domestic factories run up against a daunting price issue. US-made goods often cost more than their foreign counterparts, so many producers are looking to the government for policies that will somehow offset that price gap.

Some advocate providing subsidies

to domestic producers or placing limitations on cheaper imports.

Earlier this month, for instance, a group of 50 US-based manufacturers of face coverings — many of them started in the wake of the pandemic — sent an open letter to the Biden administration asking, among other things, for the Defence Department or the Department of Health and Human Services to provide "funding to support small-business manufacturers to increase production" and "explore formal partnerships with American domestic manufacturers as part of continuing efforts to respond to Covid-19 and future pandemic preparedness planning."

Teddy Haggerty decided the risk of relying on government support that may not come was too high. Haggerty founded his company, Defender Safety Inc, in 2018 to distribute safety equipment for industrial users but shifted his focus to medical goods during last year's crisis.

He was about to build his own production lines for face masks at a warehouse he owns in Plainview, New York, when he pulled the plug. "I just realised the hospitals will go back to buying at the lowest price" after the crisis fades, said Haggerty. — Reuters