



Emphasis on employment of citizens

HIS MAJESTY PRESIDES OVER CABINET MEETING

HM commends prominent achievements made in Oman

The Accession Day anniversary represents a new start

New Basic Law will keep pace with future visions and expectations



A special law for Council of Oman will define its roles, prerogatives

Ministers and officials told to intensify meetings with citizens

HM hails the outcome of the recent GCC summit held in Saudi Arabia

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday presided over a meeting of the Council of Ministers at Al Barakah Palace.

At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the bounties which He bestowed on Oman and its people.

His Majesty the Sultan prayed to the Almighty Allah that this new year, 2021, will be a year of blessings and bounties on the Sultanate and its citizens and residents.

His Majesty the Sultan commended the prominent achievements made in Oman, thanks to the wise and farsighted leadership of late His Majesty

Sultan Qaboos.

His Majesty the Sultan pointed out that today, the Accession Day anniversary, represents a new start for the complementation of the blessed, renewed march of the renaissance, in confident steps forward towards a brighter future that is pulsating with emotions of dignity and belonging to this homeland that

is dear to all citizens — towards the accomplishment of further achievements across all sectors in a manner that meets the expectations and aspirations of all.

His Majesty the Sultan announced that a new Basic Law of the State will be promulgated that takes into account the requirements of the next stage

of development in this country. The new Basic Law will keep pace with future visions and expectations, said His Majesty the Sultan, adding that the new Basic Law will set a specific mechanism for smooth and stable transfer of power.

Within the context of His Majesty the Sultan's attention and follow-up of the government's

performance in all units of the State's Administrative Apparatus, the Basic Law of the State dedicated a full chapter to the follow-up of progress of work in government units.

Following His Majesty's conviction in the significance of the role of the Council of Oman and in its valuable contribution to the...

TURN TO P2

Royal Decrees promulgate Basic Law of the State, Council of Oman Law

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Monday issued two Royal Decrees.

Royal Decree No 6/2021 on the promulgation of the Basic Law of the State.

"We, Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman. In reaffirmation of the principles that formed the foundations of the Sultanate, guided its policies in different fields and promoted it locally, regionally and internationally and, in consolidation of the global status of the Sultanate and its role in establishing pillars of justice, security, stability and peace among countries and peoples of the world, in pursuance of efforts for reshaping a better future of further achievements, in continuation of citizens' contribution and empowering them through participation in decision-making on all aspects of life, in preservation of the nation and protection of its lands, unity, social texture and civilisation, in reinforcement of rights, duties and public liberties, in support for the State's institutions and consolidation...

TURN TO P2

Mechanism for appointment of Crown Prince and his duties

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's issuance of Royal Decrees No 6/2021 and 7/2021 respond to the needs of the Sultanate over the coming stage and conform with the strategic Vision Oman 2040.

Royal Decree No 6/2021, which promulgates a new Basic Law of the State, focuses on the following points:

- Setting a specific and stable mechanism for the transfer of power in the Sultanate.
- Sets a mechanism for the appointment of a Crown Prince and outlines his duties, specialisations and prerogatives.
- Reaffirms the principle of 'rule of the law', the Independence of the Judiciary and Justice as

basic pillars of rule in the country.

- Underscores the State's role in sponsoring citizens' rights and liberties, notably: Equality between men and women, child care, rights of the disabled and youth welfare.
- Compulsory education until the end of the Basic Education stage; encouraging the setting up of universities, promoting scholarly research and sponsoring the talented and innovators.
- The right to decent life, human dignity, safe and secure life, the inviolability of private life and that prisons as institutions of reform, should come under the supervision of the judiciary.

TURN TO P2

HIS MAJESTY CONFERS ORDERS



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred orders at Al Barakah Palace on Monday on a number of their Highnesses, ministers and commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces, Royal Oman Police and other military and security units in appreciation from His Majesty to their role in carrying out the national duty. **DETAILS ON P3**

Assumood Radio officially launched

MUSCAT: With the blessings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Ministry of Defence and the Sultan's Armed Forces on Monday celebrated the official launch of Assumood Radio.

The ceremony, held under the auspices of HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy

Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, included a presentation on the new radio station, its programmes, daily transmission sessions and the national objectives it is expected to achieve.

HH Sayyid Shihab unveiled the plaque of Assumood Radio and inaugurated its electronic

app. Then, the Royal Army of Oman's band played the Royal Anthem marking the official opening of the radio station.

Then, HH Sayyid Shihab went on a tour of the radio studios and listened to a briefing about its programmes, its media message and future plans.

DETAILS ON P5

HM chairs Council of Ministers meeting

FROM PAGE 1

comprehensive march of development, a special law will be promulgated for the Council of Oman and it will define its roles, prerogatives and mechanisms of functioning.

Within the context of His Majesty the Sultan's attention to opinions of citizens, His Majesty the Sultan has reiterated the importance of ministers and under-secretaries' intensifying meetings with citizens and all beneficiaries from the services offered by their respective units. The officials concerned are required to explain the programmes and procedures to be undertaken by the government, notably the policies, services and mechanisms due to be implemented.

His Majesty the Sultan also underscored the priorities of the next stage, with emphasis laid on the employment of citizens in public and private sectors. His Majesty gave directives to the departments concerned to undertake steps necessary for the employment of citizens in the different institutions of the state in accordance with the actual needs, while at the same time working in

cooperation with the private sector so that it could shoulder its role in employment and encouraging it to accommodate job-seekers in its different sectors.

In confirmation of His Majesty the Sultan's continuous concern for public health and developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, His Majesty the Sultan listened to the plan of the departments tasked with providing vaccinations to different social segments. In this respect, His Majesty the Sultan commended the efforts exerted by these departments. He exhorted all to stick to the procedures governing the supply of these vaccinations.

On the Arab Gulf front, His Majesty the Sultan hailed the outcome of the recent GCC summit held in the sisterly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia which, he said, helped make the conference a success. His Majesty the Sultan commended the positive results achieved, including understanding among GCC states. He also lauded the leading role of late Emir of Kuwait Shaikh Sabah Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, in supporting the GCC march and achieving the aspirations of its peoples. — ONA



Mechanism for appointment of Crown Prince

From Page 1

Protection of the heritage and considering its breach or trading in it a crime punishable by law. The Basic Law also dedicated a full chapter to the Governance of State Institutions, the follow-up of government performance and the monitoring of the same through a committee that reports directly to His Majesty the Sultan. The committee shall be tasked with following up and assessing the performance of ministers, under-secretaries and officials of similar ranking. The role of the State's Financial and Administrative Audit Institution shall be enhanced in this respect. The basic law reiterates the importance of establishing a system for local administration. It also

underscores the role of the Council of Oman and its contribution to the country's comprehensive development. Accordingly, the Basic Law of the State dedicated a special chapter to the Council of Oman that included the most important provisions related to this Council and the specialisations entrusted to it, including: Endorsing or amending laws to be forwarded by the government, as well as proposals on draft laws, development plans and state budgets. It also sets standards for follow-up of the Majlis AshShura. As for the Council of Oman law, Royal Decree No 7/2021 has defined its prerogatives, conditions for its membership and all rights and duties of its members and other affairs of the Council. — ONA

Royal Decrees promulgate Basic Law of the State, Council of Oman Law

FROM PAGE 1

of Shura principles, and in serving the public interest, We have decreed the following: Article (1): A Basic Law of the State in accordance with the version attached to this Decree shall be promulgated. Article (2): Royal Decrees No 101/96 and 99/2011 shall be

cancelled. Article (3): This Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from its date of issue. Royal Decree No 7/2021 promulgates the Council of Oman's Law. Article (1) states that the Council of Oman Law attached to this Decree shall be enforced. Article (2) cancels Royal Decrees No 86/97, 87/97 and 88/97, as well as all that contradicts this Decree or the attached Council of Oman Law or contravenes their provisions. Article (3) says that this Decree shall be published in the Official Gazette and enforced from the day following its date of Publication. — ONA



HM confers Orders on ministers, commanders

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik conferred orders on a number of their highnesses, ministers and commanders of the Sultan's Armed Forces, Royal Oman Police and other military and security units in appreciation from His Majesty to their role in carrying out the national duty, at Al Barakah Palace on Monday.

His Majesty the Sultan conferred Sultan Qaboos Order (First Class) on

His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, and General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office.

His Majesty also conferred Al Amjad Military Order (First Class) on

Sayyid Lt Gen Munthir bin Majid al Said, Head of

Liaison and Coordination at the Royal Office.

Meanwhile, His Majesty conferred Sultan Qaboos Order (First Class) on

Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin bin Salim al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs,

Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service,

Mohammed bin Nasser al Rasbi, Secretary-General at the Ministry of Defence and

Lt Gen Ahmed bin Harith al Nabhani, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces.

His Majesty the Sultan also conferred Sultan Qaboos Order (Second Class) on

Maj Gen Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman,

Air Vice Marshal Matar bin Ali al Obaidani,

Commander of the Royal Air Force of Oman,

Rear Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman and

Maj Gen Khalifa bin Abdullah al Junaibi, Commander of the Royal Guard of Oman.

Furthermore, His Majesty conferred Sultan Qaboos Order (Second Class) on

Maj Gen Amer bin Salim al Amri, Commander of the Sultan's Special Force,

Maj Gen Salim bin Mussalam Qatan, Commandant of the National Defence College,

Maj Gen Sulaiman bin Mohammed al Harthy, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for Administrative and Financial Affairs,

Maj Gen Hamad bin Sulaiman al Hatmi, Assistant Inspector General of Police and Customs for

Operations, and

Maj Gen Abdullah bin Ali al Harthy, Chairman of the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance.

His Majesty The Sultan also conferred Sultan Qaboos Order (Second Class) on

Maj Gen Ghusin bin Hilal al Alawi, Assistant Head of Internal Security Service for Operations,

Maj Gen Ahmed bin Ali Kashoub, Secretary General of the National Security Council at the Royal Office,

Maj Gen Hamad bin Nasser al Nabhani, Secretary General of Military Affairs at the Royal Office,

Air Vice Marshal Saleh bin Humaid al Siyabi, Military Aide of His Majesty the Sultan, and

Brigadier General Mohammed bin Hamad al Sarmi, Military Aide of His Majesty the Sultan. — ONA





Bahwan CyberTek extends its
sincerest and warmest congratulations to

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

on the 1st anniversary of his ascension to the throne

May the Almighty protect him and guide him in his vision towards a glorious future for Oman. May He forge ahead with fortitude as a harbinger of renewed renaissance to Oman with far-reaching economic, technological and social advancement.



Assumood Radio of Sultan's Armed Forces goes on air

MUSCAT: With the blessings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the Ministry of Defence and the Sultan's Armed Forces, on Monday celebrated the official launch of Assumood Radio.

The ceremony, held under the auspices

of His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, included a presentation on the new radio station, its programmes, daily transmission sessions and the national objectives it is expected to achieve.

HH Sayyid Shihab unveiled the plaque of Assumood Radio and inaugurated its electronic app. Then, the Royal Army of Oman's band played the Royal Anthem marking the official opening of the radio station.

Then, HH Sayyid Shihab went on tour of the radio studios and listened to a briefing about its programmes, its media message and future plans.

HH Sayyid Shihab gave a speech on the occasion in which he expressed delight at

the launch of Assumood Radio.

He pointed out that the radio station is a media window that serves the overall goal of local Omani media. It seeks to upgrade the standard of media message in serving the national aspirations. — ONA



Sultanate receives 2nd consignment of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 11

The second consignment of COVID-19 vaccine arrived in the Sultanate on Saturday. This 11,700 doses of vaccines will be used to supplement coverage of the same target groups in the first phase, which includes groups of the community including, dialysis patients, chronic lung diseases (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma with moderate

to severe severity of the disease, interstitial lung disease) and diabetes patients aged 65 years and older.

So far as 15,907 citizens and residents have received the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines, including 6,012 or 65 per cent of the total targeted groups in the country representing 57 per cent of the targeted group. It also includes categories of health workers, including intensive care unit workers, staff working in

11,700 doses will be used to supplement coverage of the same target groups in the first phase

COVID-19 words, health workers suffering from the following: obesity (BMI diabetes, dialysis, and those suffering from chronic lung disease.

The Ministry of Health appreciated the response of

individuals during the first phase of the National Campaign for Immunization against COVID-19. Also, it emphasises the need to continue taking the vaccine by the targets during the next phases, raise the level of community awareness of the importance of the vaccine, not to turn to rumours, and to receive information from reliable official sources, which serves the interests of individuals as well as the community.

Vaccine is safe, say takers in Nizwa

AMAL AL RIYAMI
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The national coronavirus vaccination campaign began in Nizwa last week. The vaccination campaign targets frontline health workers and people who are considered to be vulnerable.

Vaccination began to include diabetics over the age of 65, dialysis patients and those with chronic respiratory diseases, asthma and lung diseases.

The Nizwa Hospital staff educated patients in the hospital about this vaccine. Dr Said bin Abdullah al Buroumi, Assistant Director of Medical and Auxiliary Affairs at Nizwa Hospital, said: "In the middle of last week, the first phase of the vaccination campaign against COVID-19 began in Nizwa Hospital for the targeted groups of medical personnel. These groups include staff who took care of COVID-19 patients, in addition to health personnel who have chronic diseases. Two weeks ago, we started vaccination against seasonal influenza, and therefore we delayed vaccination against COVID-19.

"The turnout is very good, and nearly 100 per cent of the target group has been covered for this week. We will continue next week. The good thing is that there was no objection or reservation from the medical staff. Even people with slight hesitation were persuaded to take vaccines. Being a health worker the situation was easier for them to comprehend and understand the issue. The health workers were enthusiastic," Al Buroumi said.

No side effects have been reported other



than the normal symptoms for vaccine such as headache, body ache, low fever that do not last more than 24 hours.

So far, the hospital has not encountered any abnormal symptoms in vaccine recipients.

Dr Said bin Abdullah al Buroumi said the COVID-19 vaccine may be an opening for people to start living their normal lives, but it does not dispense with the usual safety steps like physical distancing, wearing a mask, washing hands, and reducing visits.

Suleiman al Furqani, a staffer at Nizwa Hospital and a recipient of COVID-19 vaccine said, "When we first started hearing about the vaccine and its arrival to Oman, I was very encouraged because I was one of the medical personnel who would receive this vaccine. Then people started sharing many rumours saying

it has severe side effects. But as medical personnel, we did not care about these rumours. We were 100 per cent satisfied and felt safe from."

"I had slight fever and pain after taking the vaccine only for 24 hours. As I am at risk of contracting this disease from patients. I will feel more reassured and more confident, safe and comfortable after taking the vaccine."

Abdullah bin Salim al Riyami, a 65-year-old citizen diabetic, said: "I received the vaccination at the Nizwa Medical Center. I was very happy when I knew that I would be vaccinated. I felt comfortable, safe and reassured after I took it. I never felt any pain and did not feel any symptoms, thank God. I am very excited to complete the vaccination. I thank the Ministry of Health for protecting us from this disease and for providing this safety for us."

Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Heritage & Tourism

ANNOUNCEMENT OF PUBLIC TENDERS

Tender No.	Tender Name	Tender Document Fees	Last Date for Purchase of Document Tenders	Last Date for Bids Submission	Grade
1/2021	Provision of Maintenance Services to Air-Conditioner's and its extensions and General Maintenance to the Places affiliated to the Ministry in Dhufar Governorate	RO 25/=	19/1/2021	25/1/2021	1 st
2/2021	Provision of Agricultural Services to the Places affiliated to the Ministry in Dhufar Governorate	RO 25/=	19/1/2021	25/1/2021	1 st – 4 th
3/2021	Provision of Cleaning Services to Al Baleed Archaeological Park's Cove in Dhufar Governorate	RO 25/=	19/1/2021	25/1/2021	1 st – 4 th

• Companies and offices specialized in the above-mentioned works, registered with the Board of Tender in the grade stated earlier and interested in subscribing to the aforesaid tender may collect tender related documents through the Digital Portal of e-Tendering's following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>

• Subscription to tenders (2/2021) & (3/2021) is limited to specialized companies and offices registered with the Tender Board in the category of SMEs.

• Bids shall be submitted in line with technical requirements and specifications and enclosed with a temporary banking bond at a sum not less than (1%) of the bid's value issued by a local bank and valid for 90 days from the date of electronic submission of the bid. Tenderers shall submit the original receipt of the temporary banking guarantee one day before the date of submission of bids at the Ministry's Directorate of Tenders and Contracts, 2nd floor.

• The period of submitting the bids starts after the period of inquiries mentioned in the e-tendering system ends immediately till the last date of submission of bids no later than 10 am.

Support and inquiries:

- For more information related to the tender, kindly communicate through the website of the e-tendering <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>
- For inquiries related to the technical support for the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through etenderhd@ita.gov.om or on 24166670.

The Ministry shall not be obligated to accept the lowest or any other bids.

www.omantourism.gov.om

For further information, kindly communicate with us through sofic@omantourism.gov.om or on 22088348- 22088085

His Majesty greeted on Accession Day

MUSCAT: On the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's assuming leadership in the Sultanate, His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, has sent a cable of greetings to His Majesty the Sultan reading as follows:

Your Majesty, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, may the Almighty Allah protect you.

"I am honoured, and so are Your Majesty's Armed Forces, the triumphant Firq Forces and all personnel of the Ministry of Defence, to express our heartfelt wishes to Your Majesty on the first anniversary of your Accession Day, praying to the Almighty Allah to bring back this anniversary many years to come and grant you good health and happiness all along.

Your Majesty, The Accession Day is a great occasion that has registered proudly in records of the glorious Omani history and has occupied its deserved lofty status in the modern Omani state due to its profound positive implications. Despite the enormously telling situation on that haunting day, Omani people proved that they are men of strong will and that Oman is as staunch and sturdy as its high mountains, thanks to its people's commitment to the values of the country's blessed renaissance. All are committed to the pledge of placing Oman on the ranks of advanced nations.

Your Majesty, The decisions undertaken under Your Majesty's directives reflect a farsighted vision that has transformed Oman and



HH Sayyid Shihab



Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy



Gen Sultan al Numani



Shaikh Abdulmalik al Khalili



Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali



Lt Gen Hasan al Shraiqi



Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali

have proved that the renewed renaissance, under your wise leadership, will meet the aspirations of the noble Omani people, on top of which comes Oman Vision 2040.

Your Majesty, While saluting Your Majesty on this auspicious occasion, the Armed Forces, Firq Forces and personnel of the Defence Ministry reiterate their allegiance to safeguard the gains of the country's renaissance towards the accomplishment of further progress and prosperity.

May the Almighty Allah protect Your Majesty.

GREETINGS FROM MINISTER OF DIWAN OF ROYAL COURT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a cable of greetings on His Majesty's Accession Day anniversary from Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court, reading as follows: Your Majesty, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, may the Almighty Allah protect you.

"On the auspicious occasion of your Accession Day anniversary, I am honoured, and so are all

personnel of the Diwan of Royal Court, to greet Your Majesty and express the most heartfelt wishes that you would be blessed with continued good health.

Your Majesty, The modern blessed renaissance whose solid foundations were laid down by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos in half a century is still pressing ahead and gaining momentum under Your Majesty's prudent leadership towards wider horizons of progress and prosperity.

The personnel of the Diwan of Royal Court hereby reiterate their pledge of allegiance, vowing to follow your wise directives and, with strong will and determination, carry out their national duties in serving the

country as loyally as desired by Your Majesty.

May the Almighty Allah protect Your Majesty; may He bestow all His bounties on you and perpetuate on Oman the bounties of security, peace and stability.

GREETINGS FROM MINISTER OF ROYAL OFFICE

On the anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's assuming power in the country, General Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, Head of Office of the Supreme Commander, has sent a cable of greetings to His Majesty reading as follows:

Your Majesty, the Supreme Commander, may the Almighty Allah protect you.

continuing the march of nation building have become a tangible reality, testimony to which is the determination to achieve the goals of Oman Vision 2040, as well as the restructuring of the State's Administrative Apparatus and the promulgation of the System of Governorates and governance of performance.

Your Majesty's meeting citizens in an ambient atmosphere of dialogue has been an incarnation of democratic practice aimed to serve the goals of domestic development. Your Majesty's keen follow-up of economic and health circumstances has been of vital significance and it has alleviated negative impacts.

Your Majesty, the Supreme Commander

Personnel of Your Majesty's Office, Your Majesty's loyal guards and Your Majesty's unflinching Force hereby congratulate Your Majesty on the first Accession Day anniversary.

May the Almighty Allah protect Your Majesty and may He grant you success to follow the path of bounty.

Happy Accession Day, Your Majesty.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik also received greetings cables on His Majesty's Accession Day anniversary from: Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah bin Ali al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council; Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali, Chairman of Majlis Ash'shura; Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin bin Salim al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs and Lt Gen Said bin Ali al Hilali, Head of the Internal Security Service (ISS). — ONA

SQU to introduce PhD in management

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) represented by the College of Economics and Political Science approved the introduction of a PhD programme in management. The programme is the first of its kind in the Sultanate.

The programme seeks to prepare the next generation of academics, researchers, business leaders and policymakers who will be empowered with the latest knowledge, skills and management tools needed to support the advancement of knowledge,



business practices and research endeavours in Oman, the region and the world.

This approval was based on the results of a

survey, which showed that a majority of 65.3 per cent of the participants have a great desire to obtain a PhD in management.

It is worth noting that the SQU strategic plan (2016-2040) emphasizes the introduction of postgraduate programmes in line with the comprehensive development plans of the country, Oman Vision 2040 and the directives of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, which emphasize economic diversification and scientific research as an important engine for the development in the Sultanate. — ONA

Omanisation plans for optical shops

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

Dr Mahad bin Said bin Ali Baowain, Minister of Labour, has issued decision No 7/2021 to regulate the practice of some professions.

Article 1 of the decision stipulates that practising the following professions in private sector establishments shall be restricted to Omanis:

- 1- Fuel station manager
2. Professions related to the activities and business of optics and the sale of eyeglasses.

Article 2 stipulates that non-Omani manpower recruitment licences and work permits issued for the professions specified in Article 1 of this decision shall be valid until their expiry date.

The decision was based on the Labour Law issued by Royal Decree 25/2008, and the Royal Decree 9/2020 to establish the Ministry of Labour, define its functions, and approve its organisational structure.

The Ministry of Labour and the Oman Society for Oil Services (OPAL) recently

launched an initiative to localise the position of fuel station manager for holders of higher diplomas and bachelor's degrees in business administration and related fields, which will be applied in about 655 fuel stations in the Sultanate.

OPAL launched an initiative to localize the position of a fuel station manager, in the presence of the Under-Secretary for Human Resources Development, the Under-Secretary for Labour, the President of the General Federation of Oman Workers, and the chief executives of Shell, Al Maha Company and Oman Oil Company.

Shaikh Nasr al Hosni, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Labour, said: "This decision is an embodiment of cooperation between the ministry and the private sector to enable and provide job opportunities commensurate with those looking for work, as the decision will provide more than (655) job opportunities with higher diplomas and bachelor's degrees in business administration and fields."

■ SULTANATE, BRUNEI HOLD CONSULTATIVE MEETING



MUSCAT: The Foreign Ministries of the Sultanate and Brunei Darussalam held the 20th consultative meeting on Monday. Held via video-conferencing, the Sultanate's side was chaired by Shaikh Khalifa Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, while the Brunei side was chaired by Pengiran Norhashimah binti Pengiran Mohd, Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brunei. During the meeting, the two sides discussed several topics of mutual interests and means of enhancing relations between the two friendly countries on various fields. — ONA

In brief

■ COLOMBO

SRI LANKA TO REBUILD
TAMIL WAR MEMORIAL
AFTER PROTESTS

Sri Lanka's government said on Monday it would rebuild a memorial to Tamil civilians killed in the country's civil war that was demolished at the weekend.

The destruction of the monument at Jaffna University — depicting arms sticking out of a mound — prompted protests and threats of a general strike in areas where Tamils are a majority.

The government had earlier condemned the structure as a memorial to "terrorists", saying it glorified Tamil Tiger guerrillas who were crushed in 2009 at the end of a 37-year-long war. The memorial was erected by students at the university. — **AFP**

■ MUMBAI

INDIA SIGNS PURCHASE
ORDER WITH SERUM
FOR VACCINE

India has signed a purchase order with vaccine producer Serum Institute to procure AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine, a source said on Monday, the first step in one of the world's largest vaccination programmes against the novel coronavirus.

Local television channel CNBC-TV 18 said that the order was for 11 million doses and the government would buy the shots at 200 rupees (\$2.72) per dose.

The government has also signed a purchase agreement with Indian firm Bharat Biotech for its COVID-19 vaccine, the news channel reported, citing unnamed sources. — **Reuters**

■ ISLAMABAD

PAKISTAN POWER PLANT
STAFF SUSPENDED
AFTER BLACKOUT

Seven staff at one of Pakistan's biggest power plants have been suspended after a technical fault sparked a massive grid breakdown at the weekend, plunging the entire country into darkness. The blackout hit all of the country's major cities, including the capital Islamabad, economic hub Karachi and the second-largest city Lahore, lasting around 18 hours in most areas. The employees at Guddu thermal power plant in Sindh province were suspended "on account of the negligence of duty", according to the Central Power Generation Company, which operates the facility. — **AFP**

Indonesia names first plane crash
victim, steps up 'black box' hunt

JAKARTA: Indonesia identified a victim from the Sriwijaya Air crash on Monday as emergency crews prepared to send in a remotely operated underwater vehicle to search for the jet's cockpit recorders in the sea.

The Boeing 737-500 plane with 62 people on board plunged into the Java Sea two days ago, minutes after taking off from Jakarta's main airport.

Divers scoured the sea bed on Monday, retrieving human remains, personal possessions and pieces of plane wreckage until fading light ended the search, emergency officials said.

Okky Bisma, a flight attendant on the plane, was identified by his fingerprints, a police official told reporters.

"The quicker we can find victims, the better," search and rescue operation director Rasman MS said.

The Boeing 737-500 jet was headed on a domestic flight to Pontianak on Borneo island, about 740 km from Jakarta, on Saturday before it disappeared from radar screens.

It was the second major air crash in Indonesia since 189



Members of a search and rescue team carry items from Sriwijaya Air flight SJ182 at Tanjung Priok port, north of Jakarta, on Monday. — **AFP**

passengers and crew were killed in 2018 when a Lion Air Boeing 737 MAX also plunged into the Java Sea soon after taking off. The jet that crashed on Saturday is a largely different design.

The search team had narrowed down the suspected location of the "black box" flight recorders and the remote-controlled vehicle would help scan the sea bed, navy chief of staff Yudo Margono said.

"There is so much debris down

there and we have only lifted a few pieces. Hopefully, as we take out more they (the recorders) can be found," Yudo told reporters aboard a ship. Nurcahyo Utomo, an investigator at Indonesia's National Transportation Safety Committee (KNKT), said the jet may have been intact before it hit the water, given the debris appeared to have scattered in a relatively tight area underwater.

Once the flight data and cockpit

Authorities narrow
down location of
data recordersDeploying remote-
controlled vehicle to
help search

voice recorders are found, the KNKT expects to be able to read the information in three days, Nurcahyo said.

The US National Transportation Safety Board will automatically be involved in the investigation, with technical support from Boeing as needed. Tracking service Flightradar24 said the aircraft took off at 2:36 pm local time (0736 GMT) and climbed to 10,900 feet within four minutes. It then began a steep descent and stopped transmitting data 21 seconds later.

The Sriwijaya Air plane was nearly 27 years old, much older than Boeing's problem-plagued 737 MAX model. Older 737 models are widely flown and do not have the stall-prevention system implicated in the MAX safety crisis. — **Reuters**

Top court chides govt over impasse with farmers

NEW DELHI: India's Supreme Court on Monday criticised the government for failing to break a deadlock with farmers protesting against reforms of the agricultural sector. Tens of thousands of farmers have been camped on the outskirts of the capital, New Delhi, for more than a month, and have promised to march during Republic Day celebrations on January 26, against what they see as laws benefiting large private buyers at the expense of producers.

Chief Justice Sharad Arvind Bobde said in a hearing on Monday the drawn-out confrontation was causing distress to farmers.

"We are extremely disappointed at the way government is handling all this," Bobde said.

"We don't know what consultative process you followed before the laws. Many states are up in rebellion."

He repeated a suggestion that the government pause the



Protesting farmers shout slogans as they sit along a blocked highway during a protest against the central government's recent agricultural reforms at the Ghazipur Delhi-Uttar Pradesh state border in New Delhi on Monday. — **AFP**

legislation while farmers' concerns are heard and said the court would pass orders if the two sides remained at an impasse.

The government of Prime

Minister Narendra Modi says the legislation is aimed at modernising an antiquated agricultural system, which suffers from colossal wastage and bottlenecks in the

supply chain. But farm leaders say the laws are an attempt to erode a longstanding minimum support price for their crops and they want a full repeal of the laws. — **Reuters**

North Korea's Kim assumes late father's mantle

SEOUL: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has had his official party title changed, state media reported on Monday, assuming a position previously held by his late father in what analysts said was a move to bolster his authority.

The North Korean economy is struggling in the face of self-imposed coronavirus isolation, and is subject to multiple sanctions over its banned nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes.

At the same time, nuclear talks with the United States have been deadlocked since the collapse of the Hanoi summit between Kim and President Donald Trump in February 2019.

The ruling Workers' Party of Korea "unanimously adopted" a decision to elect Kim as general

secretary at its congress on Sunday, the official KCNA news agency reported.

"All the delegates expressed full support with stormy applause in great excitement," it said.

The South Korean military said it detected signs that a military parade may have been staged on Sunday night for the congress.

The last such gathering five years ago had named Kim as party chairman in what was largely seen as a formal coronation for the leader, who was in his early 30s at the time.

The new title comes after Kim pledged at the meeting to strengthen his nuclear-armed nation's military capabilities, and called the US his country's "foremost principal enemy".

He also admitted that "almost



Kim Jong Un applauds at the 8th Congress of the Workers' Party in Pyongyang in this photo supplied by North Korea's Central News Agency on Monday. — **Reuters**

all sectors fell a long way short of the set objectives" in North Korea's previous economic plan.

Experts said the new

nomenclature was largely symbolic, with the congress changing job titles to reinstate a previously scrapped party

China says
WHO team
to probe
COVID-19
origins

BEIJING: A World Health Organization (WHO) team of international experts tasked with investigating the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic will arrive in China on January 14, Chinese authorities said on Monday.

Lack of authorisation from Beijing had delayed the arrival of the 10-strong team on a long-awaited mission to investigate early infections, in what China's foreign ministry called a "misunderstanding".

The National Health Commission, which announced the arrival date, delayed from its early January schedule, did not detail the team's itinerary, however.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus welcomed the news.

"We look forward to working closely with our (Chinese) counterparts on this critical mission to identify the virus source & its route of introduction to the human population," Tedros wrote on Twitter. He previously said he was "very disappointed" when experts were denied entry earlier this month, forcing two members of the team to turn back.

DAILY CASES JUMP

Mainland China saw its biggest daily increase in COVID-19 cases in over five months, the country's health authority said on Monday, as new infections in Hebei province surrounding Beijing continued to rise.

A county in northeastern Heilongjiang province on Monday moved into lockdown after reporting new coronavirus infections, state television also reported separately.

Hebei accounted for 82 of the 85 new local infections reported on January 10, the National Health Commission (NHC) said in a statement, with Liaoning province also reporting two new cases and Beijing reporting one new case. The country also saw 18 new imported infections from overseas. — **Reuters**

secretariat system.

North Korea is more isolated than ever after closing its borders last January to protect itself against the coronavirus that first emerged in neighbour and key ally China.

"It's another indirect way of admitting that plans introduced in 2016 — including the new chairman system — did not really work out," said defector-turned-researcher Ahn Chan-il of the World Institute for North Korea Studies in Seoul.

"Kim wanted to create a new image for himself and his era — that's different from his father's — by becoming a 'chairman', but it looks like he feels the need to stress his connection to his father in order to consolidate his leadership during this difficult time." — **AFP**

Democrats in Congress move ahead with bid to remove Trump

WASHINGTON: Congressional Democrats begin their drive to force President Donald Trump from office this week, with a House vote on articles of impeachment expected as early as Wednesday that could make him the only president in US history to be impeached twice.

“It is important that we act, and it is important that we act in a very serious and deliberative manner”, Representative Jim McGovern, Chairman of the Rules Committee, told CNN on Monday. “We expect this up on the floor on Wednesday. And I expect that it will pass.”

Thousands of Trump supporters stormed the Capitol last week, scattering lawmakers who were certifying Democratic President-elect Joe Biden’s election victory, in a harrowing assault on the center of American democracy that left five dead.

House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, many of her fellow Democrats and a handful of Republicans say Trump should not be trusted to serve out his term, which ends on January 20.

“In protecting our Constitution and our Democracy, we will act with urgency, because this President represents an imminent threat to both”, Pelosi wrote to fellow House Democrats on Sunday.

When the House convenes at 11 am (1600 GMT) on Monday, lawmakers will bring up a resolution asking Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the never-used 25th Amendment of the US Constitution, which allows the



Members of the National Guard arrive to the US Capitol days after supporters of President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol in Washington, on Monday. — Reuters

In protecting our Constitution and our Democracy, we will act with urgency, because this President represents an imminent threat to both

NANCY PELOSI

House of Representatives Speaker

vice president and the Cabinet to remove a president deemed unfit to do the job. A recorded vote is expected on Tuesday.

— Reuters

Biden nominates Burns to lead CIA

WASHINGTON: US President-elect Joe Biden will nominate former career diplomat and former deputy secretary of state William Burns to lead the CIA, his transition team said on Monday.

Burns served 33 years as a US diplomat, including as US ambassador to Russia and as lead negotiator in the secret talks that paved the way to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, under former Democratic President Barack Obama.

He is currently president of the international affairs think-tank the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

“Ambassador Burns is a crisis-tested public servant who has spent his career working to keep Americans safe and secure”, Biden’s transition team said in a statement.

Biden’s pick to lead the US Central Intelligence Agency comes as he races to get a national security team into place after the transition was delayed by Republican President Donald Trump contesting the Democrat’s November election victory. — Reuters



William Burns



A view of an Israeli settlement near Ramallah in the Israeli-occupied West Bank on Monday. — Reuters

Netanyahu orders 800 new Israeli settler homes in West Bank

TELAVIV: Israel’s prime minister on Monday directed authorities to approve construction of 800 new homes for Jewish settlers in the occupied West Bank days before President Donald Trump’s pro-Israel administration leaves office.

“Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has directed that plans be advanced for the construction of about 800 units in Judea and Samaria”, a statement from the premier’s office said, using biblical terms for the West Bank.

President-elect Joe Biden, who will be sworn in next week, has indicated that his administration will restore US policy opposing settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian Territories.

Trump’s administration gave unprecedented US support to settler groups, highlighted by a declaration from Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in 2019 that Washington no longer viewed settlements as being in violation of international law.

Pompeo in November also

became the first top US diplomat to visit a settlement in the West Bank, which Israel has occupied since the 1967 Six-Day War.

Netanyahu is facing re-election on March 23, Israel’s fourth vote in just under two years.

A series of recent of polls indicate the veteran prime minister is facing a strong right-wing challenge from pro-settler candidate Gideon Saar, who defected from Netanyahu’s Likud party last month to run against the premier.

Netanyahu is widely expected to make a series of plays for right-wing votes, including by bolstering his pro-settlement credentials, before the vote, according to Israeli political analysts.

The statement from Netanyahu’s office said that 100 of the new units were to be built in the Tal Menashe settlement, where French-Israeli Esther Horgen was murdered last month. — AFP

More misery feared as US plans to blacklist Ansar Allah

SANAA/ADEN: Global aid groups and ordinary Yemenis fear that a US plan to blacklist Yemen’s Ansar Allah movement will only heap more misery on a country blighted by death, disease and poverty due to war.

The majority of the population lives in northern Yemen under the control of the group, which Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said late on Sunday the State Department intended to designate as a foreign terrorist organisation.

In the capital Sanaa, where pictures of Ansar Allah leaders line the streets and members of the movement carry automatic weapons, Ahmad al Wali frets the conflict will never end.

“Yemenis have suffered six

years of war and hunger and this (US) decision will extend the war and will be catastrophic for Yemenis”, Wali, a journalist, said.

Jan Egeland, secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said that measures to ensure aid flows mentioned by Pompeo were not yet clear and said the immediate priority was to enact unambiguous exemptions for aid and commercial supplies.

“Pompeo must detail how the US government will not bring fuel to an already burning crisis by making our aid difficult and dangerous”, he said. “Yemen is a country that imports 80 per cent of its goods, and where four in five people need some form of humanitarian assistance, so we are



Armed members of the Ansar Allah movement shout slogans as they visit the grave of the group’s senior official Saleh al Sammad at Al Sabeen Square in Sanaa, on Monday. — Reuters

talking about life or death.”

The United Nations says Yemen is the world’s largest humanitarian crisis and has warned that the long-impovertised Arabian

peninsula nation was in imminent danger of the worst famine the world has seen for decades.

“This is going to add one more layer of misery”, Oxfam America’s

humanitarian policy lead Scott Paul said, adding that the best case scenario now was for President-elect Joe Biden to revoke the designation.

He said Pompeo’s announcement was likely to “spook” businesses and banks working with Yemeni companies.

Pockets of famine-like conditions have reappeared for the first time in two years and almost half the population is suffering high levels of food insecurity, recent UN data shows, as COVID-19, reduced remittances and underfunding of the 2020 aid response exacerbated matters.

“The people will pay the price”, Hoda, a 19-year-old university student in Sanaa, said, adding that

the designation could strengthen “Ansar Allah obstinacy”.

The Ansar Allah fighters have been battling a Saudi-led coalition that intervened in Yemen in March 2015 after the movement ousted the internationally recognised government from power in Sanaa.

The conflict, which has killed more than 100,000 people, has been in military stalemate for years. Some Yemenis in the southern port city of Aden, interim base of the Saudi-backed government, said the US move was long overdue.

“It will make them (Ansar Allah) submit because it will prevent them from securing funds”, state employee Salah Abdullah, 58, said. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

VATICAN CITY

Pope allows more Church roles for women

Pope Francis, in another step towards greater equality for women in the Roman Catholic Church, on Monday changed its law to formally allow them to serve as readers at liturgies, altar servers and distributors of communion. In a decree, the pope formalised what already has been happening in many developed countries for years. But by introducing the change in the Code of Canon Law, it will be impossible for conservative bishops to block women in their



diocese from having those roles.

But the Vatican stressed that these roles were “essentially distinct from the ordained ministry”, meaning that they should not be seen as an automatic precursor to women one day being allowed to be ordained priests. — Reuters

LONDON

England opens mass vaccination sites

Seven mass coronavirus vaccination sites opened across England on Monday as the government raced to dose millions of people while a new strain of the disease runs rampant across the country. The sites include football stadiums and a horse racing course, and are located in cities including Bristol, London, Newcastle and Manchester.

They are to vaccinate thousands per week and several more sites are expected to follow,



according to the National Health Service (NHS) in England. Hospitals and pharmacies are set to begin offering the vaccine later this week, with the government hoping to have doses available for 12 million of England’s 56 million population by mid-February. — AFP

MOSCOW

Palestinians approve Russian COVID-19 vaccine

The Palestinian health ministry has approved the main Russian vaccine against COVID-19, known as Sputnik V, for use in Palestinian self-ruled territory, Russia’s sovereign wealth fund said on Monday. The first shipment of the shot is expected to arrive next month, with all deliveries expected in the first quarter of this year, according to the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), which is responsible for marketing the vaccine abroad.



Outside Russia, where authorities say over a million people have now been inoculated with Sputnik V, the vaccine has also been approved for emergency use by local regulators in Algeria, Argentina, Bolivia and Serbia, RDIF has said. — Reuters

Life is a lesson...

It is interesting how in Oman this year on January 10 there was a sense of loss and on January 11 there is a sense of hope. This experience will be unique to Oman, a day to mourn and a day to reenergise; January will always be a special month.

January 10 of the year 2020 had seen an end of an era — where a modern state was established in five decades. The architect of modern Oman, late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos had chosen a humble way for his last journey. He must have known his people would find it to be one of the most difficult days in their life. For the last five decades the journey has been with determination to reach the status of a developed nation in every way.

In tears however there was hope as His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik reassured through his speech that he will continue with late His Majesty's vision.

The first accession anniversary of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik — a year which saw measures taken for economic and social benefits. While the reforms continue, His Majesty laid a clear foundation on international relations — peaceful coexistence.

Education, employment and fiscal plans in alignment with Oman Vision



Lakshmi Kothaneth lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

JANUARY 10
OF THE YEAR
2020 HAD SEEN
AN END OF AN
ERA — WHERE
A MODERN
STATE WAS
ESTABLISHED IN
FIVE DECADES

2040 are top priorities.

On the domestic front, although economic and pandemic challenges dominated the year, importance has been given to social and job security.

The job security System Law promulgated by Royal Decree saw His Majesty Sultan Haitham donating RO 10 million as a personal contribution towards the foundation of the fund.

And in focus is also the Social Security Scheme that provides protection to low-income groups and Social Security Fund beneficiary families against the expected impacts of the medium-term fiscal Balance Plan. The year has seen a restructure of the Cabinet.

The year 2021 sees the 10th Five Year Plan. With a renewed enthusiasm Oman looks forward to a bright future, as expressed by His Majesty the Sultan, "Carrying a great heritage and noble goals, building and not demolishing, approaching and not distancing. We are committed to sustain this approach, with you and by you, so that we could together perform, with firm will, our cultural role and historic mission."

These words of wisdom are an indication on how important is public participation. These are trying days for the world economies and everyone has to dive deep to come up with

new ways to sustain themselves as individuals whether it is career or a project, but there would also be a need to groom oneself to be a contributor to the nation.

Nations continue to evolve and they can never be standstill and this is guaranteed with the challenges that come by, which often demands us to think differently and take actions accordingly.

What we have to remember is social responsibility is not just for the government or a corporate entity. Each one of us is entitled to this opportunity to contribute to society. It is an opportunity because it leaves with us everlasting impact. Giving is not just about money, it is to do with our skills and abilities and most importantly time. Can we make someone else's day slightly better? Can we be part of someone else's success?

At that same time do we ever think and plan for changing circumstances? Most of the time we do not think about the possibilities that could go wrong because we are in the comfort zone, and why think negative right? But the pandemic has taught us too many lessons and families who were perfectly fine hit hard times. Maybe this is the time to silently help and make it as an opportunity for individual social responsibility.

WIDENING GAP

Silence, division between old allies Trump and Pence

BRIAN KNOWLTON

Since Vice-President Mike Pence led the Congress session that ceremonially confirmed his boss Donald Trump had lost the November election, relations between the two top Republicans have plummeted to an Arctic chill.

The men have not spoken after the president's supporters violently stormed the Capitol last Wednesday, according to the US media, which also reports that Pence intends to be at Biden's inauguration despite Trump saying he will skip it.

It is a stark rupture between the precedent-shattering Trump and his deputy who has been the president's most devoted foot soldier for the past four years.

"Vice-President Pence, one of the most faithful guys to Donald Trump, is now Public Enemy Number One in Trump World," Republican lawmaker Adam Kinzinger said on Sunday on ABC's "This Week."

In an angry speech outside the White House last Wednesday, Trump urged his supporters to march to the Capitol and demand that Pence, who as vice-president led the joint session of Congress, must intervene to reverse the Republicans' election defeat.

Pence refused, and he was ultimately the one who announced to lawmakers Trump's and his loss to Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, the incoming vice-president. But before the certification was complete, a pro-Trump mob descended on the symbolic seat of American democracy in an attack that ended with five dead and international condemnation.

"Mike Pence didn't have the courage to do what should have been done to protect our Country and our Constitution," was the president's damning assessment on Twitter.

Last Wednesday's frenzied riots posed a clear danger to lawmakers, and to Pence himself — who was hustled out of the chamber by Secret Service officers.

Some Trump supporters, furious over Pence's action, chanted that he should be hanged. Trump reportedly did not call to check whether his deputy was safe.

While Pence condemned the violence, the president released a video message that urged the rioters to be peaceful but then added: "We love you. You're very special."

The gap between the two men appeared to widen further when Trump learned that Pence would attend Biden's January 20 inauguration, in keeping with tradition.

The president — who says the election was rigged — has declined to attend, despite his claim following the Capitol riot that he wanted to ensure a "peaceful transition."

Adding to the tension, Pence has reportedly not ruled out backing efforts to invoke the 25th Amendment to oust Trump in his final days in office for being unfit to serve.

It is all very different from Pence's previously vocal and consistent support for Trump.

Trump called him "as solid as a rock," and ever-dutiful Pence took on a tough role during COVID-19, fronting up the White House taskforce as public anger grew over the government's floundering response to the pandemic. — AFP

SCIENTIFIC PUZZLE

A year after first death in China, coronavirus source still a puzzle

LEO RAMIREZ AND DAN MARTIN

It is the world's most pressing scientific puzzle, but experts warn there may never be conclusive answers over the source of the coronavirus, after an investigative effort marked from the start by disarray, secrecy and international rancour.

January 11 marks the anniversary of China confirming its first death from COVID-19, a 61-year-old man who was a regular at the now-notorious Wuhan wet market.

Nearly two million deaths later, the pandemic is out of control across much of the world, leaving tens of millions ill, a pulverised global economy and recriminations flying between nations.

Yet China, which has broadly controlled the pandemic on its soil, is still frustrating independent attempts to trace the virus' origins and the central question of how it jumped from animals to humans.

There is little dispute that the virus which brought the world to its knees sparked its first known outbreak in late 2019 at a wet market in the central Chinese city of Wuhan where wildlife was sold as food, and the pathogen is believed to have originated in an undetermined bat species.

But the trail ends there, clouded by a mishmash of subsequent clues that suggest its origins may predate Wuhan as well as theories — amplified by US President Donald Trump — that it leaked from a Wuhan lab.

Establishing the source is vital for extinguishing future outbreaks early,



A woman wearing a face mask walks along a street, following new cases of the coronavirus disease in Beijing, China, on Monday. — Reuters

JANUARY 11 MARKS
THE ANNIVERSARY
OF CHINA
CONFIRMING ITS
FIRST DEATH FROM
COVID-19

leading virologists say, providing clues that can guide policy decisions on whether to cull animal populations, quarantine affected persons, or limit wildlife hunting and other human-animal interactions.

"If we can identify why they (viruses) keep emerging, we can reduce those underlying drivers," said Peter Daszak, president of EcoHealth Alliance, a global NGO focused on infectious disease prevention.

China won early kudos for reporting the virus and releasing its gene sequence in a timely manner,

compared with the 2002-03 Sars outbreak. But there has also been secrecy and shifting stories.

Wuhan authorities initially tried to cover up the outbreak and later spent precious weeks denying human-to-human transmission.

Early on, Chinese officials declared flatly that the outbreak began at the Huanan Seafood Market in Wuhan.

But Chinese data in January 2020 showed that several of the first cases had no known links to the now-shuttered market, suggesting a source elsewhere. — AFP



First Duqm cycling championship on January 16

ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 11

The Oman Cycling Association (OCA) in collaboration with Special Economic Zone Duqm (SEZAD) will organise the first ever Duqm Cycling Championship on January 16.

The 107 km road race will see the participation of 15 teams which include two new teams – one from Duqm Special Economic Zone and other from Qurayat.

Rest of the 13 teams include Ahli Sidab, Al Rustaq, Al Shabab, Sur, Izki, North Road Oman, Gulf Cycles, Arsen Endurance/Diver Store, Nizwa Club, Brothers Team, Capital Team, Ibri Club and Royal Army of Oman.

The race that offers a total prize money of RO 2,200, will begin from Duqm Airport and finish near SEZAD headquarters.

The Open category winner will receive yellow jersey, while 40 plus winner will get blue jersey and under-23 winner takes home orange jersey – all carrying DiscoverDuqm initiative logos.



The OCA will surely look into making this an international event in the coming editions after reviewing this year’s championship which will see national and resident cyclists in action. We are expecting 110 participants from different governorates

SAIF AL
RASHDI
OCA President



The OCA officials announced the event in presence of Special Economic Zone Duqm officials at a press conference held at Oman Olympic Committee headquarters in Muscat on Sunday.

#DISCOVERDUQM
Eng Yahya al Zadjali, Acting CEO of SEZAD, appreciated the OCA for their support and cooperation to realise the Duqm cycling championship. “The event comes as part of #DiscoverDuqm initiative, confirming Duqm as sports, leisure and tourism

destination. This championship highlights and raises awareness among the local community about the importance of healthy lifestyle and physical activity. It also reflects the zone’s direction towards utilising energy efficient transportation like cycling in view of the growing economic activity and investment inflow that Duqm Special Economic Zone is experiencing.” Al Zadjali said in his message. OCA President Saif al Rashdi said they will review the possibility of making this an international event in the coming editions.

“The OCA will surely look into making this an international event in the coming editions after reviewing this year’s championship which will see national and resident cyclists in action. We are expecting 110 participants from different governorates.” “The organisation of this race comes according to a plan through which we hope to establish a strategic partnership that aims to make Duqm one of the best cities for living, entertainment and tourism through the establishment of an integrated

cycling network that consists of safe cycling paths as well as the establishment of a track for the BMX along with launching of an annual international championship,” Al Rashdi said.

PRIZE MONEY
In the Open category, the winner will get RO 500, while runner-up gets RO 300 and third-placed rider earns RO 200.

In the under-23 category, the top three winners will get RO 150, RO 100 and RO 50 respectively.

The 40 plus category also follows the same prize money as the under-23 section.

The penalties and other regulations will be in accordance with the International Cycling Union (UCI) regulations. SEZAD Organising Committee members Saleh al Maamari and Mustafa al Balushi were present along with OCA panel members Khalifa al Jabri, Ishaq al Balushi, Sultan al Rawahi and Saud al Rawahi at the press meet. The event is sponsored by Special Economic Zone Duqm and Renaissance.

In brief

■ MUSCAT



AL FAIRUZ MEETS RUSSIAN TEAM TO DISCUSS EXPANDING TENT PEGGING

Mohammed bin Issa al Fairuz, chairman of International Tent Pegging Federation (ITPF), met in his office at ITPF headquarter on Sunday, Maxim Kretov, President Adviser of Russian Equestrian Federation.

During the meeting, both parties discussed the best ways on spreading the Tent Pegging sport in Russia through organisation of the tournaments, activities and training programmes including the International Friendly Tent Pegging Championship. Russia had organised successfully the event before two years and it featured participation of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Russia team had crowned as champion of the event.

As part of the tournament, a training programme being organised for organisers, referees, and coaches. The meeting was attended by Haitham bin Mohammed bin Jawad al Lawati, the Secretary-General of ITPF.

OTTA signs deal with Salalah club to form TT Junior centre

Table Tennis Junior centre is part of the OTTA initiatives to focus on the potential faces that will contribute positively to the national teams in the near future

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 9

Oman Table Tennis Association (OTTA) signed a deal with Salalah club to establish a junior talented table tennis centre.

The signing function took place at the Al Saada Sports Complex as apart of the underway monthly camp of the junior talented table tennis centres.

Abdullah BaMukhalef, OTTA chairman, signed on behalf of OTTA while Shaikh Ali bin Awadh al Rawood, chairman of Salalah club, represented the club party. Table Tennis Junior centre is part of the OTTA initiatives to focus on the potential faces that



will contribute positively to the national teams in the near future. Also, it is on OTTA objective to ensure proper spreading of table tennis in all the wilayats of the Sultanate.

The centre will target the junior age group from 8 to 12 years old under direct supervision of the experienced coach, Mohammed Atoum, Oman national table tennis head coach and the centre's coaches including coach Ahmed Helmi, coach of Salalah talented centre.

Salalah's junior talented table



tennis centre will be added to the list of centres under the supervision of OTTA. The other centres are Sultan Qaboos sports

complex (Muscat), Al Saada Sports Complex in Salalah, Al Ettifaq, Ibri, Saham, Al Nasr, Seeb and Salalah.

According to the clauses of the agreement, OTTA to provide four tables of STAG brand, which was approved by ITTF and the club to arrange a suitable venue for the training purpose.

OTTA will supply 600 STAG balls, 15 rackets and table tennis outfits for the players and coaches. The club will get a corporate rate from STAG for any table tennis related procurement stuff.

The second party, club, to sign an agreement with head coach who will supervise the training sessions in the centre. Also, the club to secure the transportation of all the players to attend four training sessions weekly.

Speaking after the signing function, the OTTC chief said that OTTA is keen to shape and prepare the youngsters with the required skills prior to joining of the national teams.

"The existing table tennis junior centres are performing well. There is a contentious follow up and monitoring from the head coach of the national team on the progress of centre's players. We are looking for more contribution from the clubs to accomplish the desired targets in short time," he ended. On the other hand, Shaikh Ali bin Awadh al Rawood, chairman of Salalah club, thanked all the OTTA efforts towards the development of table tennis domestically.

"I believe these table tennis Junior centres will add better technical values towards development of the national table tennis meet. We are very keen in Salalah to form a strong team and compete at different domestic competition levels," he concluded.

Sketch, Mazoon Up, Landmark and Cricworld register victories

MUSCAT: Sketch International rode on a superb all-round show by Yusuf Patanwala to thrash Landmark Group by 7 wickets in an E Division T20 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 4 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Yusuf was the pick of Sketch bowlers, taking 3 for 16 as Landmark was dismissed for a disappointing 113 in the 18th over. Issam Othman and Sukhvinder Singh took two wickets each.

Brief Scores (E Division): Landmark Group 113 all out in 17.1 overs (Naresh Kumar 29 – 4x4, Yusuf Patanwala 3-16, Issam Othman 2-19, Sukhvinder Singh 2-27) lost to Sketch International 116 for 3 in 12.2 overs (Manish Bhatia 38 – 5x4, Yusuf Patanwala 23 – 3x4) by 7 wickets.

Ali helps Mazoon Up to victory

In another E Division match, Muhammed Ali slammed a splendid 72 not out to steer Mazoon Up to an exciting 7-wicket victory against Sam Royals at Muscat Municipality ground 3.

Brief Scores (E Division): Sam Royals 157 for 8 in 20 overs (Sinu Thankachan 39 – 4x4, Arjun Rajesh 36 – 6x4, Ashfakh Chaikinakath 3-23, Muhammed Ali 2-32) lost to Mazoon Up 161 for 3 in 18.1 overs (Muhammed Ali 72 – 11x4, Vijith Ravi 2-31) by 7 wickets.

Rudhi, Sanjay help Horizon win

Opener Rudhi Rasheed struck an unbeaten 67 off 54 while off-spinner Sanjay Makwana picked up 4 for 33 to guide Y Horizon to a nail-biting 3-run win over BSI in an F Division game at OAC 3 ground in Seeb.

Brief Scores (F Division): Y Horizon 158 for 7 in 20 overs (Rudhi



Y Horizon team



Karthik Rajappa of Design Group

Rasheed 67 – 5x4, Thiru Mothilal 40 – 5x4, 1x6, Rakshan Acharya 3-17 beat BSI CT 155 for 7 in 20 overs (Saud Haroon Khan 54 – 10x4, Usman Siddique 43 – 3x4, 1x6, Sanjay Makwana 4-33, Thiru Mothilal 2-12) by 3 runs.

Neil stars in easy win for Cricworld

Opener Neil topscored with a fluent 43 off 32 while Amal Raj Rajan cipped in with 35 off 25 as Cricworld posted 163 for 9 on the board.

Brief Scores (F Division): ACT Cricworld 163 for 9 in 20 overs (Neil Paily 43 – 5x4, Amal Raj Rajan 35



Khawar Ali and Adeel Shafique of IT Works – 5x4, Arjan Mavji 2-15, Sardar Ali Khan 2-27) thrashed Team Coorg Muscat (TCM) 112 all out in 18.4 overs (Vishnu Parameswaran 14 – 2x4, Neil Paily 4-19, Subeesh Nair 2-9, Jebin James 2-23) by 51 runs.

Khawar bowls IT Works to another win

It is difficult to keep Oman all-rounder Khawar Ali quiet as a match winner; if he fails with the bat he finds a way to succeed with the ball. IT Works rode on Khawar's superb 4 for 30 and opener Adeel Shafique's stylish 62 to beat Renaissance by 6 wickets

in a 50-over Premier Division game at OC Turf 1 in Amerat on Saturday. Reduced to 83 for 6, Renaissance could manage only 153 for 9. Sufyan Mahmood topscored with an unbeaten 51 while

Brief Scores (Premier Division):

Renaissance 153 for 9 in 50 overs (Sufyan Mahmood 51 not out – 5x4, 1x6, Hammad Ifraq 44 – 6x4, Khawar Ali 4-30, Muhammed Nadeem 2-16) lost to IT Works 154 for 4 in 31.5 overs (Adeel Shafique 62 – 6x4, 1x6, Hammad Mirza 34 – 4x4) by 6 wickets.

Karthik bats Design Group to victory

Karthik Rajappa struck a sizzling 49 off 25 to steer Design Group Engineering Consultants to a 4-wicket victory against Jumbo Electronics in a C Division game at Muscat Municipality ground 1 on Friday.

Brief Scores (C Division):

Jumbo Electronics 123 for 8 in 20 overs (Chandra Mouli 29 – 5x4, Nishan Padma Kumara 2-13, Satham Hussain 2-31) lost to Design Group Engineering Consultants 124 for 6 in 12.1 overs (Karthik Rajappa 49 – 10x4, Chandra Mouli 4-32) by 4 wickets.

Ismail stars in OHI win

In another C Division match, openers Ismail al Balushi (54 off 23) and Santosh Vishwakar (37 off 17) batted with gay abandon as Douglas OHI thrashed OCT Al Amerat by 10 wickets at Muscat Municipality ground 2.

Brief Scores (C Division):

OCT Al Amerat 93 for 7 in 20 overs (Said Haidar al Balushi 32 – 3x4, Rajender Kumar 2-3, Santosh Vishwakarma 2-16) lost to Douglas OHI 94 for 0 in 6.3 overs (Ismail al Balushi 54 – 8x4, 2x6, Santosh Vishwakarma 37 – 5x4) by 10 wickets.

Late goals see Arsenal through in FA Cup

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, JAN 11

With two goals scored in the second half of extra time, FA Cup holders Arsenal sent Newcastle crashing out in the third round. The win, their fourth in a row — three in the Premier League — also showed that the Gunners are back in form after a poor run earlier.

They went into the lead in the 19th minute of extra time with an excellent effort from 20-year-old Emile Smith Rowe, only minutes after he was shown the red card which was then rescinded by VAR monitor.

Arsenal manager, Mikel Arteta, pleased with Smith Rowe's performance, said: "I didn't think he should be sent off. The regulations gave us VAR and today it worked the way it should. It means we believe in Smith Rowe. He is doing well and becoming important in the team.

The personality he plays with, we ask him to be more of a threat in the box and he scored an important goal for us."

Arteta added: "For young players to step in at difficult moments like this is not easy. They need experience around them. We've a great mixture. We can't put too much responsibility on them. We have the talent and the characters which is healthy and also promising for the future."

But the win was a close shave for the Gunners who were pushed to the limit by Newcastle who blew two brilliant chances to score, both were missed by Andy Carroll.



Arsenal's Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang reacts. – Reuters

First, he sent a header wide from close and then after 18-year-old Elliot Anderson had come on as substitute on his debut and seen his shot blocked by the goalkeeper, Carroll missed the follow up with a weak shot.

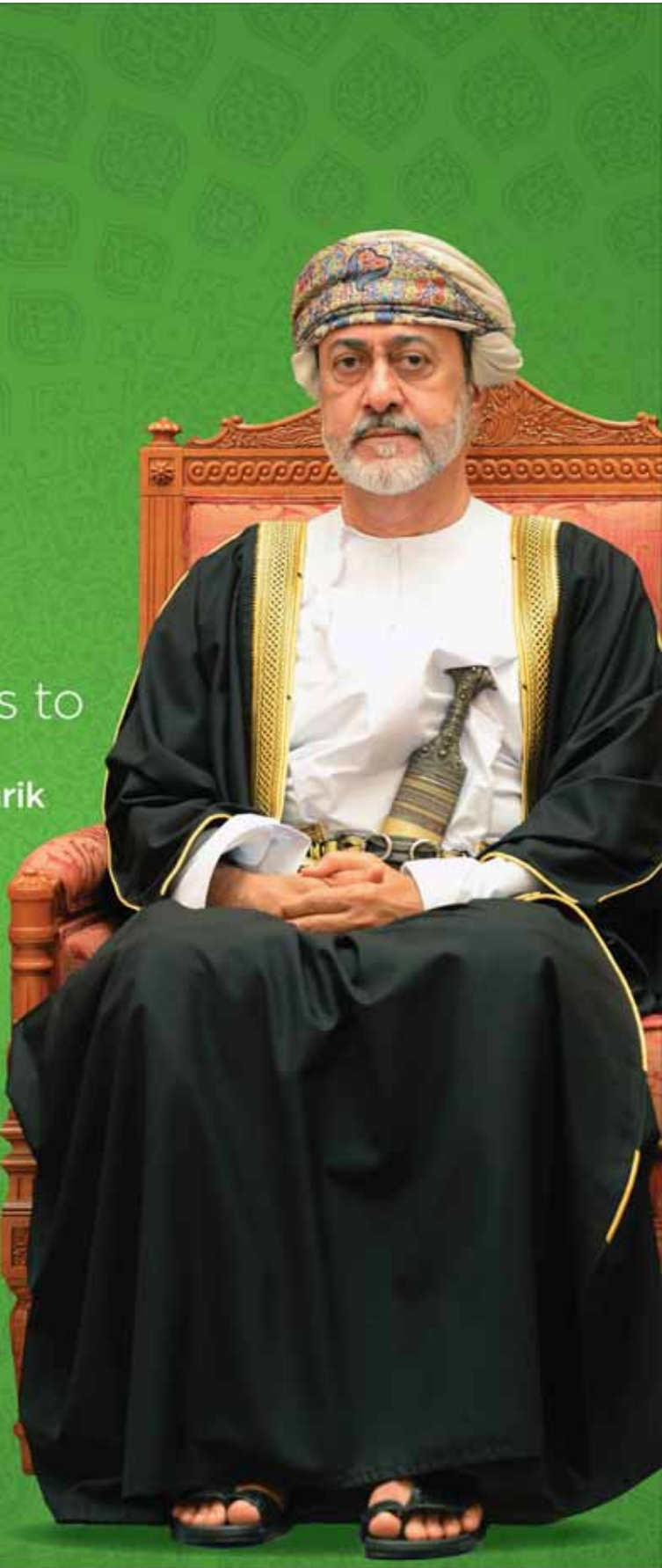
Arsenal missed the chance of taking the lead in the first period of extra time when a powerful drive from Granit Xhaka was superbly tipped over the bar by Martin Dubravka. Smith Rowe's goal — his fifth for the club — came after a combined move by substitutes Alex Lacazette and Bukayo Saka.

A header from Lacazette was taken on the chest by Smith Rowe who then went past the Newcastle defence on the right and finished with a brilliant shot inside the far post.

The goal seemed to lift the Gunners and on 117 minutes, Kieran Tierney, after receiving a pass from Xhaka, raced down the left to cross to Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang who simply had to tap into the net from close range for the second goal to put the game beyond Newcastle.

Congratulations to
His Majesty
Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

We extend our loyalty
and best wishes of
success and prosperity
as Oman progresses
towards glory, guided by
His Majesty's
inspiring leadership.





شركة ظفار لتوليد الكهرباء
Dhofar Generating Company

Al Attiyah tops stage 8, Peterhansel keeps lead



NEOM, Saudi Arabia: Qatari driver Nasser al Attiyah won stage eight of the Dakar Rally on Monday, covering the 375 kilometres of the timed special between Sakaka and Neom in Saudi Arabia in just under three hours.

Three-time champion Al Attiyah has now won four of eight stages of this year's edition as well as the prologue but still trails Frenchman Stephane Peterhansel by 4min 50sec.

Last year's winner Carlos Sainz finished 52sec behind Al Attiyah along the Red Sea coastline, with Peterhansel third as he stayed on course to capture a record-extending 14th Dakar title.

Sainz is third overall at 38min 55sec ahead of Tuesday's ninth stage, a 579km loop on sandy tracks around Neom that is expected to be one of the toughest of the rally.

Chile's Jose Ignacio Cornejo



extended his advantage in the motorbike category with his first stage victory of the event.

Cornejo gained over a minute on nearest rival Toby Price, having led by just one second on Sunday.

American Ricky Brabec, winner of the 2020 rally, was almost three minutes adrift in third.

French rider Xavier de Soultrait withdrew from the competition following a heavy

crash on stage eight. He was taken to hospital in Tabuk for observation and had been fourth overall at the time.

De Soultrait was considered among the favourites and had briefly occupied first place last week following stage four.

Britain's Sam Sunderland is third overall, 5min 57sec off the pace after crossing fourth in Monday's special, with Brabec in sixth at 17min 42sec.

— AFP

Defiant India earn dramatic draw in Sydney Test

SYDNEY: A battered and bruised India team battled resiliently through the final day to snatch a remarkable draw in the third Test against Australia on Monday, leaving an engrossing series tied at 1-1 heading into the final match in Brisbane.

A hobbling Hanuma Vihari combined with Ravichandran Ashwin to defy Australia's attack in a partnership over the last three hours of the match that kept alive India's hopes of a second successive series triumph Down Under.

The sixth-wicket stand was worth only 62 runs but immeasurably more in terms of morale for a squad that has endured quarantine, alleged racial abuse from fans and a catalogue of injuries.

"Our talk this morning was all about showing character, fight till the end and not thinking of the result," said India skipper Ajinkya Rahane.

"A special mention to Vihari and Ashwin, the way they batted and showed their character. Looking forward to Brisbane now."

Australia's frontline bowlers, who skittled the tourists for 36 in the first test, threw everything they had at the Indian batsmen on a day five wicket at Sydney Cricket Ground that did not deteriorate as

“Our talk this morning was all about showing character, fight till the end and not thinking of the result. A special mention to Vihari and Ashwin, the way they batted and showed their character. Looking forward to Brisbane now

AJINKYA RAHANE
Indian captain

much as they had hoped.

India finished on 334 for five, 73 runs short of the victory target of 407 that Australia had handed them after declaring on 312-6 at tea on Sunday.

"We certainly created chances to win the game. Just did not hold our catches, myself in particular," said Australia captain and wicketkeeper Tim Paine.

"We have to cop the blame for that, wear it, move on and look forward to Brisbane."

GLIMMER OF HOPE

Earlier, a brilliant 97 from Rishabh Pant and a typically obdurate



77 from Cheteshwar Pujara had given India a glimmer of hope that they might just be able to chase down their imposing target.

Pant, who was a serious injury doubt on Saturday after taking a nasty blow to his elbow, slugged 12 fours and three sixes to take the game to the Australians.

The pair had put on 148 for the fourth wicket before Pant was caught at backward point three runs shy of his century to give off-spinner Nathan Lyon his second

wicket of the day.

It was huge relief to the home side, who must have had flashbacks to Ben Stokes's innings of 135 not out at Headingley in the 2019 Ashes that enabled England to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

Pujara was the chalk to Pant's cheese, eking out his runs from 205 deliveries over 285 minutes before Josh Hazlewood finally got something out of the second new ball to penetrate his defence and

shatter his wickets.

Once they departed, however, a draw was clearly the only target.

Vihari, clearly hampered having pulled up clutching his hamstring after running for a single before tea, scored at a rate that made Pujara look like a limited overs slogger.

His 23 runs came from 161 deliveries, while Ashwin was barely more expansive with 39 from 128 balls. At one stage, 41 deliveries passed without a run

SCOREBOARD	
Australia first innings:	338
India first innings:	244
Australia second innings: ...	312-6 decl
India second innings (O/n: 98/2):	
R Sharma c Starc b Cummins	52
S Gill c Paine b Hazlewood	31
C Pujara b Hazlewood	77
A Rahane c Wade b Lyon	4
R Pant c Cummins b Lyon	97
H Vihari (not out)	23
R Ashwin (not out)	39
Extras (LB-3, W-2, NB-6)	11
Total (For 5 wkts, 131 overs)	334
Fall of wickets: 1-71, 2-92, 3-102, 4-250, 5-272	
Bowling: Starc 22-6-66-0, Hazlewood 26-12-39-2, Cummins 26-6-72-1, Lyon 46-17-114-2, Green 7-0-31-0, Labuschagne 4-2-9-0.	

being scored.

Ashwin came out to bat ahead of Ravindra Jadeja, who dislocated his left thumb in the first innings to add to India's long injury list.

Steve Smith was named Man of the Match for his innings of 131 and 81 and Australia will be hoping he maintains that form at the Gabba, where they are unbeaten in 31 tests going back to 1988.

Cricket Australia chief executive Nick Hockley earlier ended a week of uncertainty around the match, which begins on Friday, by announcing that the tourists had agreed to travel to Brisbane despite concerns about the biosecurity measures.

— Reuters

business

MUSCAT
STOCK
MARKET

3,725.34



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OIL PRICE

Oman Crude \$55.24

Brent Crude \$55.19

Light Crude \$51.77



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Oman publishes full list of VAT zero-rated food items

ZERO-RATED FOR VAT: The Tax Authority's Decision 2/2021 on the Determination of Food Items subject to VAT came into effect on January 11 following its publication in the Official Gazette

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

More details have emerged of the complete range of food products that have been zero-rated for Value Added Tax (VAT), which is due to come into force in the Sultanate with effect from April 16, 2021 — part of reforms by the Omani government to shore up non-oil revenues.

The Tax Authority's Decision 2/2021 on the Determination of Food Items subject to VAT came into effect yesterday, January 11, following its publication in the Official Gazette. It provides a full list of food items eligible for zero rate of VAT, according to well-known professional services firm KPMG.

In an advisory to customers, KPMG said the Tax Authority's Decision seeks to minimise the impact of VAT on the final consumer by extending zero rating to over 90 food items.

"The list of food items zero-rated for the purposes of VAT largely resembles the list of food



items exempt from Customs duty. Food items that are not specifically zero-rated would attract VAT at the standard rate of 5 per cent.

Therefore, for businesses, classification of the goods will be critical to ascertain their correct tax treatment. The tax treatment, among others, will impact the pricing, documentation and system configuration. Incorrect tax treatment could result in over/underpayment of VAT and lead to penalties", the multinational audit, tax and advisory services firm noted.

KPMG made available a

complete breakdown of the food items zero-rated for VAT that are distributed across 12 broad categories. The list is as follows:

Poultry, Meat and Fish: Layer chicken; Broiler chicken; Chicken weighing not more than 185 grams from Gallus Domesticus Species; Full and half carcasses of bovine animals; Bovine meat cuts with bones, Boneless bovine meat; Full and half carcasses of lamb, Full and half carcasses of sheep; Sheep meat cuts with bones; Boneless sheep meat; Full and half carcasses of goat; Goat meat with bones; Boneless goat meat; Offal and

other parts of sheep or goat; Meat, offal and other parts of camel and other camelids; Frozen meat, offal and other parts of camel and other camelids; Yellowfin tuna (Thunnus albacares); Bigeye tuna (Thunnus obesus); Atlantic and pacific bluefins tuna (Thunnus, Thynnus, Thunnus orientalis); Southern bluefin tuna (Thunnus maccoyii); Longtail tuna (Thunnus tungle); Kawakawa (Thunnus Avinus); Mackerel (Kingfish, soitted soabug mackerel); Trevally; Seabream (Sparidae); Grouper (example Hamor, Bertam, Chenino, Cato, Nagel, Samman);

The list of food items zero-rated for the purposes of VAT largely resembles the list of food items exempt from Customs duty. Food items that are not specifically zero-rated would attract VAT at the standard rate of 5 per cent

Shei'ri fish (Sheoor); Hamra fish (Alesmaudi); Nagroor fish; Bori fish (Meed and Biyah); Safi fish, and Barracuda.

Dairy Products: Long life milk in containers exceeding 1 litre; Milk in powder, granular or solid form, of fat content by weight exceeding 1.5 per cent, not containing added sugar or sweetener; Fresh Yoghurt; Fresh (unripe or uncured) cheese, including whey cheese and curd.

Fresh Eggs: Fresh eggs of fowls of the species Gallus Domesticus (Fresh chicken eggs)

Fruits and Vegetables: Potatoes; Tomatoes; Onions for food (green or dry rind); Garlic; Cabbage lettuce (head lettuce); Carrots and turnips; Cucumbers and gherkins; Peas (pisum sativum); Beans (Vigna spp, Phaseolus spp); Other beans, fresh or chilled Aubergines (egg-plants); Fruits of the genus Capsicum or of the genus Pimenta; Spinach, New Zealand spinach and orache spinach (garden spinach); Olives; Pumpkins, squash and gourds (Cucurbita spp.); Marrow; Okra; Parsley; Coriander; Fresh dates; Pressed dates; Pineapples;

Guavas; Mangoes; Oranges; Mandarin (tangerines & satsumas), clementines, wilkings and citrus hybrids; Fresh lemons; Dried lemons; Fresh grapes; Watermelons Green Melon; Yellow melons; Apples; Pears; Apricots; Sour cherroes (prunus cerasus); Kiwifruit and Pomegranates.

Coffee beans, tea and cardamom: Unroasted coffee beans (not decaffeinated); Roasted coffee beans (not decaffeinated); Green tea (not fermented), in packages not exceeding 3 kilograms; Other green tea (not fermented); Tea bags not exceeding 3 grams each; Other black tea (fermented) and other partly fermented tea; Cardamom (neither crushed nor ground); Crushed or ground cardamom;

Grains: Normal wheat; Thin wheat; Semi-milled or wholly milled rice, whether or not polished or glazed and Wheat flour.

Olive oil and its fractions, whether or not refined, but not chemically modified: Virgin olive oil.

Sugar: Refined sugar (fine crystals)

Baby food supplies: Infant and baby food based on milk or malted milk prepared as substitute of mother's milk, not containing cocoa.

Breads: Ordinary bread of any kind.

Water: Artificial mineral water; Ordinary natural water

Salt: Common salt (table salt).

Takaful Sukuk to launch RO 25m Sukuk

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 11

The Capital Market Authority has approved the prospectus of the Mudharabah Sukuk of Takaful Sukuk LLC in favour of Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG for the offer of perpetual Sukuk Al Mudharabah worth RO 25 million.

The Authority has also approved the prospectus of the first issuance of the programme for the offering of RO 6 million in private placement at an issue price RO 1.020 comprising RO 1 as nominal value and 20 baisas issue expenses.

The minimum limit for subscription in the first issuance is 100,000 Sukuk to commence on January 17, 2021. Takaful Sukuk's offering seeks to enhance capital quality and to finance the general objectives of the company.

The proceeds will be invested, per the Mudharabah agreement, to explore investment opportunities for the trust assets taking into consideration the regulatory solvency requirements aligned with the growth plans of the company and profitable opportunities in the market.

Sukuk are effective investment instruments in the Omani market covered by Sukuk Regulation providing protection



The proceeds will be invested, per the Mudharabah agreement, to explore investment opportunities for the trust assets taking into consideration the regulatory solvency requirements aligned with the growth plans of the company and profitable opportunities in the market

to all stakeholders, while also encouraging investments from issuers as well as local and foreign capital for various investments.

Sukuk are securities of equal value, issued for a specific term, that represent joint ownership in underlying assets or services or rights or a combination thereof, or assets of specific undertaking or existing investment activity or which will be established from the proceeds of subscription as specified by the prospectus

and the agreement in the trust deed issued by a special purpose vehicle in favour of the beneficiary and the proceeds used in specific economic project manager by the trustee in favour of the beneficiary.

Sukuk Al Mudharabah are tradable Sukuk issued based on Mudharabah contract on behalf of the Sukuk holders and beneficiary as Mudharib and the proceeds to be distributed as specified in the relevant contract.

New stock market trading platform launched

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 11

The newly renamed Muscat Stock Exchange launched on Monday a new electronic trading platform, dubbed 'Optiq', designed and developed by Euronext, the leading pan-European exchange in the Eurozone.

Optiq is described as a cutting-edge trading platform that gives investors access to trading across all asset classes available on Euronext's exchanges. With modular architecture and the latest generation of components, the platform facilitates the introduction of new products and functionalities for the benefit of Euronext's clients.

Shaikh Abdullah bin Salim al Salmi, Executive President of the Capital Market Authority (CMA), presided over the unveiling of the new platform in the presence of a number of CMA officials and representatives of brokerage firms.

Raidbin Hussain al Hoti, Acting General Manager of Muscat Stock Exchange, said the launch of Optiq coincides with



the issuance of Royal Decree 5/2021 transforming Muscat Securities Market into Muscat Stock Exchange, a closed Omani joint stock company owned by Oman Investment Authority.

The introduction of the new platform is in keeping with efforts to modernise the trading platforms of the stock market, he said. He commended the efforts of the contractor in delivering the project in a timely manner despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

Mohsen bin AbdulRedha, Director of Systems and Development, explained that with the launch of the electronic trading system, the stock market has kept pace with the most advanced financial markets internationally.

Euronext is a leader in the management of trading systems for many international exchanges, he stated, adding that the company has agreed to provide after-sales support for the next 10 years.

Oman REIT Fund set to launch IPO

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 11

Oman REIT Fund is all set to launch its initial public offering (IPO), in the biggest-ever listing of a property trust in the Sultanate, for 15 days from January 17 to 31, 2021. The REIT, managed by Shumookh Fund Management LLC, is offering RO 26.19 million worth of units at an issue price of 102 baiza per unit comprising 100 baiza as unit value plus 2 baiza towards issue expenses and can accept up to 39.29 million representing 60 per cent of the fund size.

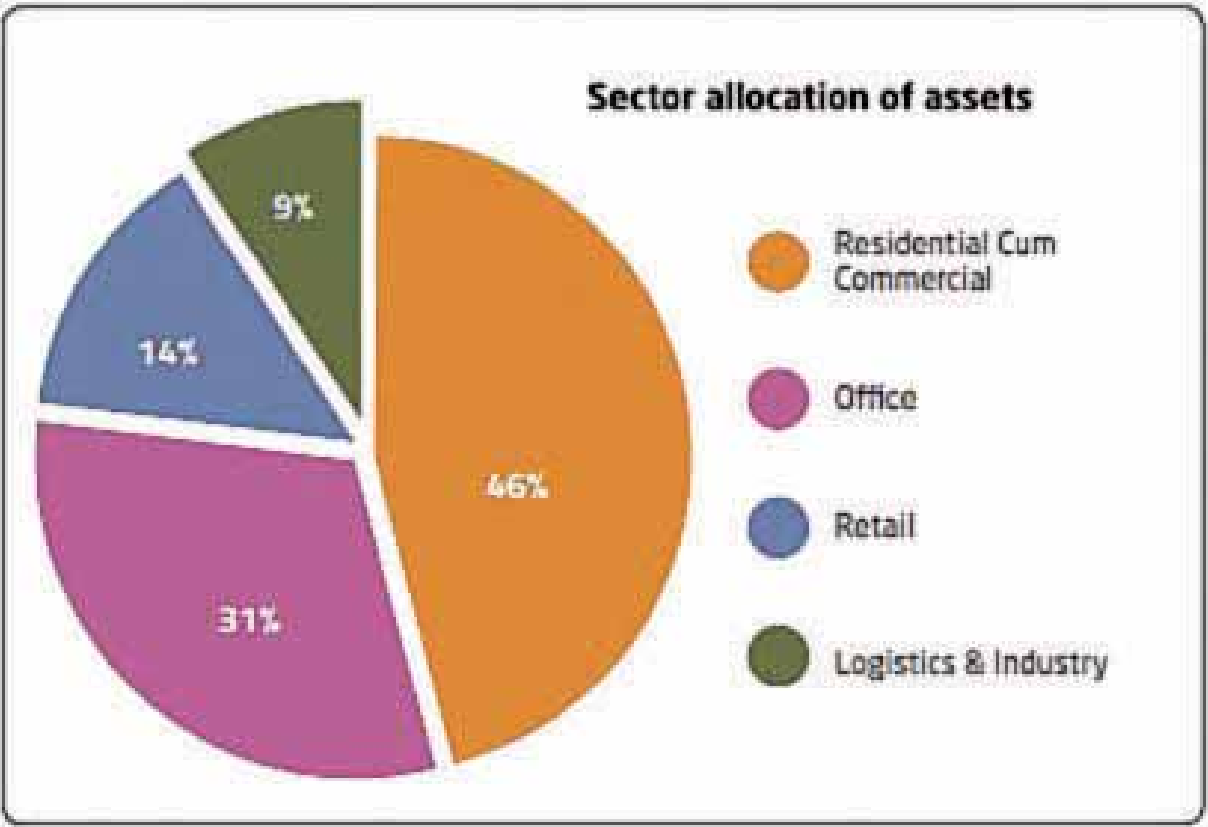
Oman REIT Fund is the first Omani real estate investment trust with a diversified assets portfolio, established with the principal investment strategy of investing in a diversified portfolio of income-producing real estate assets in Oman.

Speaking exclusively to *Oman Daily Observer*, Jasser Saleh al Aulaqi (pictured), CEO of Shumookh Fund Management LLC said that the public offering is to provide an opportunity to investors in the Sultanate to participate in developed real estate and realise recurring and growing income.

“Oman REIT Fund’s key strategic objectives are to provide investors with a diversified, stable and sustainable income stream, while also benefiting from organic growth and value-add opportunities aiming to maximise unitholder returns”, he said. The offering for the public subscription represents 40 per cent of the fund’s total issued capital at RO 65 million, and there is a potential for increasing the public offer percentage to 60 per cent, he said.

“The offer is open to everyone in the Sultanate. Both Omani and non-Omani individuals as well as juristic persons can apply”, he said. Before placing the application, said Al Aulaqi, “all investors should examine and carefully review the prospectus in order to decide whether it would be appropriate to invest in the Fund.” He revealed that the REIT would pay a quarterly dividend, which will provide a yield of more than seven per cent plus, per annum.

Oman REIT Fund’s initial



public offering would be the largest REIT IPO in the Sultanate since the Capital Market Authority issued regulations to list real estate investment funds, in 2018.

Speaking about the initial portfolio of Oman REIT, Al Aulaqi said it consists of 20 properties located at various locations in Oman, with an aggregate built-up area of approximately 196,000 square metres with around 488 leases.

The IPO portfolio’s appraised value is approximately RO65million at the end of August 2020 based on the aggregate of independent valuations for each property. “As a Fund Management company, we have already chalked out a five-year plan, according to which, the value of the assets under our management will exceed RO 1 billion at the end of the plan”, he said.

The IPO portfolio primarily consists of good quality residential

cum commercial buildings located in Oman’s strategic areas.

According to the IPO prospectus, the properties have good accessibility and have a diverse tenant base comprising corporates and individuals. The Omani real estate market is going through challenging market conditions induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing economic conditions.

However, Oman has shown more resilience to the spread of COVID-19 than its global peers. Therefore, we expect the economic activities to start gaining momentum leading to improved business sentiments. Government expenditure has already been focused on the infrastructure that will further support the real estate market.

The supply of good quality labour accommodation facilities is limited in Oman. These quality buildings can only ensure that employee health and safety norms are adhered, both comfortably and conveniently. “Properties which are currently or are expected to be a part of future REIT holdings belong to this category and hence the outlook for REITs continue to remain favourable in the country”, he said.

High-quality office assets located at strategic places in Muscat have high occupancy rates in excess of 90 per cent and is leased by

technology and SME clients.

The office portfolio assets include one building in Oman’s leading Technology Park, Knowledge Oasis Muscat with 121 tenants. With regard to the retail assets, they are spread across Muscat and Salalah, with a total built-up area in excess of 10,000 square metres. Oman’s retail sector may currently be under pressure with the store closures and social distancing measures induced by the COVID-19 situation.

However, over the longer term, innovative retail concepts and online shopping are expected to drive growth in the sector. Similar to trends in other regional markets, e-commerce continues to grow at a rapid pace, despite in-store retail dominating the landscape.

One of the highest mobile penetration rates in the world coupled with a growing youth population that is tech-savvy has helped enhance the popularity and growth potential of the retail sector in Oman.

The light industrial/logistics properties are located in Rusail Industrial Area, and in Misfa. These assets have a strong tenant base with long lease expiry. The REIT funds provide options for investors to invest in real estate and own investment units. In addition, REIT funds also allow foreign investor to own investment units in the fund and attract foreign capital.

Heartiest congratulations and most sincere wishes to His Majesty the Sultan

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat affirms its readiness to play its role in the implementation of Oman Vision 2040. On Monday, 11 January 2021, the Sultanate celebrates the first anniversary of its renewed Renaissance under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.



His Majesty the Sultan has been leading a transformational phase in the country’s march with well-thought-out efforts that have marked the beginning of the ambitious Oman Vision 2040. With the approval of His Majesty the Sultan, the Government is moving ahead with the 10th Five Year Plan.

It is restructuring the state’s administrative apparatus and has announced a major fiscal rebalance plan that promotes economic stability. These steps aim to create the appropriate conditions and climate for the Oman Vision 2040 which stands on the pillars of People and Society, Economy and Development, Governance and Institutional Performance and the Environment.

Playing its part, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in Oman, is keenly providing the best banking services in the country and partners with various institutions for the implementation of national goals.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of Bank Muscat, the Management Team and employees, Shaikh Khalid bin Mustahail al Mashani (pictured), Chairman,

said: “It is a great honour to express our most sincere wishes of good health and long life to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik. We pray to the Almighty Allah to protect His Majesty, grant him good health and continuous blessings.

May the Almighty Allah safeguard Oman and its people and help Oman continue its Renewed Renaissance under his wise leadership. We renew our solemn pledge of loyalty and allegiance to His Majesty.”

Bank Muscat continues its support of the implementation of Oman Vision 2040 through its partnership with the government, private sector and the community. The bank provides various products and services to enable the engine of growth needed to achieve national development goals.

Sustainability is a running theme in the Bank’s initiatives and activities, ensuring lasting positive benefits for the local community. In the recent past, the Bank jointly with the Ministry of Tourism and Heritage inaugurated the old village of Misfat al Abriyeen in the Wilayat of Al Hamra to boost heritage tourism and preserve the cultural heritage of Oman.

Strong start to year feeds supercycle speculation

OLE S HANSEN

We expect the broad commodity rally that saw the Bloomberg Commodity Index rose by 10 per cent during the last quarter will extend further into 2021. Driven by multiple tailwinds from tightening supply, a global market flushed with cash driving speculation across markets and increased demand for inflation hedges.

Adding to this, the prospect for a weaker dollar, a vaccine-led recovery in global demand as well as emerging weather worries and the components for another commodity supercycle have started to emerge.

All of this during a time when the pandemic is still raging across many countries, especially in winter-hit regions across the northern hemisphere where

the prospect for improvement — vaccine or not — is unlikely to occur until warmer weather arrives in March and April.

While the rally may pause until the vaccine rollout gathers momentum, the market will have to rely on continued investment demand is strong enough to keep markets supported during the coming months when the negative impact of lockdowns and reduced mobility will be the greatest.

Investment demand was on clear display during the first full week of trading with the US stock market racing higher to reach a fresh record high, led by so-called ‘bubble stocks’ within technology and green stocks following the Democratic majority in US Congress.

Bitcoin, another bubble candidate, surged past \$40,000 as the alternative investment continues to become more mainstream with institutional demand on the rise.



Speculators have responded very forcefully to the improved sentiment during the past six months and as we enter 2021, they hold a total net long across 24 major commodity futures of 2.5 million lots, representing a nominal value of \$125 billion.

While the two previous peaks in 2017 and 2018 were primarily led

by the crude oil market, the chart below shows how bullish bets have been spread out more evenly between the three major sectors of energy, metals and agriculture.

Overall, the biggest bets are held in crude oil with the combined 614k lots long in WTI and Brent representing a nominal

value of \$30 billion, gold’s 137k lots long at a value of \$26 billion and finally the soybean complex where the net long in soybeans, meal and oil reached 399k lots or \$19 billion nominal.

The net long in crude oil and gold, the two biggest contracts in terms of exposure, remain well below their previous peaks which for crude oil was the 1.1 million lots reached in March 2018 and 292k lots in gold that was reached in September 2019.

Crude oil’s impressive rally since the first vaccine announcements in early November extended into the first week of trading with Brent crude oil breaking above \$55/b for the first time since last February. This after Opec+ faced with an uncertain short-term demand outlook decided to rollover current production levels until March. Topping up the agreement was the surprise unilateral production cut announced by Saudi Arabia, which increasingly

is being seen as the guardian of the oil market.

The Saudis most likely concluded that the next few months could see the current weakness in Western world fuel demand spread to Asia where infections are rising quickly.

With this in mind and from a current fundamental perspective, we remain sceptical about crude oil’s ability to forge much higher at this stage. Momentum, however, remains strong and with this in mind the price can easily reach levels that may otherwise be difficult to justify at this stage of the recovery.

We see Brent trade above \$60/b later in the when global fuel demand recovers further and Opec and Non-Opec spare capacity, currently above 7 million barrels/day, start to reduce through additional Opec+ led production hikes. [The writer is head of Commodity Strategy at Saxo Bank]

HSBC to face shareholder heat on fossil fuels in AGM vote

LONDON: Major HSBC shareholders are calling on Europe's biggest bank to toughen its commitment to cut lending linked to fossil fuels and to turn its climate "ambitions" into targets.

Investors collectively managing some \$2.4 trillion in assets have filed the resolution to be voted on at HSBC's annual general meeting, after HSBC in October stated its ambition to get to net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

That pledge was criticised by campaigners for not directly addressing HSBC's lending to fossil fuel firms, including a relatively large share of clients involved in the coal sector.

"HSBC is strongly committed to addressing climate change, in line with our clear ambition to align our financed emissions of our entire business portfolio to net-zero by 2050 or sooner," a spokesperson for the bank said.

But after a four-year period of engagement with HSBC, the investors coordinated by responsible investment group ShareAction and including Europe's largest asset manager Amundi said they wanted to see the bank go further.

— Reuters



A man walks past a branch of HSBC bank in the City of London financial district. — Reuters



Traders work at the Hong Kong Stock Exchange in Hong Kong, China. — Reuters

Firms drop sanctioned Chinese companies as US enforces ban

HONG KONG: Wall Street institutions in Hong Kong said they are reducing exposure to Chinese companies named in a US ban on investments in companies Washington considers linked to China's military before the rules come into force later on Monday.

Goldman Sachs JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley will delist 500 Hong Kong-listed structured products linked to telecom companies China Mobile, China Telecom and China Unicom and local indexes including the Hang Seng Index, they said in filings to the Stock Exchange of Hong Kong on Sunday evening.

The three telcos' shares are included in the local benchmark. In a separate statement, US

custodian bank State Street said an exchange-traded fund it manages which tracks the Hang Seng Index would not make any new investments in sanctioned stocks, though it would continue to maintain its existing shareholdings.

The statement said that according to information published by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), the fund was no longer appropriate for US individuals or companies to invest in. The announcements follow statements last week by OFAC clarifying a November order from President Donald Trump that banned Americans from investing in Chinese companies that the US considers to have links with

China's military.

The investment banks' filings cited a piece of guidance saying the three telecom companies were specifically included in the initial executive order.

Bourse operator Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing said it was "working closely with the relevant issuers to ensure orderly delisting, and facilitate buyback arrangements being arranged by the issuers." There are over 12,000 structured products listed in Hong Kong issued by 15 companies.

Alex Wong, director at Ample Finance Group in Hong Kong said the delistings would "not have too much impact", as customers could switch to Europe or China-based issuers.

Hong Kong's markets

watchdog, the Securities and Futures Commission, said it had stressed to the investment banks that "any action taken by them should be necessary, fair, and having regard to the best interest of investors and integrity of the market, and that investors should also be properly informed as appropriate." Hang Seng Indexes Co Ltd did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Global index providers MSCI Inc, FTSE Russell and S&P Dow Jones Indices said last week they would cut the three Chinese telecom companies from benchmarks wiping a combined \$5.6 billion off the value of their Hong Kong-traded shares on Friday.

— Reuters

UK airline easyJet gets new five-year \$1.87 billion loan

LONDON: British airline easyJet boosted its liquidity through a new five-year loan facility of \$1.87 billion, backed by a partial guarantee from Britain, helping to ease concerns about its finances as the pandemic continues to stop travel.

Like most European airlines, cash-strapped easyJet had been hoping to be gearing up for a recovery this spring, but with Britain, its biggest market, back in lockdown, flying is expected to stay at minimal levels for several more months.

EasyJet said the new loan facility improved its debt maturity profile and it planned to repay and cancel the full drawn revolving credit facility of \$500 million and term loans of about 400 million pounds (\$540 million) in the first quarter.

To survive the pandemic so far, easyJet has axed 4,500 staff, tapped shareholders for cash, and sold dozens of its aircraft, and it did not rule out further action in its statement on Monday.

— Reuters



Oil prices fall on renewed coronavirus concerns

SINGAPORE: Brent crude oil prices fell by \$1 per barrel on Monday, hit by renewed concerns about global fuel demand amid tough coronavirus lockdowns in Europe and new curbs on movement in China, the world's second-largest oil user, where infections jumped.

Brent crude oil futures were down 78 cent s, or 1.4 per cent, at \$55.21 a barrel by 0758 GMT, after falling \$1 to a session low of \$54.99 earlier. Brent rose

in the previous four sessions. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) slipped 52 cents, or 1 per cent, to \$51.72 a barrel. WTI rose to its highest in nearly a year on Friday.

"COVID hot spots flaring again in Asia, with 11 million people (in) lockdowns in China's Hebei province...along with a touch of Fed policy uncertainty, has triggered some profit taking out of the gates," Stephen Innes, chief global market strategist at Axi,



A worker walks at a petrol station in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

said in a note.

Mainland China saw its biggest daily increase in virus infections in more than five months, authorities said on Monday, as new infections rose in Hebei, near the capital Beijing. Shijiazhuang is in lockdown, with people and vehicles barred from leaving, as authorities seek to rein in the spread.

Most of Europe is now under the strictest restrictions, according to the Oxford stringency index,

which tracks measures such as travel bans and school and workplace closures.

Still, oil price losses were curbed by plans for US President-elect Joe Biden to announce trillions of dollars in new virus relief bills this week, much to be funded through increased borrowing.

Crude prices were supported by Saudi Arabia's pledge last week for a voluntary oil output cut of 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in February and March. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

Heathrow passenger numbers plunged 73 per cent

Heathrow Airport, the busiest in Britain, said that passenger numbers slumped 73 per cent during 2020 as COVID-19 restrictions wiped out travel. The airport said on Monday that its annual cargo volumes also fell 28 per cent as fewer passenger planes meant there was less space available for goods.

For December, Heathrow said that passenger numbers plunged 83 per cent as the new strain of COVID-19 led to countries restricting travellers from Britain



and millions of passengers were forced to cancel plans. The numbers capped off a dismal year for the UK hub, which in October lost its title as the busiest airport in Europe to Paris-Charles de Gaulle. — Reuters

BANGKOK

Thailand plans 'golf quarantine' to boost tourism

Thailand's Tourism Minister said on Monday he had proposed a plan to allow foreigners to quarantine in some of the country's many golf resorts to boost the ailing tourism sector during the coronavirus pandemic.

"We are discussing with the Public Health Ministry and the country's coronavirus taskforce to offer hotel and golf quarantine for tourists with medical certificates," Minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn told reporters.

Foreign tourists would be able to spend the two-week quarantine period at a specified resort and move around in the hotel area and also play golf, he said, rather than just isolating in their rooms.

The plan, which is subject to the approval of the cabinet, comes as the Southeast Asian country grapples with the second wave of coronavirus infections after managing to largely contain community spread for months. — Reuters

BEIJING

China to punish EU countries for banning Huawei

In the recent business investment deal signed by the European Union and China following seven years of talks, Beijing's negotiators had sought to punish EU countries that limit or block access to Chinese telecom companies such as Huawei.

But the EU thwarted Beijing's plan to insert a clause to that effect into the final document. China, according to the document, wanted to reserve the right to deny the benefits of the partial opening of its telecom



sector to investors from countries "that block or arbitrarily discriminate against Chinese telecommunication enterprises in law or policy." That passage, found in a December 11 draft text, was ultimately crossed out. — dpa

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features



AN ARTIST'S TRYST WITH KUMMIAS

Majority of those who visited Oman always have something positive to say about the country and the Omanis with many pointing out that the Omanis are the friendliest and most hospitable. Here's an anecdote of the few reasons why the Omanis, in general, are seen as friendly... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

HUMAN INTEREST



AMAZON VILLAGERS TAKE VINE TEA TO TREAT COVID

In the middle of the Brazilian Amazon rainforest, far from the laboratories of the world's major pharmaceutical companies, the Kayapó indigenous people of Para state are using a drink made from vines to help them ward off the... **Story on Page 20**

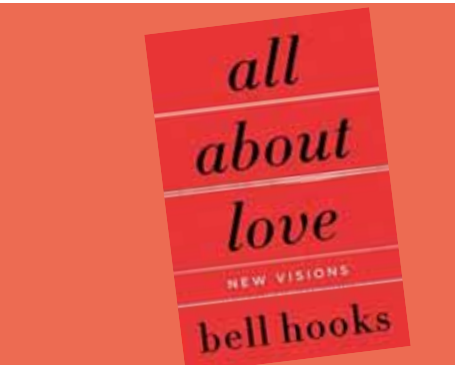
ENVIRONMENT



ESO LAUNCHES IT'S TIME CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOURS

The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) is kicking off the new year with the launch of the It's Time campaign, a year-long initiative designed to promote the adoption of environmentally conscious community... **Story on Page 19**

READ



ALL ABOUT LOVE

BY BELL HOOKS

In her deeply personal and emphatic *All About Love*, renowned social activist and feminist Bell Hooks asserts that, in fact, love is a choice we must all make and it's not nearly as abstract or elusive as many of us have come to believe.

ANCIENT



HOME-TURNED-MUSEUM RETAINS 'SOUL' OF SOUTHERN IRAQ

An imposing house stands out among other buildings in Iraq's Samawah city — once a multi-generational family home, it's now a museum of a bygone age in the country's tribal south. Abdellatif al Jablawi, the property's owner and family patriarch... **Story on Page 19**

CELEBRITIES



NEIL YOUNG SELLS 50 PER CENT STAKE IN HIS MUSIC

Neil Young is the latest high-profile musician to cash in on his song rights, selling a 50 per cent stake in his music to British investment company Hipgnosis. The company said it acquired half of Young's global copyright and income interests of his catalog, which includes 1,180 songs. Hipgnosis did not disclose terms of the deal.



Saleem Sakhi Kumma

AN ARTIST'S TRYST WITH KUMMIAS



KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
@patkaushal

Surroundings have always been a great inspiration for artists. It is interesting, however, to know that for a professional artist Saleem Sakhi, Omani cap (Kumma) made him so inquisitive that he started digging its source and ultimately came out with interesting pieces of art. As an established artist, Saleem Sakhi has ended a number of exhibitions in Oman and abroad,

as he loves to spread the idea of art and his works far and wide. His works at the Art & Soul Gallery at the Waterfront Mall have many inquisitive visitors who try to understand the reason behind his artworks and hugely impressed with the aesthetics therein. The exhibition titled 'Mixture' is a solo show of selected works of Saleem Sakhi, who has successfully portrayed various scenes of nature through the Kumma. When all the details around him become a source of inspiration, it turns the overall shape and becomes the main theme of

his works. That co-existence between him and environment, heritage and traditional costume details have become a source of creativity and inspiration. He has participated in many art exhibitions in the Sultanate and other countries where the scenes from the culture are formatted into the art of the rich environment overlapping the sensory and emotional constitution with a new vision and unique outcome. His artworks have been collected by the Unesco and some government and private institu-

tions. And of course, there are individual buyers who have love and understanding for various forms of art. Kethki Ambekar, Art & Soul Gallery Director, is impressed with the Saleem Sakhi's works and calls it an opportunity to an artist of repute who is an inspiration for many other established and budding artists. "It is rightly said art has the power to transform, to illuminate, to educate, inspire and motivate. At the Art & Soul gallery, we wish to create that platform where artists can express their creativity and showcase it to our commu-

nity," she said. "As a new addition among the existing art scene in Oman, the Art and Soul Gallery offers enhanced exhibition settings, appropriate lighting and state of the art equipment to display artwork attractively. We believe it offers a perfect venue for art talks, workshops and creative performances. Artists can look forward to regular exhibitions, events and competitions at the Art and Soul Gallery. We are looking forward to bringing other unique concepts of Art to the city of Muscat," Kethki Ambekar said.





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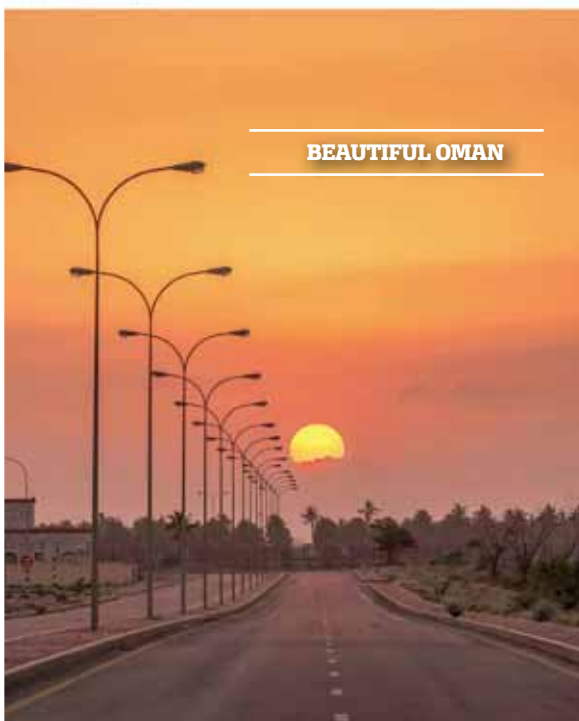
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ENVIRONMENT

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ESO launches It's Time Campaign to Promote Sustainable Behaviours

The Environment Society of Oman (ESO) is kicking off the new year with the launch of the It's Time campaign, a year-long initiative designed to promote the adoption of environmentally conscious community behaviours across Oman. Coinciding with Oman Environment Day on January 8, the campaign is focused on three key issues affecting the Sultanate's environment and its communities; litter, single-use plastics and recycling. As well as a prolonged social media campaign, the organisation will be holding a number of workshops, panel discussions, clean-up events, competitions and awards, aiming to engage communities in environmental causes, raise funds, and educate and inspire people on the benefits of adopting sustainable behaviours.

Among the activities is a quarterly Environmental Heroes award to celebrate individuals and companies who are making a noteworthy contribution to Oman's environmental preservation. Furthermore, the Wa'ai



Award will challenge 15 to 25-year-olds to create their own content in the form of short films, short stories or infographics, with an aim to motivate the community to adopt habits that promote sustainable lifestyles. Meanwhile, the Young Environmentalists programme will offer free interactive workshops for children under the same theme.

"As nations move towards reducing the use of single-use plastics and with Oman's Ministerial Resolution 23/2020 to ban single-use shopping bags from January 2021, we believe that "It's Time" for a more aware and environmentally conscious society.

This timely campaign will demonstrate the size and scale of the three key issues we are targeting; litter,

single-use plastics and recycling, provide a platform to share encouraging messaging, and serve as a call to action for communities to join us in cleaning up Oman", said Sayyida Tania bint Shabib al Said, President of the Environment Society of Oman.

"We are committed to working hard in the pursuit of encouraging the adoption of environmentally sustainable behaviours across Oman, but we cannot do it without the support of the community. I would encourage everyone to think about individual actions they can take in their own lives to positively impact Oman's Environment, because together we can make a difference – It's Time," she added.

As the country's only non-profit organisation dedicated to environment, ESO has spent the last 16 years working to protect Oman's environment and its wildlife. Aside from a variety of research and conservation projects, it continues to introduce new and innovative ways to educate and engage the local community, and effect behavioural change.

ANCIENT

Home-turned-museum retains 'soul' of southern Iraq



AN IMPOSING HOUSE stands out among other buildings in Iraq's Samawah city – once a multi-generational family home, it's now a museum of a bygone age in the country's tribal south.

Abdellatif al Jablawi, the property's owner and family patriarch, led a tour of the traditional house where he was born 80 years ago.

At the time, three generations, from grandparents to grandchildren, lived in the house, with its

nected by steep, narrow stairs and walls of yellow brick, a historic building material still produced in southern Iraq.

Jablawi said the structure had been at risk of "falling into ruin" when he decided to act.

"I decided to buy back all the shares of the house... and, in 2015, I found an architect specialised in renovating heritage buildings," he said.

"I told myself: 'This is our loyalty to the past.'"



intricate "shanasheel" bay windows, wooden balconies and tall doors topped by elaborate lintels.

"Over the generations, everyone preferred to rent elsewhere and the house emptied out," said Jablawi, now the oldest member of his family.

The house is comprised of 13 rooms splashed with sunlight coloured by stained glass windows, including a grand ceremonial salon and kitchen, which Jablawi still calls "the fireplace", as it was known when he was young.

The rooms are con-

All told, the work to restore the building cost 250 million dinars, or around \$171,000.

SYMBOL OF THE CITY

At the start, some family members were resistant to the project, said Ali, Jablawi's eldest son, standing in front of an old radio set in the inner courtyard, where a well recalls the days before running water.

"We didn't agree with this project and the expense; we suggested he sell the dilapidated house to construct a building because we are in the commercial centre of the city," he added. — AFP



Amazon villagers take vine tea to treat COVID

In the middle of the Brazilian Amazon rainforest, far from the laboratories of the world's major pharmaceutical companies, the Kayapó indigenous people of Para state are using a drink made from vines to help them ward off the worst effects of COVID-19.

As incursions into the Amazon by illegal loggers and miners have increased during the pandemic, potentially exposing forest-dwelling tribes to the virus, the Kayapó say their natural treatment is helping to keep them safe.

The skin of the vine — the name of which the community is keeping secret — is boiled and strained into a tea which is drunk three times a day, for five days, explained Po Yre, a 23-year-old member of the Kayapó community from Pykany village.

"The medicine is very strong. When you take it, you get weak, sometimes with red eyes and a headache. But, the next day, it works. You wake up well", said Po Yre, who took the remedy after he tested positive for COVID-19 in July.

While there is no scientific evidence that the tea can combat the virus, Kayapó leaders have said all community members should drink it as a form of prevention against COVID, which has killed nearly 200,000 Brazilians, according to official figures.

Villagers say it is the best way to keep the pandemic from wiping out indigenous communities, which they say have had limited support from the federal government.

A PERFECT STORM

There are an estimated 12,000 Kayapó in the states of Pará and Mato Grosso, according to the Instituto Socioambiental, an organisation that proposes solutions to environmental and social issues in Brazil.

Among that population, there have been less than 20 deaths from COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic, according to SESAI, the government's indigenous health service.

While indigenous advocates say that figure is likely an underestimate, it is still much lower than the 2.5 per cent fatality rate among non-indigenous Brazilians, according to statistics from the National Council of Health Secretaries.

Indigenous rights advocates say rampant encroachment of the Amazon's forests by loggers, miners and farmers greatly increases the risk that villagers will catch the coronavirus from outsiders.

Rodrigo Balbueno, a biologist and consultant at the Kabu Institute, which represents the Kayapó communities from the Bau and Menkragnoti indigenous lands in Para state, says there has been a boom in the number of incursions during the pandemic.

Comparing satellite images of the area from August 2020 to October 2020, Balbueno said it is possible to see that new roads have been built and more areas have been cleared of trees - all indications of increased illegal logging and gold mining.

Environmental advocates say encroachers have been emboldened by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's plans to open up the Amazon to commercial mining and agriculture, which he says will lift indigenous people from poverty.

At the same time, when Funai banned outsiders from entering indigenous lands at the start of the pandemic, the order also stalled inspections that were meant to stop illegal activity in the rainforest, Balbueno explained.

"This loosening of inspections and the feeling of freedom (granted by Bolsonaro) was the perfect storm for everything we are seeing now", he said.

Scientists say that combatting rising deforestation rates in the Amazon rainforest — a major store of planet-warming carbon that stretches across nine South American countries — is crucial in the fight against climate change.

LOSING HISTORY AND TRADITIONS

Even with villagers avoiding cities and drinking regular doses of the vine tea, Chief Abiri Kayapó of Pykatoti village is still worried that the virus might take hold.

"There has been no serious case here in the village. Everyone has been treated with the medicine from the forest. But I worry about the invasions", he said, walking along a trail through the forest to point out medicinal plants.

Kayapó leaders have forbidden anyone in



the community from disclosing the name of the plant species used in the tea treatment to prevent their forests from being further stripped of resources, said Abiri.

That secrecy, villagers say, is essential to making sure the pandemic does not claim any more of the people who hold the community's history and traditions.

"COVID-19 has killed women, the elderly and leaders who took with them a whole history of struggle and culture", said O-é Kaiapó Paiakan, who is still shaken by the loss of her father.

"Elders are of great importance for the permanence of our culture. They maintain our way of life, handing down their stories for younger generations to pass on." — **Reuters**