

Omani students in UK urged to heed stay-home orders

The Omani Cultural Attaché Office in London has urged all Omani students based in the United Kingdom to comply with the instructions issued by the local authorities as part of precautionary measures against Covid-19. It urged Omani students to heed stay-at-home order and avoid unnecessary contact with others during the lockdown period. In a statement, the Cultural Attaché Office notified Omani students not to step out of home after sunset for their own safety amid the current conditions as most roads are empty which makes them susceptible to crimes. **DETAILS ON P5**



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OMAN OBSERVER

www.omanobserver.om editor@omanobserver.om

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MUSCAT

MAN ARRESTED FOR CYBER EXTORTION

The Department of Combating Economic Crimes at the Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation has arrested a person on charges of fraud, cyber extortion, threatening, impersonation, violating human dignity and breaching the Cyber Crimes Law, a Royal Oman Police (ROP) official said. The accused impersonated a security officer on one of the social media platforms to convince his victims of his ability to secure their personal accounts from being hacked.

DETAILS ON P5

AMMAN

2.4M SYRIAN CHILDREN ARE OUT OF SCHOOL

More than half of children in war-torn Syria are missing out on education, the UN children's agency Unicef said on Sunday, with a third of schools in ruins or commandeered by fighters. The figures are a sharp rise from previous estimates when Unicef said a third of Syrian children were out of school. "After almost ten years of war in Syria, more than half of children continue to be deprived of education", Unicef said in a statement, estimating there are over 2.4 million children out of school inside the country.

No plan to make health services chargeable for citizens

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

Right to have healthcare in the Sultanate is guaranteed and ensured for all citizens. This is one of the government's priorities and there is no plan to make citizens pay for health services.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, assured this when he gave a detailed statement during the sixth and seventh regular sessions of the second annual sitting of the Majlis Ash'shura on Sunday.

Regarding health insurance, the minister stated that the issue had been referred to the Council of Ministers, while its implementation assigned to CMA. Starting on a gradual basis with the private sector, "Citizens will not be negatively affected by any financial burdens from health insurance."



Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi giving a statement in Majlis Ash'shura during a session on Sunday. — ONA

COVID-19

In his statement before the Majlis, the minister praised everyone for their cooperation towards reducing the impacts of the pandemic.

"The number of laboratory-confirmed cases of Covid-19 has reached more than 99 million cases at the global level, while the number of deaths has reached more than 2 million.

A steady increase in cases has recently been observed in many countries, coinciding with the onset of winter.

The number of confirmed Covid-19 cases from the beginning of the pandemic till date is more than 133,044 in the Sultanate, including 10,685 cases which required hospitalisation, 2,650 cases in intensive care units and 1,521 deaths", he said.

Coexist safely with the pandemic until vaccination is done

39,413 health workers till 2019 with an Omanisation rate of 72%

3,050 expatriate health workers were replaced by Omanis

However, the last updated data indicated a noticeable decline in the number of infections and deaths, as well as in the rate of positive tests for Covid-19 since mid-October 2020.

"Yet, in the light of the continuation of the pandemic at the global level, the possibility of the rise in the number of infections locally is not ruled out", Dr Al Saeedi added. **TURN TO P2**

Land borders to remain closed till February 1

MUSCAT: The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic at its meeting has followed-up the updates on the pandemic and means to protect the society against it, as well as ways to curb its spread.

As per the recommendations of the specialised technical team on the spread of the new Covid-19 strain and to protect the society against the disease, the Supreme Committee has decided to keep the Sultanate's land borders closed for one more week till 6 pm of Monday (February 1).

The Supreme Committee is following up and assessing the epidemiological situation in the Sultanate and the increase in the number of infected cases and those admitted to the ICU, in addition to the leniency in implementing precautionary measures. — ONA

PLAYING WITH SNOW!



A woman is hit by a snowball in Trafalgar Square in London, Britain, on Sunday. — Reuters

Biden to unveil climate policies

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden's administration will this week release more policies it believes are needed to tackle climate change and is urging China to toughen one of its targets on greenhouse gas emissions, his top climate advisers said.

Gina McCarthy, the White House's national climate adviser, did not say what policies would be released. A memo seen by Reuters showed Biden will unveil a second round of executive



orders as soon as January 27 that include an omnibus order to combat climate change domestically and elevate the issue as a

national security priority.

"We've already sent signals on the things that we don't like that we're going to roll back, but this week you're going to see us move forward with what's the vision of the future", McCarthy told a virtual meeting of the US Conference of Mayors.

John Kerry, Biden's special climate envoy, said a recent pledge by China, the world's top greenhouse gas emitter, was "not good enough." — Reuters

Omanisation of more professions announced

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

In line with the continuous efforts to generate more job opportunities for citizens, the government has reserved more jobs for them.

As per Article 1 of the ministerial decision issued on Sunday, practising some professions and activities in private sector establishments will be restricted to only Omanis.

These include financial and administrative professions in insurance companies and firms operating in brokerage activities, selling, accounting, money exchange, management and arranging goods in operating stores in malls, accounts and auditing professions in auto agencies, all professions in the sale of new and used vehicles, all accounting professions related to the sale of new and used vehicles in agencies and sale of spare parts for new vehicles in auto agencies.

Article 2 states that non-Omani workforce licences and work licences issued for the professions and activities

Non-Omani workforce licences issued for the professions specified in Article 1 shall be valid until their expiry date

MINISTRY OF LABOUR

specified in Article 1 shall be valid until their expiry date.

Article 4 says that this decision shall be published in the Official Gazette and shall be enforced after six months from the date of its publication.

The Minister of Labour has issued a decision (9/2021) regulating the profession of driving.

Article 1 states that practising the profession of driving vehicles of whatever type should be reserved only for Omanis. The activities include transportation of fuel, agricultural materials and foodstuff.



INSIDE



CHINA RESCUES 11 MINERS AFTER 14 DAYS

P7



TEARS AND FEARS AS INDIA'S VACCINE PUSH FAULTERS

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WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 24°C Min 15°C SALALAH: Max 29°C Min 19°C NIZWA: Max 27°C Min 14°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:50 FAJR: 05:31 DHUHR: 12:24 ASR: 15:32 MAGHRIB: 17:54 ISHA: 19:07

■ SAUDI AMBASSADOR BIDS FAREWELL



General Sultan Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received in his office on Sunday Eid Mohammed al Thaqafi, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), to bid him farewell at the end of his tour of duty as his country's ambassador to the Sultanate. The ambassador expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the cooperation extended to him during his duty from all officials in the Sultanate. He also praised the strength of the bilateral relations binding the two brotherly countries. Gen Al Numani thanked the ambassador for the efforts he exerted in serving the existing relations between his country and the Sultanate while carrying out his duty, wishing him permanent success. — ONA

558 COVID-19 cases, 4 deaths

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health announced on Sunday 558 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the total number of coronavirus patients in the Sultanate to 133,044. The total number of death cases in the country has reached 1,521 on Sunday after 4 people died in three days.

A total of 126,262 out of the COVID-19 patients in the Sultanate have recovered, the ministry said.

The ministry also pointed out that 10 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of hospitalised COVID-19 patients stands at 86, of them 26 are in intensive care units (ICU).

Duqm Economist Magazine released

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) today released the 22nd Issue of Duqm Economist Magazine, featuring a number of projects in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) and the free zones in Salalah, Suhar and Al Mazunah. The cover story is on His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq's launch of Oman Vision 2040.

In the editorial, Ahmed Hassan al Dheeb, Deputy Chairman of OPAZ and General Supervisor of the Magazine, stressed on the importance of the special economic zones and free zones in the Sultanate's development plans. He commended the various achievements marked over the



past years. Duqm Economist Magazine dedicated a number of pages for the main story, titled "Duqm; a tourist icon amid a number of investment projects" in which 8 key tourist destinations in Duqm or nearby have been featured. — ONA

No plan to make health services chargeable

FROM PAGE 1

On the other hand, he said, the use of non-drug interventions (such as the closure of activities and borders) has become a major challenge for countries and governments. The solutions for the next stage are limited to strengthening societal and institutional preventive measures (such as physical distancing, wearing masks and hand hygiene) to coexist safely with the pandemic until vaccination of target groups is completed in the Sultanate according to the set plan.

VACCINES

Talking about the vaccines, the minister said: "To ensure the Sultanate obtains the required quantities with appropriate conditions in terms of the international quality of the vaccines, the speed of supply and the economic feasibility study, several consultative and

negotiation channels have been opened through the Global Alliance for From Page 1

Vaccines (GAV) and direct negotiations with the vaccine manufacturers. On December 28, the national vaccination campaign against COVID-19 was launched where a total of 27,004 people have been immunised till date, with a coverage rate of 99 per cent of the target groups."

In their successive annual reports, international organisations praised the Sultanate's health achievements and their effectiveness.

"This international praise is a source of pride for all of us as it reflects the success achieved by the Sultanate in the field of the health sector as part of comprehensive development, as the participation of community members in maintaining their health is necessary to bring about healthy development. Health is one of the advanced priorities in



the comprehensive development process," he added.

The minister also noted that the Sultanate is among the first 40 countries in the world to obtain a Pfizer vaccine from the country of origin, confirming that "we will not import any medicine without ensuring its safety. The Sultanate goes by the health standards and requirements, and the lives of its citizens are very important. The system for managing and classifying vaccinations in the Sultanate ranked first among 127 countries, and this classification is international."

OMANISATION

Regarding Omanisation rates in the health sector, the minister said the total number of employees in the Ministry of Health by the end of 2019 reached 39,413, with an Omanisation rate of 72 per cent compared to 69 per cent in 2016. The percentage of employees in the medical and paramedical personnel represents 79 per cent of the total in the ministry.

The total number of Omanis who were hired after replacing expatriate workers during the period from 2016 to the end of 2019 stood at 3,050 Omanis, of whom 215 were doctors, 1,671 were nurses, 251 were pharmacists, and 913 were other paramedical categories, according to the statement of the minister.

Omanisation of dentists in primary healthcare institutions has reached 100 per cent, while Omanisation in the pharmacy sector in government institutions has reached 95 per cent.

"As for the private pharmaceutical sector, the number is still not satisfactory. However, we will not dispense with attracting experienced expatriate doctors. We have started implementing work contracts with expatriate doctors since 2014," Dr Al Saeedi said.

During the session, the minister also indicated that there are four pharmaceutical factories

under construction, one in the production stage, and a plan to expand ambulance services among health institutions.

He stressed the importance of enhancing investments in the health sector and localising industries, noting that the ministry seeks to encourage investment in the sector and provide technical support.

In terms of the existing projects, the minister said, "Al Suwaiq Hospital is under construction, and the completion rate of the project has crossed 20 per cent."

He said: "We are counting on it to relieve pressure on the health sector in the South Al Batinah Governorate." There is also the expansion of care unit in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali Hospital which will be operated if the capabilities are available. Besides, Shaleem Hospital has been expanded, and it provides maternity and emergency services. It is a fully integrated facility.



Collectors' delight

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) announced that the 6th Series of Uncut Sheets of One Rial, Half Rial and 100 Baisa are up for sale starting from Sunday. The banknotes in the sheets are legal tenders for their face values and the sheets are available for sale at the CBO. — ONA

RO 80	←	40 Banknotes of RO1	←	
RO 50	←	50 Banknotes of half Rial	←	
RO 12	←	60 Banknotes of 100 Baisa	←	

Air ticket issues dominated complaints in 2020: CAA



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The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has said there has been an increase of nearly 152 per cent in the complaints received against various operators in the sector in 2020.

Most of the grievances were following the suspension of flights to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

CAA said in its bi-monthly bulletin said 419 of 542 (nearly 77 per cent) of the complaints were related to air tickets.

Civil Aviation Authority said that passengers' complaints related to air transport, which are subject to the provisions of the economic regulation rules for licencing and consumer protection in civil aviation.

CAA also deals with complaints in accordance with the rules of economic organisation issued by the authority in 2015, to make sure that the traveller has made a grievance before that with the air carrier in question, and in the event that the carrier does not respond within 30 days of the complaint's rules.

Ministry ink pact with PDO to conserve geological sites

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 24

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism signed a Memorandum of Collaboration (MoC) with Petroleum Development Oman (PDO) to protect and conserve several geological heritage sites in Oman. The MoC aims to ensure the sustainability of these sites, which are considered important national heritage locations, and tourist destinations of global scientific significance.

The agreement was signed by Salim bin Mohammad al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and Raoul Restucci, PDO managing director.

Al Mahrouqi said: "Oman enjoys geological diversity by virtue of its geographical location. Mountains, springs, caves, and rock formations have characterised Oman with unique geological nature, making it a tourist destination due to its variation in terrain and climates. Its monuments are an outlet for nature lovers, observers of geological transformations, and those studying them.

"The memorandum signed with PDO comes within the framework of the partnership and the strengthening of relations between the public and private sectors, and the consolidation and encouragement of the exchange of



experiences in various fields. The memorandum aims to establish a mechanism to rehabilitate some important Omani geo-heritage sites to protect and preserve them and to promote them as tourist destinations that highlight the diversity of Oman's rich geo-heritage. It also aims to exchange geological information, seek assistance from expertise between the Ministry and the

Company, and exchange data and information to map the geological sites in the Sultanate.

"The areas of collaboration also include providing scientific and technical support to protect endangered geological sites, as well as preparing files for geo parks in the Sultanate and identifying them to register one or two sites subsequently in the List of Unesco Global Geoparks

(UGGp).

"Furthermore, it involves delivering a series of workshops targeting existing key tourism sector players, and job seekers interested in geo-tourism. As well as enabling SME's and youth groups to engage with this newly emerging sector and empowering them with knowledge and opportunities to introduce the Sultanate and to access them

safely, as well as introducing them to the best possible health, safety, security and environmental practices that must be followed to sustain the sights for future generations."

PDO Managing Director Raoul Restucci said: "PDO is proud to support such initiatives as Oman's geology is highly complex and of great scientific significance.

The memorandum aims to establish a mechanism to rehabilitate some important geo-heritage sites to protect and preserve them and to promote them as tourist destinations that highlight the diversity of Oman's rich geo-heritage

SALIM AL MAHROUQI

Minister of Heritage and Tourism

"This project hopes to ensure the immediate protection and conservation of key threatened geo-sites as a foundation for developing geo-heritage-based tourism in Oman and the establishment of Geoparks as economic and job opportunity generators.

"The collaboration between the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and PDO will include the formation of a joint team. We look forward to offering the technical support required to assess and manage the identified geological sites."

Explore mountain of rich



TEXT & PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

Wadi Mayh, located in Wilayat of Al Amerat, is home to many archaeological sites. It consists of Al Raja, Al Qabil, Al Marazih, Al Mazra'a Al Hadriyah and Al Mazraa Al Alalwiyah. The western part of the valley is guarded by an enormous mountain range with many layers of rock from different geological periods. Now, it looks like a massive display of rock art.

Wadi al Mayh is a valley which is surrounded by many high mountains. The prominent among them is Jabal Al Hanqri (the mountain of rich). It is called so as the place is rich in wild game and honey. The valley is covered with trees and palms, as well as rocks, and a large number of tourists come to it to



enjoy these picturesque scenes. Inside this wadi, there is a stream called Wadi Aimfas. This site's picturesque landscape is dotted with shrubs and pools of freshwater, which are turquoise blue in colour. The mountain rocks are mostly limestone aged over 300 million years. One can find rock inscriptions and



rocky structures which attract hikers from all over the world especially those geologists who are eager to document these type of exceptional spots in Oman.

Nowadays, many people visit Wadi Aimfas for hiking and exploring nature. The site has remains of old stone houses.



OMAN DATES PRODUCTION
& PACKAGING CO. (S.A.O.C)

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

OMAN DATES PRODUCTION & PACKAGING COMPANY S.A.O.C (ODPP) is Part of Oman Food Investment Holding Company S.A.O.C. Oman's leading investment, development and management company in the food sector.

ODPP is pleased for DCRP-approved Contractors to participate at the tender about the realization of the Laying of H.T U/G cable from new substation to Dates Factory in Rumais, Barka, Al Batinah Region.

For Contractors who are interested to participate, the tender documents are available for collection by sending an official email to: tenders@tumoor.om, with copy of payment transfer receipt of the tender fee (OMR 100/-) to OMAN DATES PRODUCTION & PACKAGING COMPANY S.A.O.C (ODPP) Bank Account below:

Account Name	Oman Dates Production & Packing Company
Account Number	0010035196001001
Bank	Bank Al-Izz Islamic
Currency	OMR (Omani Riyal)
SWIFT Code	IZZBOMRU XXX

Last day to purchase the Tender is on 1st February 2021.
The tender submission date is 11th February 2021.

Note:

For the contractor to qualify to bid for this tender they must submit the following:

- A valid DCRP Certificate.
- Submission of refrence project that the bidder have completed at least 5 Projectes with Mazoon Electricity Company in the past 3 years.
- Reciept of payment transfer for the tender fees.

OMAN DATES PRODUCTION & PACKAGING CO. S.A.O.C

 Call : +96824111200 _ +96824111222

 tenders@tumoor.om

 Office No. 6, 8th Floor, Al Nahdah Tower 2, Ghala.P.O Box: 830, Azaiba, P.C. 130, Muscat, Sultanate of Oman.



BRING YOUR OWN CARRY BAG

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkuttyp](#)

After the ban on single-use plastic bags in Oman, there is a big drop in the overall use of shopping bags.

“Leave alone that fact all the checkouts are free of single-use plastic bags. There has been a substantial fall in the number of other bags as well. Many customers started bringing them from home,” said Rafeeq Ahmed, a salesman at a hypermarket in the capital.

The comment of this salesman is a proof of the success of the decision by the government to ban the single-use plastic bags as part of its endeavour to make the Sultanate a plastic-free country in the long run.

“Look at shoppers. Most of them have their own bags to carry back the goods they purchase. Others take them

in trolleys till their vehicles. Some of the customers seek the help of the staff at the shops,” said Rafeeq.

Ban on single-use plastic bags, although small, is a critical step towards eliminating a menace from the face of the earth. The consideration and adoption of bag bans have already played a crucial role in drawing attention to the harms of plastic and has pushed people to examine their plastic consumption habits.

PLASTIC CRISIS

“Although the ban won’t solve the plastic crisis on their own, they do help to change plastic consumption habits and cause consumers and retailers to be more open to alternatives,” said Adhil Lawati, who joined the beach cleaning drive launched by Muscat Municipality.

Although consumers have not been willing to give up the habit of walking



Everyone forgets
sometimes, so make
it easy on yourself
and keep some bags
permanently
in your car

ADHIL LAWATI

into the shop without shopping bags. We should not expect them to change overnight, he said. “Everyone forgets sometimes, so make it easy on yourself and keep some bags permanently in your car. Also get into the habit of returning bags to your stash spots once you have emptied the shopping, so that they will be there for next time,” he advised.

RECYCLING

Although plastic bags are recyclable, very few actually are because the cost of recycling is greater than the cost of producing new bags. As a result, most plastic bags end up in landfills or as litter in the environment. Paper bags and reusable bags have been suggested as alternatives for plastic bags.

According to Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri, Chairman of the Environment Authority, the ban was implemented after

studying about its environment impact.

Studies indicate that people worldwide use an estimated 500 billion to 1 trillion single-use plastic bags each year. Often described as the number one consumer product in the world, and the most ubiquitous, plastic shopping bags are now among the “most-banned” of the world.

The standard specifications for shopping bags have been adopted and a fine of RO 1,000 will be imposed on non-compliant factories. At the same time, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion issued a decision specifying that polyethylene be used for making reusable shopping bags.

According to the decision, “an administrative fine not exceeding RO 1,000 will be imposed on anyone who violates the provisions of this decision, and the fine is doubled in the event of a repeat offence.”

Decision to regulate export of waste

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Environment Authority has issued a decision to regulate the export of waste, which will be managed in coordination with competent authorities.

As per ministerial decision 15/2021, it is prohibited to export all types of hazardous and non-hazardous waste from the Sultanate without obtaining a licence from the Authority.

The export licence fees will be between RO 10 and RO 100 depending on the volume and the type of waste.

It is prohibited to mix more than one type of waste in a single container or shipment, and the waste that is not available for treatment and recycling in the Sultanate shall be exempted from export licence fees in coordination with the competent authorities.

If an export licence has been

sought for wastes that can be utilised in the Sultanate, priority will be given to the local market.

Companies and shops that produce and deal with hazardous and non-hazardous waste must keep a record that includes the produced waste, indicating what was sold off as well as what was disposed of and the methods for that, and the record must be shown to the competent authorities upon request.

Anyone who violates the provisions of the regulation will be punished with an administrative fine of not less than RO 500 and not more than RO 2,000 and the fine will be doubled if the violation is repeated.

The competent authorities named to implement the decision will include the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, the Royal Oman Police (ROP), Bee'ah, and any other party related to the implementation of the decision.



Officials inspect health facilities in Sharqiyah

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 24

Senior officials of the Ministry of Health (MoH) made field visits to inspect health facilities in Al Sharqiyah North. Dr Fatima Mohammed al Ajmi, MoH Under-Secretary for Administrative, Financial and Planning Affairs recently visited health institutions and new facilities in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate to follow up on the work progress in these institutions.

Dr Al Ajmi visited hospitals and some health centres in Sinaw, Bidiya, Ibra and Al Mudhaibi. She was briefed on the workflow at these institutions as she met with administrations and the health workers and received their opinions on how to improve the quality of health services delivery. In Ibra Hospital presentations were given on financial and human resources, as well the situation in the governorate's primary and secondary health institutions.

She met Shaikh Ali

al Shamsi, Governor of Al Sharqiyah North, and discussed quality enhancement of the health services delivery in the governorate.

Dr Fatima also visited the new building and training centre in the old building of the Directorate-General of Health Services in the governorate. She reviewed health systems including health plans, indicators, and achievements with the administrative personnel of the governorate.

The under-secretary

was accompanied by Mohammed al Abri, Director-General of Health Services, Al Sharqiyah North Governorate along with some senior officials from the MoH and DGHS.

The MoH conducts regular visits to review work progress in the three healthcare levels of the health institutions (primary, secondary and tertiary), identifying their needs and requirements, and studying the development of the health system infrastructure.

Omani students in UK urged to stay home

LONDON: The Omani Cultural Attaché Office in London has urged all Omani students based in the United Kingdom to comply with the instructions issued by the local authorities as part of precautionary measures against Covid-19. It urged Omani students to heed stay-at-home order and avoid unnecessary contact with others during the lockdown period.

The Cultural Attaché



Office attached a link specifying the reasons for stepping outside during the national lockdown:

<https://gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home#when-you-can-leave-home>.

In a statement, the Cultural Attaché Office notified Omani students not to step out of home after sunset for their own safety amid the current conditions as most roads are empty which makes them susceptible to crimes.

Omani students in the UK were advised to keep in contact with the Cultural Attaché Office and urged Omani English language learners to communicate with their host families.

Man arrested for cyber extortion

MUSCAT: The Department of Combating Economic Crimes at the Directorate-General of Inquiries and Criminal Investigation has arrested a person on charges of fraud, cyber extortion, threatening, impersonation, violating human dignity and breaching the Cyber Crimes Law, a Royal Oman Police (ROP) official said.

The accused impersonated a security officer on one of the social media platforms to convince his victims of his ability to secure their personal accounts from being hacked. After collecting personal information, the fraudster gained control over the victims' accounts and asked them for money by means of extortion. The scammer also posted a fake job advertisement for females and demanded personal information.

TENDER NOTICE

Majis announce the following tender

Sl. No.	Tender No.	Tender Description	Bids fees In R.O.	Last date for Obtaining Tender Documents	Last date for tender Submission
1.	Majis-01-2021	Supply and Installation of Sludge Drying at MAJIS' CETRP Plot, Sohar Industrial Port area	200/-	1 st February 2021	1 st March 2021

- Interested companies may obtain the Tender documents from the e-tendering website: <http://tendering.majis.om/ VendorLogin.aspx> against non refundable payment as mentioned above. Tender documents will be published to such firms only.
- Tenders should be submitted online on the given website; no documents can be accepted as manual submission except original Tender Bond.
- The Tenderer shall register in E-tendering portal to enable purchase and collection of the tender documents.
- All correspondences pertaining to the Tender enquiry must be online at the e-tendering system and sent to email ID: tender@miscoman.com.
- Any clarification pertaining to the e-tendering system technical support must be directed to the following helpdesk email ID: vender@miscoman.com and phone No. 26852421.

Majis is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.


AL BASHAYER

Bid Announcement

Skins and Hides (Cattel, Sheep & Goat)

Al Bashayer Meat Company SAOC announces its intention to float a bid to sell the hides and skins of the slaughtered animals in its factory in Thumrait Region.

Those who wish to participate in the bidding process with a commercial register are requested to contact the Procurement Department in the company's headquarters in Muscat on Thursday 28th January 2021 and Sunday 31st January 2021 to collect the bidding document after presenting bank deposit receipt for the bidding fees of OMR 50.000 non-refundable.

Bids must be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to the Procurement Committee through either hand delivery or courier to the company's headquarters in Muscat by no later than Sunday 7th February 2021.

❖ **Company Address:**

Muscat, Bousher, Ghala, Al Nahdah Tower 2,
8th Floor, Office No. 1

❖ **Bank Details:**

0423058184870015 (Bank Muscat)


AL BASHAYER

Bid Announcement

Red and White Offal (Cattle, Sheep & Goat)

Al Bashayer Meat Company SAOC announces its intention to float a bid to sell the Red and White Offal of the slaughtered animals in its factory in Thumrait Region.

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0423058184870015 (Bank Muscat)

UN mediator demands progress at Syrian talks

BEIRUT/GENEVA: Negotiators of the Syrian government and opposition need to start drafting a new constitution as soon as possible, UN envoy Geir Pedersen said ahead of a new round of talks in Geneva next week.

“There needs to be more urgency to delivering progress in this process,” the Syria envoy told a press conference on Friday.

The UN-brokered constitutional talks are meant to pave the way for a settlement of the Syrian civil war that broke out in March 2011.

Fifteen delegates from both sides are scheduled to arrive in the Swiss city on Saturday to start talks on Monday.

Four previous rounds have not brought any substantial progress.

“The political process so far is not delivering real changes in Syrian’s lives nor a real vision for the future,” Pedersen said.

The situation is dire for the more than 6 million people who are displaced within Syria.

Twelve people have been murdered at the overcrowded Al Hol refugee camp in north-eastern Syria since the beginning of the year, according to United Nations figures.

Imran Riza, the UN’s resident coordinator and humanitarian



The political process so far is not delivering real changes in Syrian’s lives nor a real vision for the future

GEIR PEDERSEN
UN envoy

coordinator for Syria, and Muhannad Hadi, regional humanitarian coordinator for the Syria crisis, expressed concerns over what they called “deteriorating security conditions” at Al Hol.

From January 1 to 16, “the UN received reports of the murders of 12 Syrian and Iraqi camp residents, including one female Iraqi refugee. Another person was critically injured in a violent attack,” the UN officials said in a statement on Thursday.



A general view of Al Hol displacement camp in Hasaka governorate, Syria. — Reuters

Circumstances of the reported murders were not clear.

Al Hol camp is located in a region controlled by Syria’s Kurds. It is the largest refugee camp in the civil war-torn country, with more than 60,000 people, according to UN figures.

More than 80 per cent of its inhabitants are women and children. Aid agencies have long complained of inhumane conditions in the overcrowded camp.

“The recent rise in violence among the camp population not

only represents a tragic loss of life, it also jeopardises the ability for the UN and humanitarian partners to continue to safely deliver critical humanitarian assistance and services to residents,” the statement said.

Thousands of former

supporters of the IS militia, including German nationals, are also kept at Al Hol.

The UN reported last year that several children had died there.

The reasons varied from complications as a result of malnutrition, diarrhoea or internal bleeding.

Meanwhile, refugee camps in Syria’s north-western province of Idlib have suffered severe damage due to heavy rains earlier this week, Salem Abdan, the head of the provincial Health Directorate, said.

Videos and pictures from Idlib showed flooded tents and camps, while children stood knee-high in water.

According to the Ihsan Relief and Development Group, more than 200 camps and an estimated 175,000 people have been affected by the bad weather.

Idlib is the last rebel stronghold in Syria. Syrian government forces supported by Russia began an offensive in the region in 2019, prompting concerns over civilians’ safety there.

Russia and Iran back Syrian President Bashar al Assad, while Turkey has been supporting opposition forces since a pro-democracy uprising started against Assad in 2011. — dpa

Pandemic forces Jordanian children prematurely into labour market

AMMAN: Omar’s heart sinks when he trudges past his closed school gates in the Jordanian capital Amman — now part of his trip to work, to repair and clean kerosene heaters.

The 14-year-old, who dreams of becoming a pilot, is one of many minors experts say have been forced prematurely into the labour market.

Schools throughout Jordan have been closed for nearly a year now, and the economic fallout from the novel coronavirus pandemic has eaten into breadwinners’ ability to feed their families.

“As school is shut, I help my family financially,” said Omar, sporting a sweater and dirty jeans as he cleaned a heater with his blackened hands.

He works exhausting 12-hour days at the workshop, and collapses into bed after a shower and a quick evening meal.

Overall, the work “doesn’t bother me,” he said. “What



Jordanian teenager, Omar, fixes a kerosene heater in a workshop where he works in Amman. — AFP

is unbearable is the smell of kerosene... (it) doesn’t go away.”

He earns three dinars (around \$4.25) a day, which helps pay the family’s monthly rent of 130 dinars.

His contribution is vital because his father, a day labourer, has struggled to find work due to

the coronavirus downturn.

But Omar has not given up hope, and said he was determined to return to school as soon as possible.

“I would love to continue my studies” and eventually become a pilot, he said. “I don’t want the coronavirus to destroy my dream.”

The education ministry has announced a return to classes next month for kindergarten and some elementary school levels, as well for students in their final year of high school. Everyone else will have to wait until March.

UN children’s agency Unicef said that while it had no hard statistics, it believed many Jordanian children had been forced into precarious work since the pandemic began — despite it being forbidden to employ those under 16.

Some 76,000 children were already working in Jordan according to the last official count, published in 2016.

“When we see children and when we speak to people, we are concerned that the numbers are increasing,” said Tanya Chapuisat, Unicef’s country representative in Jordan. “It would seem logical... because we know the levels of poverty are increasing” during the coronavirus crisis, she added.

— AFP

Yemen’s warring sides resume prisoner swap talks

DUBAI: Yemen’s Ansar Allah group and government who have been at war for almost six years began fresh UN-backed negotiations on a prisoner exchange on Sunday, UN and Yemeni officials said.

The meeting in Jordan comes days after the United States designated the Ansar Allah as a terrorist organisation, a move the United Nations had warned could undermine peace efforts and worsen Yemen’s humanitarian crisis.

A UN-chartered plane carried four Ansar Allah officials from Sanaa to Amman on Saturday. The government also sent four representatives, according to Mohammad Fadayel, the head of the government’s prisoners committee.

The talks aim to free 300 prisoners, including high-

ranking officials like the brother of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, whose internationally recognised government was ousted by the Ansar Allah, sources familiar with the matter said.

“The meetings started on Sunday morning,” Ismini Palla, spokeswoman of the office of UN special envoy Martin Griffiths, said, adding that he had opened the talks.

The talks are part of confidence-building measures aimed at restarting peace negotiations last held in Sweden in December 2018, when the two parties agreed to exchange 15,000 detainees split between the Ansar Allah movement and the coalition that has been battling the group since 2015.

Around a 1,000 prisoners were exchanged last year.

— Reuters

BOUZNKA

Libya camps agree to open candidacy process

Representatives from rival Libyan camps said a candidacy process would open on Tuesday for key institutional appointments, after a new round of talks in Morocco on ending nearly a decade of conflict.

The process, set to run until February 2, aims to quickly fill several strategic posts in order to facilitate collaboration with an interim executive body set to be elected next week in Geneva, a joint statement said on Saturday.

Oil-rich Libya has been riven



by civil war since a Nato-backed uprising that ousted long-time dictator Moamer Kadhafi in 2011. — AFP

KUWAIT

Kuwait’s emir reappoints PM to form new cabinet

Kuwait’s emir reappointed Sheikh Sabah al Khalid al Sabah as prime minister on Sunday after the cabinet resigned last week in a standoff with parliament over its vote to question the premier on issues including his choice of ministers.

Emir Sheikh Nawaf al Ahmed al Sabah, facing his first big political challenge since taking power in September, tasked Sheikh Sabah with nominating a new cabinet for approval, state news agency KUNA said.



The barely one-month-old government had been acting in a caretaker role since it resigned over the confrontation with parliament. — Reuters

TEL AVIV

Israel includes teens in vaccination drive

Israel expanded its COVID-19 vaccination drive on Sunday to include 16- to 18-year-olds in what the government described as an effort to enable their attendance at school exams.

Israel, which has the world’s fastest vaccine distribution rate, is hoping to begin reopening its economy next month.

With regular imports of Pfizer Inc. vaccines, Israel has administered at least one dose to more than 25 per cent of its 9 million population since



December 19, the Health Ministry says. The vaccines were initially limited to the elderly and other high-risk categories, but are now available to anyone over 40 or — with parental permission — those between 16 and 18.

In brief

NEW DELHI



INDIA TO GIVE HOMEGROWN VACCINE IN 7 MORE STATES

India said it will administer homegrown coronavirus vaccine COVAXIN in seven more states from Monday as it seeks to inoculate 30 million healthcare workers across the country.

The government this month gave emergency-use approval to the vaccine, developed by Bharat Biotech International Ltd and state-run Indian Council of Medical Research, and another licensed from Oxford University and AstraZeneca PLC that is being manufactured by the Serum Institute of India.

The expansion from the 12 states now administering COVAXIN includes the southern state of Kerala, which has a high COVID-19 caseload, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state of Gujarat, the government said late on Saturday. — **Reuters**

WELLINGTON



NZ DETECTS FIRST COMMUNITY VIRUS CASE IN TWO MONTHS

New Zealand health officials on Sunday confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in the community for more than two months, sparking urgent contact-tracing efforts north of Auckland.

A 56-year-old woman who recently returned from Europe tested positive 10 days after completing a compulsory two weeks in managed isolation, although she had noticed symptoms several days before getting tested.

Contact tracing was underway after it was revealed the woman and her husband spent several days travelling around the Northland region while she was potentially infectious, visiting about 30 different locations. — **AFP**

ISLAMABAD



UN WARNS STAFF AGAINST FLYING WITH PAKISTANI AIRLINES

The United Nations is advising its staff not to travel on Pakistani airlines due to concerns over potentially fake licences of pilots.

In an advisory to staff seen by Pakistani media over the weekend, UN security officials said "caution is advised on use of Pakistan-registered air operators."

Over the last decade, around 450 passengers and crew have died in four plane crashes in Pakistan. Human error was found behind three of the four crashes, raising questions about the pilots' abilities.

Responding to reports, Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said it was assessing the situation and working on a solution. — **dpa**

China rescues 11 miners after 14 days

BEIJING: Chinese rescuers pulled 11 gold miners to safety on Sunday, 14 days after they were trapped by an underground explosion, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

Footage showed the first miner to be rescued, a black blindfold across his eyes, being lifted out of a mine shaft in the morning.

The miner was extremely weak, CCTV said on its Weibo site. Rescue workers wrapped the barely responsive man in a blanket before taking him to hospital by ambulance.

Over the next few hours, 10 miners from a different section of the mine, who had been receiving food and supplies from rescue workers last week, were brought out in batches.

One was injured but several of the others were shown walking, supported by rescue workers and wearing black cloth over their



One of 22 Chinese miners wearing a black patch is saved from hundreds of metres underground, where they had been trapped for two weeks after a gold mine explosion in Qixia, in eastern China's Shandong province. — **AFP**

eyes, before leaving the site in ambulances.

Twenty-two workers were trapped about 600 metres underground in the Hushan mine

by the January 10 blast in Qixia, a major gold-producing region under the administration of Yantai in coastal Shandong province. One miner has died.

Contact was first established a week ago with a group of 11 miners trapped in a section of the mine around 580 metres below the surface

Officials said on Thursday it could take another two weeks to clear "severe blockages" before they could drill shafts to reach the group of 10 who had been receiving supplies of food from the rescue team.

State media said earlier however that the more than 600 rescuers on site were hoping to reach the men in the mine's fifth section on Sunday.

The men were said to be in good physical condition and had been receiving normal food since Saturday, after several days

of living off nutrient solutions, according to Xinhua.

Meanwhile, state broadcaster footage on Sunday showed a small elevator carriage lifted to the surface, accompanied by rescue workers. A masked man, who appeared unable to stand, was carried out.

Later footage showed emergency workers lifting out other miners, who wore black shades to protect their eyes from the light. One appeared to be holding his hands as if praying.

Contact was first established a week ago with a group of 11 miners trapped in a section of the mine around 580 metres below the surface. One of them was seriously injured in the initial explosion and died after falling into a coma.

Another miner was found alive by rescuers as they attempted to reach the group. — **Reuters**

DARE DEVIL CADETS



Cadets of Tamilnadu Police perform an acrobatic stunt during a full dress rehearsal for the upcoming Republic Day Parade in Chennai. — **AFP**

Malaysia detains 16 Vietnamese fishermen

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysian maritime authorities have arrested 16 Vietnamese fishermen from two boats they said were encroaching in Malaysia's waters without a licence, the Bernama state news agency reported. The fishermen and their boats were detained off Terengganu state, on the east coast of peninsular Malaysia, on Friday, the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA) said. "Checks conducted on the two boats found that 16 crew members including the skippers, aged 18 to 62, did not have any valid identification documents nor possessed any licence to fish in the country's waters," Terengganu MMEA director Captain Muhammad Suffi Mohd Ramli was reported as saying. "Two boats, fishing gear, catch and diesel supply were also seized," he said.

— **Reuters**

Alleged Asia drug kingpin arrested after probe

SYDNEY: The alleged ringleader of Asia's biggest crime syndicate and one of the world's most wanted men has been arrested in the Netherlands, with Australian authorities pushing for his extradition to face trial.

Police had been chasing alleged drug kingpin Tse Chi Lop, 57, for years until his arrest by Dutch police on Friday acting on a request from Australia's federal police.

In a statement on Sunday, Australian authorities said a man "of significant interest" to law enforcement agencies had been detained. A police spokeswoman confirmed his name as Tse Chi Lop.

The Chinese-born Canadian citizen has been compared to Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman.

He has been named by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) as the suspected leader of the Asian



mega-cartel known as "Sam Gor", a major producer and supplier of methamphetamines globally.

Sam Gor is believed to launder its billions in drug money through businesses springing up in Southeast Asia's Mekong region — including casinos, hotels and real estate.

Australia's federal police said Friday's arrest followed an operation that in 2012-2013 nabbed 27 people linked to a

crime syndicate spanning five countries.

The group were accused of importing "substantial quantities of heroin and methamphetamine" into Australia, long a lucrative market for drug traffickers.

"The syndicate targeted Australia over a number of years, importing and distributing large amounts of illicit narcotics, laundering the profits overseas and living off the wealth obtained

The arrest of Tse Chi Lop almost a decade after the operation's launch is a major breakthrough for Australian authorities

from crime," the Australian police said.

As part of the 2012-2013 raids across Melbourne, police seized A\$9 million worth of assets, including cash, designer handbags, casino chips and jewellery.

The arrest of Tse Chi Lop almost a decade after that operation's launch is a major breakthrough for Australian authorities.

The country's attorney-general will now begin preparing a formal extradition request for the alleged drug lord to face trial.

Most of Asia's meth comes from "Golden Triangle" border areas between Laos, Myanmar, Thailand

and southwest China which are pumping unprecedented quantities of synthetic drugs into global markets.

A study by the UNODC says Southeast Asia's crime groups are netting more than \$60 billion a year.

The production of methamphetamine — either in tablet "yaba" form or the highly potent crystallised "ice" version — as well as ketamine and fentanyl, take place primarily in Myanmar's eastern Shan state, but much of the precursor chemicals needed to cook them flows across the border from China.

Thailand in 2018 netted more than 515 million yaba tablets, 17 times the amount for the entire Mekong region a decade ago, said the UNODC.

Drug hauls feature near daily in headlines across the region, with traffickers finding more creative ways to ship out their illicit products. — **AFP**

Baltic states slam Russia’s crackdown on Navalny protests

RIGA: The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have criticised Russia’s harsh crackdown on protesters demonstrating against the imprisonment of leading opposition figure Alexei Navalny.

“We strongly condemn the detention of peaceful protesters in Russia. They must be released immediately,” the foreign ministers of the three EU and Nato countries bordering Russia wrote on Twitter.

In the joint statement, Urmas Reinsalu of Estonia, Edgars Rinkevics of Latvia and Gabrielius Landsbergis of Lithuania also called for the rest of the EU to take a tough line on Moscow.

“All of us in the EU must be decisive in imposing restrictive measures against Russian officials responsible for arrests,” it said.

Late Saturday the Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said it launched criminal inquiries in Moscow over the use of violence against law enforcement, hooliganism and property damage.

“Investigators are continuing to study and analyse a large amount of photo and video materials,” the Committee said.

In a separate statement, investigators said Sunday a 36-year-old man hit two policemen at the Saint Petersburg protest and was detained.

But Saint Petersburg prosecutors also said they were probing violations “on the part of law enforcement” and the use of force against a woman.

The statement was released after local media published a



Law enforcement officers detain a woman during a rally in support of jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny in Moscow. – Reuters

video showing a middle-aged woman falling to the ground after being kicked by riot police.

In the video, a woman — identified as Margarita Yudina — is seen asking three policemen in full riot gear why they are detaining a young protester. One of the policemen then kicks her in the stomach.

Saint Petersburg’s Dzhanelidze hospital said Yudina was hospitalised with a head injury.

“She is in a serious condition,” a hospital representative said on Sunday. “She’s in intensive care.”

Moscow authorities for

The Investigative Committee, which probes major crimes, said it launched criminal inquiries in Moscow over the use of violence against law enforcement and property damage

their part insisted that no one remained hospitalised in the capital following the rallies.

Officials said in a statement on

Sunday that 29 people were taken to hospitals and received medical assistance after the protests.

“No one required further hospital treatment,” the statement said.

The head of the Kremlin’s human rights council, Valery Fadeyev, said most of those detained in Moscow had been released.

He also defended the detentions, saying the protests were illegal and took place during a coronavirus pandemic. “I see no violations whatsoever,” he said.

“These events are illegal.” — AFP

Sweden adds Norway to entry ban over new virus strain

STOCKHOLM: Sweden is banning entry from Norway after an outbreak of the British mutation of the coronavirus in the Oslo region, a cabinet member said on Sunday.

The ban enters into force at midnight (2300 GMT) on Sunday and runs until February 14, Mikael Damberg, minister for home affairs, told a press conference after a Cabinet session.

Sweden previously introduced a similar ban for Britain and neighbouring Denmark due to the virus variant, initially detected in Britain, which is considered more transmissible.

Bans affecting Britain and Denmark were extended until February 14, he added.

Swedish citizens were exempt from the entry ban as well as people who live or work in Sweden, and people with “imperative family reasons,” Damberg said.

Sweden’s Foreign Ministry meanwhile advised against all non-essential travel to Norway.

Norway’s government on Saturday ordered the

temporary closure of most shopping venues in 10 municipalities in the Oslo region, including Oslo.

The temporary closure also affected gyms, swimming pools and sports centres. Exceptions include grocery stores, pharmacies and petrol stations.

Public events, with the exception for funerals, are prohibited until January 31.

Almost 1 million people live in the 10 municipalities affected by the Norwegian government decision. They were urged to work from home where possible, avoid all non-essential travel and limit contacts outside their own household.

The shop closures could lead to Norwegians travelling to Sweden and contribute to an increased spread of infection, Damberg said.

Sweden’s Public Health Agency on Saturday recommended that all travellers who have been to Norway during the past 14-day period self-isolate for seven days on arrival in Sweden and take a coronavirus test as soon as possible after arrival. — dpa

Portuguese brave lockdown for presidential polls

LISBON: Portugal voted on Sunday despite the country’s pandemic lockdown in a presidential election widely expected to see centre-right incumbent Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa win another term.

Polls point to a first-round win for Rebelo de Sousa, a former political commentator the turned approachable head of state known for candid moments like queueing at the supermarket in shorts, plunging into the sea to help girls whose canoe had capsized or sharing a meal with homeless people.

But observers have their eye on how a far-right challenger

At stake in the election is a post with the power to dissolve parliament and call fresh elections

will perform as well as whether a lockdown-induced plunge in turnout among its electorate of 10.8 million — who include some 1.5 million overseas voters — could produce an upset.

Voters queued outside polling stations in the capital Lisbon, being let in one by one under social distancing rules. At a public library in the city centre, Fatima



Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa casts his ballot for the Portuguese presidential election at Benfica School in Lisbon. – AFP

Cristo, a 63-year-old teacher, said she was pleased with the organisation, saying: “It’s not too intimidating, despite all this fear.”

Another voter, architect Jose Barra, 54, said: “Nothing would have stopped me from voting, but I think elderly people, for example, will be discouraged both by the virus and by the queues.”

As mail-in ballots are not well-established in Portugal, early voting was available on last Sunday, drawing nearly 200,000 voters, though long lines may have defeated the purpose in some areas.

Portugal has been under a second national lockdown for the

past 10 days aimed at braking a surge in coronavirus cases.

The country recorded its worst daily coronavirus death toll and number of new infections on Saturday, bringing fatalities to over 10,000.

More than 80,000 infections were reported in the past week to Friday, the highest rate worldwide in proportion to its population of more than 10 million, according to a tally based on government figures.

Almost every new day brings a fresh record in case numbers, and the government has now shut schools for two weeks on top of shops and restaurants. — AFP

BERLIN

Germany tightens virus border checks

Tighter border checks to control coronavirus infections came into force in Germany with distributors warning that fresh food imports might be held up. Germany now requires persons entering from countries considered very high-risk to present a negative coronavirus PCR test no older than 72 hours at the border.

The concerned areas are countries with an incidence rate from 200 cases per 100,000 inhabitants within one week.



This means drivers importing fresh fruit and vegetables from Portugal and Spain have to provide a test result, which in practice was almost impossible, Andreas Bruegger, head of the German fruit trade association said. — dpa

ISMAILIA

Egypt begins virus immunisation campaign

Egypt began its COVID-19 immunisation programme becoming one of the first countries in Africa to vaccinate its citizens, with a doctor and a nurse receiving the Chinese-made Sinopharm jab. Egypt received its first batch of the vaccine in December.

The inoculation will be available to all health workers for free, Health Minister Hala Zayed said. “All healthcare workers will receive it for free, it’s their right,” Zayed told a press conference



at Abu Khalifa Hospital in the northeastern city of Ismailia.

She also paid tribute to over 330 doctors in Egypt who have died from the virus. — AFP

ANKARA

Pirates kill sailor, kidnap 15 off Nigeria

Armed men killed an Azerbaijani sailor and abducted 15 Turkish crew members from a Turkish cargo ship off the coast of Nigeria, Turkey’s Anadolu news agency reported. That left three crew members to sail the Liberian-flagged Mozart owned by a Turkish company, the state agency said.

Turkish news channel NTV spoke to a sailor still on board who said several crew members were wounded.

The Mozart had been en route



from the Nigeria’s economic capital Lagos to Cape Town in South Africa when it was boarded on Saturday. It has now arrived at Port-Gentil in nearby Gabon. — AFP

A straw that broke the camel’s back

Over a year now since the coronavirus pandemic broke out in the world, spreading fear and panic among human beings. In fact, it has messed up all spheres of life, leaving people in severe stress, discomfort and suffering. Came out of nowhere, scattering everywhere around the globe and harshly affecting people of all ages and segments. This coronavirus has been unmercifully attacking people, with many have lost the battle in one way or the other.

The year-long fight was a very tough one indeed. Those who hit by the virus had no choice, but either to struggle to survive or be suffocated to death. Though, the choice is not theirs as the firmness and duration of the fight vary from one case to the other. Some victims have been fighting the virus for days while others were battling for weeks and months. However, the battle has unfortunately not come to an end yet! What a hard experience that people have come across!

Healthcare services have been struggling to cope with the increasing number of infections and deaths. Doctors, nurses and other frontline warriors have been sleepless for days, sacrificing their life, time, effort and family for the sake of saving Covid-19 victims. All have been sparing no effort to save lives of elderly as well as youngsters. Keep in mind that they



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HEALTHCARE SERVICES HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING TO COPE WITH THE INCREASING NUMBER OF INFECTIONS AND DEATHS

have been playing the role of soldiers, who are fully armed to combat the virus.

The rapidly spreading virus threatened every human being of the over 7.8 billion people on earth. One can imagine how frightening the situation was! Other than the health sacrifices and challenges, the pandemic has disrupted people’s social and economic life across the globe. It is attributed that this pandemic is the greatest global crisis of this century for its depth and scale are extremely enormous on humanity. People were locked down at home and urged to stay socially distant with travel and movement banned most of the time.

What was even worse is that visits, handshaking and direct contact with one another were strictly not allowed. Staying at home, wearing a mask and washing and sanitising hands were must-to-do precautionary measures for all when they get out. So many complications have come into people’s lifestyle.

Likewise, due to the direct impact of the pandemic, the financial and economic crisis could exceed lead to greater decline, which was seen worldwide during 2008-2009. Each crisis alone could cause a dramatic shock that permanently changes the international system and balance in the

world. Economics of most countries around the world if not all have been undergoing a slump throughout 2020 and some are still suffering. Luckily, some countries have started recovering this year and businesses are reviving again after the lockdown procedures implemented every now and then over the past year.

In view of that, hundreds of thousands of employees around the globe have lost their jobs. Business people and entrepreneurs have lost their sources of income and some have even gone bankrupt. Governments have changed many of their laws and regulations so they could cope with the economic impact and sustain their budgets and manage financial commitments. In other words, the pandemic was the straw that broke the back of world’s economy.

As 2021 is just taking off, let us hope for a better and brighter year ahead. We shall remember that challenges are rewarding experiences. As Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “None (among the believers) remains patient in a land in which plague has broken out and considers that nothing will befall him except what Allah has ordained for him, but that Allah will grant him a reward similar to that of a martyr.” Life breaks us, but the Almighty Allah forces us and we get stronger.

PLUS ÇA CHANGE

For much of world, Biden means continuity

SHAUN TANDON

Joe Biden has begun his presidency with sharp breaks from Donald Trump in both substance and tone, from climate change to immigration to a general openness to working with the rest of the world. But on several key international issues, the Biden administration has signalled that it will not deviate from Trump, drawing unease from some on the left who hoped for a cleaner break but also renewing a US tradition of continuity in foreign affairs.

Paul Poast, a political scientist at the University of Chicago, said that the fundamental objective of the United States since the end of the Cold War has been to maintain primacy, a challenge that has become all the more pertinent with the rise of China.

“Maybe the rhetoric changes a bit but regardless of who’s president, the overall goal of US foreign policy remains the same. And with Biden, I’m not expecting that to change.”

Antony Blinken, Biden’s pick to be secretary of state, in his Senate confirmation hearing said

“that Trump “was right in taking a tougher approach to China”, a signature policy of the defeated president that has drawn growing bipartisan support.

PAUL POAST
A political scientist

Blinken also said he would keep the US Embassy in Israel in Jerusalem, a landmark Trump decision on the status of the contested holy city, and stood by US

recognition of opposition figure Juan Guaido as crisis-wracked Venezuela’s president.

Even on Iran, where Biden plans a U-turn by returning to diplomacy, Blinken and the new Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, used nearly identical language to emphasize a long road ahead as they put the onus on Tehran to return to compliance with a 2015 accord rejected by Trump.

Senator Lindsey Graham, a Trump ally, smiled and said “we’re off to a good start” with Blinken, a longtime advocate for refugees who answered the Republican’s question about a caravan of Hondurans heading to the United States by advising, “I would say, do not come.”

The preternaturally calm Blinken’s approach may largely be shrewd politics in facing an evenly divided Senate — and it appears to have paid off, with the former Senate aide coasting towards easy confirmation as America’s top diplomat. Biden has followed through on promises to erase some of Trump’s most controversial moves, immediately taking action to rejoin the Paris climate accord and stop the US exit from the World Health Organization and rescinding a ban on visitors from a number of Muslim-majority countries. Blinken said that the administration will end US military support for the offensive in Yemen. Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies, a left-leaning Washington think-tank, said that Biden was shaping up to be the most progressive president in modern US history on key issues including economic equality, racial justice and climate.

“Having said that, I think foreign policy is the arena where you see the biggest gap between the Biden or centrist wing, whatever you want to call it, and the progressive wing,” she said. — AFP

BEHIND SCHEDULE

Tears and fears as India’s huge coronavirus vaccine push falters

ABHAYA SRIVASTAVA

India’s huge coronavirus vaccination drive is behind schedule, with a third of recipients not showing up for appointments because of safety fears, technical glitches and a belief that the pandemic is ending.

After one week, India has vaccinated 1.4 million people, or 200,000 people per day. It had initially hoped to process 300,000 per day before ramping up the rollout and inoculating 300 million by July.

At the Sharda Hospital in Greater Noida near New Delhi, pharma student Khushi Dhingra, 17, hugged a friend and wept as she waited to get her shot. “I am very afraid. I hate needles and I am worried about side effects”, she said.

“My papa is very worried too. He is calling me again and again to make sure I am okay.”

“There are about 80 students in my batch but only two have opted to get the shot”, said nursing student Sakshi Sharma, 21, in Greater Noida. “My friends are saying there will be side effects, that you can even get paralysis.”

India is using two shots for its drive. One is Covishield, a locally produced version of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, which has been approved and safely used in a number of other countries after completing Phase 3 human trials.

The other — Covaxin — was developed locally by Bharat Biotech and has not yet completed Phase 3 trials, though the government has insisted it is “110 per cent safe”.



Students getting their face painted to pay tribute to frontline workers fighting against the spread of the coronavirus, ahead of the upcoming India’s Republic Day celebrations, in Mumbai. — AFP

SIDE EFFECTS ARE A COMMON FEAR REPORTED WIDELY AND CIRCULATED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Side effects are a common fear, with a few cases of severe reactions — and even deaths — reported widely in the media and circulating wildly on Facebook and WhatsApp.

In the eastern state of West Bengal, health chief Ajoy Chakraborty said that turnout was just under 70 per cent, calling it “not encouraging.”

“We could have achieved our target if some hadn’t backed out after seeing television reports of adverse effects following immunisation”, Chakraborty said. But Alisha Khan, 20, a nursing

student in Greater Noida, said people were also hesitant because of the “rushed” approval of Covaxin.

“Why are they trying to experiment on us? First, they should have completed trials in a proper way”, Khan said. “I am shivering already out of fear.”

Dhingra, in the end, did not get a shot after staff realised she was under 18. She had, however, received a text telling her to come for the vaccination from the IT system managing the mammoth process. — AFP

sport



Seeb take on Saham, Dhofar meet Musannah

TWO-LEGGED HM CUP QUARTERS ON FEB 5, 6 AND FEB 15, 16



ANUROOP
ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, JAN 24

Defending champions Dhofar will take on Al Musannah and Omantel League champions Seeb meet Saham in the His Majesty’s Cup Football Championship quarterfinal matches.

In other quarterfinals, Al Nahda clash with Al Ittihad and Ibri play with Al Suwaiq.

The draw was unveiled at

the Oman Football Association (OFA) headquarters at the Seeb Stadium on Sunday.

Zaid Mahmood al Abdullatif, Assistant General Manager at NBO, was the chief guest and picked the draw in presence of OFA officials.

The quarterfinals will be held as home and away legs and the first-leg matches will be held on February 5,6. The return leg matches will take place on February 15 and 16.

HM CUP QUARTERFINALS
Seeb vs Saham
Al Nahda vs Ittihad
Dhofar vs Al Musannah
Ibri vs Al Suwaiq
First leg on Feb 5, 6
Second leg on Feb 15, 16

The two-leg semifinals are slated for February 26 and 27 (first leg) and March 8 and 9 (second leg).

FIVE-TIME CHAMPS OUT

On Friday, Al Ittihad upset four-time winners Al Arouba 5-4 in penalties after a 2-2 draw at extra time.

Dhofar blanked Al Rustaq 2-0 and Seeb prevailed over five-time champions Al Nasr 4-2 in penalties after a 1-1 draw in

the last-16 knock-out matches. Three-time champions Al Suwaiq edged Sohar 2-1 in full time to advance to the last-eight stage.

PENALTY SHOOT-OUT

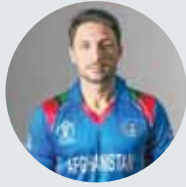
On Thursday, Saham moved to the last-8 round after beating Samayil 4-2 in penalty shoot-out at Sohar Sports Complex. The regulation time of the match ended in a 1-1 draw.

Ibri knocked out four-time HM’s Cup winners Sur 6-5 in

penalty shoot-out after a 1-1 draw in the regulation time at Sur Sports Complex.

Al Musannah booked direct ticket to the next round of the showpiece championship as they defeated Oman club 2-1 in a thrilling encounter at Al Rustaq Sports Complex.

Al Buraimi representatives Al Nahda secured a spot in the quarterfinal after thrashing Majees 3-0 at Al Buraimi Sports Complex.



Rahmat century guides Afghanistan past Ireland

Rahmat Shah hit an unbeaten ton to guide Afghanistan to a seven-wicket victory over Ireland in their second one-day international in Abu Dhabi. Rahmat hit two sixes and 10 fours in his 103 from 109 balls as the Afghans reached their victory target of 260 with 28 balls to spare, taking an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series.



Royals appoint Sangakkara as director

The Indian Premier League's Rajasthan Royals have appointed former Sri Lankan captain Kumar Sangakkara as director of cricket for the fourteenth season of the world's richest cricket league. "Kumar brings a wealth of cricket knowledge both as a player and a leader," Mike Fordham, Group CEO of Rajasthan Royals, said.

Root's 186 leads England fightback

SRI LANKA'S EMBULDENIYA CLAIMS SEVEN WICKETS

GALLE, Sri Lanka: Skipper Joe Root was run out shy of a second successive double century Sunday as England scored 339 for nine in reply to Sri Lanka's 381 on day three of the second Test in Galle.

Root was out to a direct throw from Oshada Fernando on 186 in the final over of the day, and stumps were called with England trailing by 42 runs.

Sri Lanka's Lasith Embuldeniya claimed seven wickets and broke a key seventh-wicket stand of 81 between Root and Dom Bess, who fell to the left-arm spinner for 32.

Root, who completed his 19th Test ton in 99 matches before lunch, kept pushing in the marathon knock of 309 balls.

The captain, who hit a match-winning 228 in his team's opening win, was helped along by wicketkeeper-batsman Jos Buttler in a partnership of 97 runs.

"Quite an amazing innings," Buttler said of his skipper.

"To back up his double hundred in the first Test... both physically and mentally to show the application to go and do it again to their spinners. A



masterclass really. "It has been a great education for all of us really watching it from the sidelines."

Buttler added: "I think we just have to praise not just the

technical and tactical aspects of his game, but the physicality and concentration to apply himself for so long is quite amazing."

Debutant Ramesh Mendis took

his first international wicket when he dismissed Buttler for 55 after the batsman's reverse sweep hit his boot and the ball lobbed for an easy catch to short leg.

EMBULDENIYA STRIKES

Buttler survived a similar call in the morning session when replays showed his shot had hit the boot and ground, and he went on to register his 18th Test fifty.

Embuldeniya, who registered his third five-wicket haul, struck twice early in the day with his left-arm spin, including the key wicket of Jonny Bairstow, to break a 111-run third-wicket stand with Root.

Bairstow, who added just four more to his overnight 24, was given not out by the umpire but Sri Lanka successfully reviewed the call as replays suggested the ball had grazed the bat before hitting the pad and being caught second slip.

Root reached his hundred with a single off Dilruwan Perera and raised the bat to an applauding dressing room and lone England fan standing on the ramparts of the fort overlooking the picturesque ground.

He went past England greats including Geoff Boycott (8,114), Kevin Pietersen (8,181) and David Gower (8,231) in Test runs before

he attempted a cheeky single, and was run out while returning back to his crease.

"The wicket is turning now compared to day one and day two," said Embuldeniya, who added if they could get close-out the England innings early Monday and set a target of 150-200, "we are in the game".

The series resumed on January 14 behind closed doors after being cancelled in March due to the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

Sri Lanka 1st innings 381
England 1st innings
Z Crawley c Thirimanne b Embuldeniya .. 5
D Sibley lbw Embuldeniya 0
J Bairstow c O Fernando b Embuldeniya 28
J Root run out (O Fernando) 186
D Lawrence c Thirimanne b Embuldeniya 3
J Buttler c O Fernando b Mendis 55
S Curran c Thirimanne b Embuldeniya .. 13
D Bess c Thirimanne b Embuldeniya 32
M Wood c Thirimanne b Embuldeniya 1
J Leach not out 0
Extras (b8, lb3, nb5) 16
Total (114.2 overs, 9 wickets) 339
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-5, 3-116, 4-132, 5-229, 6-252, 7-333, 8-337, 9-339
Bowling: Lakmal 16-7-31-0, Embuldeniya 41-6-132-7, Fernando 10-2-31-0, Perera 31.2-3-86-0, Mendis 16-1-48-1

Ayaan's heroics power Muscat to thrilling victory over Al Turki

MUSCAT: Muscat CT once again rode on Ayaan Khan's match-winning talent to beat Al Turki NMC in a Premier Division thriller at OC Turf 1 in Amerat on Saturday.

The tournament's two most experienced sides tested each other to the limit before Muscat managed to prevail for a nail-biting win.

Al Turki found the going tough against Muscat's potent attack, crawling to 214 for 9 in 50 overs, Suraj Kumar (43), Karan Sonavala (37) and Akshay Patel (36) being their main scorers. Ganesh Chandrashekhar picked up 3 for 42 while Ayaan and Sandeep Goud took two wickets each.

Muscat's response was equally erratic as from being 51 for 1 they slumped to 82 for 6 before Ayaan started to take control and stamp his authority on the game despite wickets still falling around him. His 65-run ninth-wicket partnership with Ganesh (28 off 46) put Muscat in the driver's seat before Jay Odedara removed Ganesh in the 44th over.

With Muscat still requiring 12 runs and only one wicket in hand, Ayaan decided to take on Al Turki's ace spinner Ajay Lalcheta, hitting him for a four and a six to steal 14 runs from his first five balls and seal a sensational one-wicket win for his side.

Muscat and IT Works now lead the table with 10 points each from six games followed by Al Turki which has 8 points from six outings.



Tahir Ali of Maniz Azad



Ayaan Khan and Ganesh Charashekher of Muscat CT.

OMAN CRICKET LEAGUE BRIEF SCORES

Premier Division

Al Turki NMC 214 for 9 in 50 overs (Suraj Kumar 43 - 2x4, 2x6, Karan Sonavala 37 - 3x4, 2x6, Akshaykumar Patel 36 - 2x4, Ganesh Chandrashekhar 3-42, Ayaan Khan 2-28, Sandeep Goud 2-38) lost to Muscat CT 217 for 9 in 44.5 over (Ayaan Khan 91 not out - 8x4, 2x6, Shoaib Khan 31 - 3x4, Mehran Khan 3-24) by 1 wicket.

C Division

Maniz Azad International 153 all out in 19.2 overs (Tahir Ali 48 - 9x4, Satham Hussain 3-12, Nishan Padmakumara 3-25, Parvez Beg 2-18) defeated Design Group Engineering Consultants 96 all out in 17.5 overs (Parvez Beg 33 - 4x4, Muhammed Althaf 29 - 1x4, Adnan Ahamad 3-6, Adnan-ul Haq 2-9, Zaheer Abbas 2-15, Tahir Ali 2-22) by 57 runs.

Tahir steers Maniz Azad to victory

Tahir Ali's superb all-round performance helped Maniz Azad International to a 57-run victory against Design Group Engineering Consultants in a C Division T20 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 1.

Invited to bat first, Maniz Azad scored 153 all out in 19.2 overs, Tahir top-scoring with a whirlwind 48 off 24. Satham Hussain and Nishan Padmakumara were the pick of Design Group bowlers, taking

three wickets each. Design Group failed to fight, folding up for a dismal 96 in the 18th over.

Vijesh stars in Ideal win

Vijesh Vijayakumaran struck a solid 57 off 39 and then took two wickets to guide Ideal Technology to an exciting 28-run win over Spania & VDD in a D Division T20 League encounter at Muscat Municipality ground 3.

Vijesh top-scored with 57 while Noman Mohammed contributed 38 as Ideal posted 162 for 6 on the board. Spanio were then

dismissed for 134 in the final over thanks to brilliant bowling by Biji Sunder (3 for 29).

Shadab, Adeel shine for Safara

In another D Division clash, splendid fifties by Shadab Kazi and Adeel Anwar were the highlights of Safara International's 4-wicket victory against Jotun CT at Muscat Municipality ground 4.

Jotun scored a challenging 174 for 7 helped by vital knocks by Vineesh Raj (63) and Prajeesh (47). Safara's response was led by opener Adeel's 50 off 21 balls.

Arthur bags first Juve goal in Bologna win

MILAN: Brazilian midfielder Arthur Melo scored his first goal for Serie A champions Juventus in a 2-0 win over Bologna on Sunday to pile the pressure on the Milan teams.

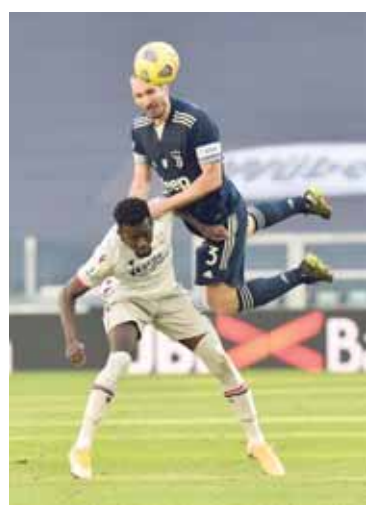
Andrea Pirlo's side bounced back from last weekend's 2-0 league defeat by Inter Milan, and followed on from their morale-boosting Italian Super Cup triumph over Napoli midweek.

AC Milan held the top spot in Serie A on Saturday despite falling 3-0 at home against Atalanta after second-placed Inter were held to a goalless draw at Udinese. Roma are third after a 4-3 win over Spezia on Saturday with Juventus moving fourth ahead of Atalanta into the Champions League berths, seven points behind AC Milan with a game in hand.

Juventus dominated 13th-placed Bologna in Turin with Arthur breaking through after quarter of an hour with a long-range shot that took a big deflection off Bologna defender Jerdy Schouten. It was the first goal for the ex-Barcelona player in 19 appearances since joining Juventus last summer from the La Liga side in a transfer worth up to 82 million euros (\$99 million).

US midfielder Weston McKennie got the second on 71 minutes nodding in off a corner, for his fourth goal in 21 games since moving from Bundesliga side Schalke. "McKennie is always in the right place, he has great vision," said Pirlo, hailing an "important" win after last week's defeat to Inter in the San Siro.

"We are a strong team,



Juventus' Giorgio Chiellini in action with Bologna's Musa Barrow.

— Reuters

it all depends on us. As we demonstrated in the Super Cup we are not the team seen in the San Siro. "We did well in the first half but if you don't manage to close it, the games always remain in the balance."

Bologna could have suffered more but for goalkeeper Lukasz Skorupski denying Adrien Rabiot and Cristiano Ronaldo in the final four minutes, having also been decisive in the first half.

— AFP

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS

On Sunday:

Juventus 2 (Arthur 15, McKennie 71) Bologna 0

On Saturday

Roma 4 (Mayoral 17, 52, Karsdorp 55, Pellegrini 90+2) Spezia 3 (Piccoli 24, Farias 59, Verde 90) AC Milan 0 Atalanta 3 (Romero 26, Ilicic 53-pen, Zapata 77) Udinese 0 Inter Milan 0 Fiorentina v Crotone (1945) Fiorentina 2 (Bonaventura 20, Vlahovic 32) Crotone 1 (Simy 66)

On Friday

Benevento 2 (Viola 31, Lapadula 49) Torino 2 (Zaza 51, 90+3)



Manchester City players celebrate after the match. – Reuters

City survive huge FA Cup scare, Arsenal crash out

LONDON: Manchester City were given a huge FA Cup scare by fourth-tier Cheltenham before a late blitz gave them a 3-1 win on Saturday after Southampton dumped holders Arsenal out of the competition.

Six-time winners City were minutes away from exiting at the fourth-round stage before goals from Phil Foden, Gabriel Jesus and Ferran Torres broke the hearts of the brave League Two side.

City boss Pep Guardiola made 10 changes for the trip to the southwest of England but his side was still packed with internationals.

The home team — 72 places below City in the football pyramid — produced a stirring defensive display but also sporadically threatened at the other end of the pitch.

Jesus hit the post shortly after the restart as City upped the tempo following a goalless first half but it was the home team who broke the deadlock.

The visitors failed to deal with the outstanding Ben Tozer's long throw and Alfie May fired in from close range just before the hour mark.

Guardiola threw on Ilkay Gundogan and Joao Cancelo in a desperate bid to find a way back into the game and was rewarded in the 81st minute when Foden

volleyed in Cancelo's cross.

Three minutes later Jesus made amends for his earlier miss and Torres made it 3-1 with the final kick of the game, turning in Gundogan's low cross.

"We came here with humility and had the quality to make the difference", said Guardiola.

"They used their quality in the box, they are taller and better than us there and we showed clips on how to solve it. It is difficult to control that."

The Catalan had warm words for Foden, who is the club's top-scorer in all competitions this season. "Phil Foden is in a great moment and with great confidence", he added. "He is clinical in front of goal."

Cheltenham boss Michael Duff said he was "super proud" of his players, bemoaning the fact the match had to be played behind closed doors because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"It's a shame because (with fans) the place would've been bouncing", he said. "Would that have seen us through in the last 10 minutes? I'm not so sure — but the key is to enjoy it."

ARSENAL OUT

Earlier, Arsenal, who have won the competition a record 14 times, went down 1-0 at Southampton courtesy of a Gabriel own goal.



Cheltenham Town's Alfie May scores their first goal. – Reuters

Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta made seven changes from his team's 3-0 league win against Newcastle on Monday, with Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and midfielder Emile Smith Rowe both absent.

Southampton, FA Cup winners in 1976, earned a well-deserved lead in the 24th minute when Kyle Walker-Peters' ball across the six-yard area was inadvertently turned in by Gabriel.

SIX-TIME WINNERS CITY WERE MINUTES AWAY FROM EXITING AT THE FOURTH-ROUND STAGE BEFORE GOALS FROM PHIL FODEN, GABRIEL JESUS AND FERRAN TORRES BROKE THE HEARTS OF THE BRAVE LEAGUE TWO SIDE

The visitors went close to an equaliser through Eddie Nketiah's deflected shot but were forced to leave empty-handed after the match.

"We had a dream to do it again like last year (win the FA Cup) and the dream today is over", said Arteta.

"I am as well disappointed with the way we conceded the goal in an area where we know we shouldn't be doing that. At the same time I cannot fault the

effort of the players."

West Ham, who will face either Manchester or Liverpool in the next round, crushed third-tier Doncaster 4-0 despite multiple changes from manager David Moyes while fellow Premier League sides Brighton and Sheffield United also progressed.

Pablo Fornals gave impressive West Ham an early lead at home to Doncaster as they dominated the League One side from the kick-off.

Andriy Yarmolenko doubled the lead before a second-half own goal from Andy Butler and a late strike from debutant Oladapo Afolayan.

Goals from Yves Bissouma and Steven Alzate were enough to seal a 2-1 win for Brighton against League One Blackpool.

Chris Basham and Billy Sharp scored for Premier League strugglers Sheffield United against League One opponents Plymouth.

Elsewhere, Swansea thumped fellow Championship side Nottingham Forest 5-1, while Bristol City beat Millwall 3-0. Barnsley beat Championship leaders Norwich 1-0.

On Sunday, Premier League leaders Manchester United face Liverpool in the tie of the round, while Chelsea host Luton.



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Salalah edible oils firm boosts output



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 24

Salalah-based Omani Vegetable Oils and Derivatives Company saw its output of edible oils, comprising palm oil products, sunflower oil, corn oil, and other vegetable oil products soar to 50,000 tonnes in 2020, according to Eng Mohammed bin Ahmed Jaboob, Commercial Manager.

Established in 2005 within Raysut Industrial City in Dhofar Governorate, Omani Vegetables Oil ad Derivatives Company is a partnership of Dhofar Cattle Feed Company, Dhofar Insurance Company, and Dhofar International Development and Investments Holding Company.

The company's products are widely available in the market under the brands Safa, A'Saadah, Salalah, Taibah, Sahi, Bahjah, Diyah, Sunlife, and A'Safwah in sizes from 750 ml to 20 litres.

"These products are available in major

Omani Vegetable Oils and Derivatives is an HACCP Certified company following stringent GMP practices and certified food safety management systems by SGS Europe

commercial stores, supermarkets and retail companies.

Additionally, the company adopts multi-channel distribution method throughout the Middle East and Africa, and undertakes significant efforts to expand its business to meet the needs of customers in the emerging markets," Jaboob pointed out.

He added that the company utilises advanced technologies in oil production process with high-quality specifications.

Omani Vegetable Oils and Derivatives is an HACCP Certified company following stringent GMP practices and certified food safety management systems by SGS Europe, he stated.

Construction of Oman-Australia subsea cable to start soon

GLOBAL CONNECTIVITY:
9,800km submarine cable to be completed by December 2021, boosting Oman's credentials as a regional hub for undersea cables

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

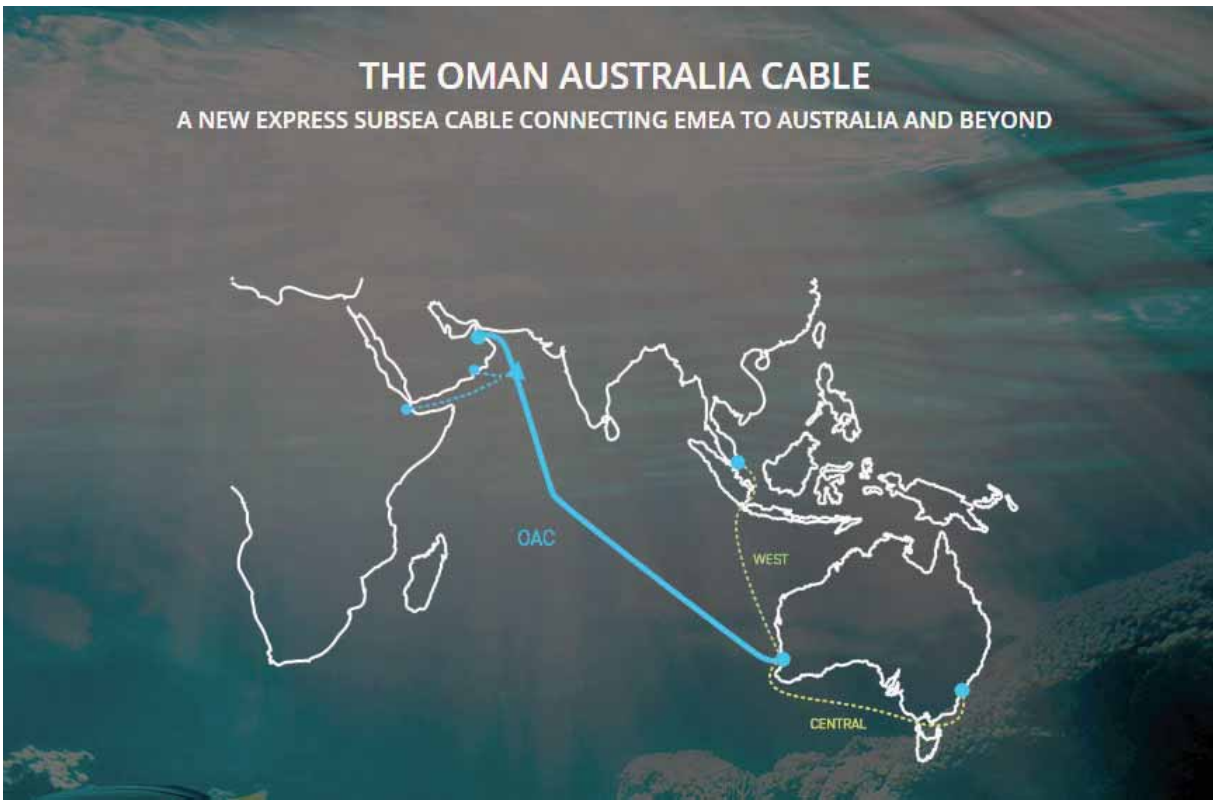
The Australian-based company behind plans for the construction of a 9,800-km submarine cable linking Muscat with Perth, roughly half way around the globe, says the cable-laying phase of the intercontinental project will kick off in March this year.

Sub.co announced this week that production of fibre optic cable covering the entire length of the trans-oceanic route has been completed, with the first consignment currently being loaded onto a freighter for transfer to the main cable-laying ship.

In a series of media interviews to mark the milestone, Bevan Slattery, founder of Sub.Co, said the imminent start of the cable-laying phase came at the end of immense challenges unleashed by the pandemic over the course of 2020 – challenges that Sub.co and its partners were able to surmount nevertheless, he noted.

"2020 has been an extraordinarily challenging year to commit to building a cable of this scale, but I am delighted that we have achieved 100 per cent of cable production and completed the first load system assembly testing within the original product schedule.

This could not have been done without the assistance of



The choice of Oman as a landing location for the cable was based on the element of 'security and safety' afforded by the country, as opposed to other potential Middle Eastern destinations considered for the project

our fantastic partners: SubCom," Slattery, a technology veteran, stated.

The Oman-Australia Cable (OAC), plans for which were first unveiled in October 2019, is set to be the only express cable linking continental Australia and the EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) region.

It promises to deliver secure, diverse and low latency route

between the two continents.

Designed as a three fibre pair system, OAC has the option to upgrade to four fibre pairs based on demand and will span approximately 9,700km with additional branching units designed to extend the system into Salalah, Oman and Djibouti sometime in the future, according to Sub.co.

The choice of Oman as a landing location for the cable, said Slattery, was based on the element of 'security and safety' afforded by the country, as opposed to other potential Middle Eastern destinations considered for the project.

Muscat already hosts a significant number of regional and international submarine cables, thus making it a safe choice for the landing of the Oman-

Australia Cable, he stated.

Starting in March, cable-laying will begin roughly at a midway point on the high seas and move towards Perth, where the Australian-end of the landing station will be located.

Thereafter, cable-laying will continue from the halfway mark and progress in the opposite direction towards Muscat. The project is expected to be completed before the end of this year.

The completion of the linkage will add to Oman's credentials as a hub for intercontinental submarine cables.

Already, Omantel – the country's biggest telecom operator – is a partner in around 20 international subsea cables serving vast global swathes that are home to over five billion people.

Omani govt-led digital transformation tops 2021 tech trends

KEY FINDING: 89 per cent of public sector CXOs agree data sharing improves citizen engagement

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 24

Oman's government-led digital transformation ranks as the top technology trend of 2021, supporting innovative mega-events and taking citizen services to a new level, global technology company SAP announced on Sunday.

More than four-fifths (89 per cent) of public sector senior executives agreed that data sharing helps them to improve how they connect with citizens, according to a recent Oxford Economics and SAP survey "The Public Sector



Transformation Imperative" of 3,000 senior executives from around the world.

"The Omani government has advanced digital transformation amid the pandemic to better serve citizens," said Waheed al Hamaid (pictured), Managing Director, SAP Oman.

"With 89 per cent of public sector executives agreeing on the importance of data sharing, the top three goals for Oman's public sector organisations in 2021 will be to share data to improve



citizen experiences, gain real-time data insights, and enhance their employees' digital skills to drive innovation."

For the public sector, the top three lessons that make a digital "have" and not a digital "have-not":

1. Employee and citizen experiences will close the gap with the public sector: Thanks to government initiatives such as Oman Vision 2040, Oman's public sector will continue to lead data-driven innovation to enhance

citizen experiences.

Among public sector leaders in the survey, 89 per cent said data sharing improves how they connect with citizens, 83 per cent said data sharing improves their innovation of existing products or services, and 82 per cent said data sharing helps them to exceed performance goals.

Digitising hiring and onboarding processes can create better employee experiences. Over half of public sector respondents (56 per cent) said employee

satisfaction has the greatest influence on organisational strategy, well above the 35 per cent cross-industry average.

2. Data insights will point the way toward actionable insights: Real-time data insights can help organisations to enhance operational efficiency and craft strong policy.

Healthcare has been a standout during the pandemic, with providers using data analytics to target coronavirus hotspots, optimise hospital and staff capacity, and rollout the vaccine.

There is potential for more sharing data among partners to deliver greater benefit.

Among public sector respondents, 81 per cent were effectively sharing employee data internally, but only 22 per cent with partners, and 74 per cent were effectively sharing citizen

data internally, but only 26 per cent with partners.

3. Digital skills capabilities will streamline and expand mission-critical services: Already, many Middle East organisations have embraced collaboration and flexible work policies to enhance employee experiences. But more can be done to enhance employee skill sets and collaboration across different departments.

Among public sector respondents, few have implemented the processes needed to improve data sharing.

Only about one-third (33 per cent) have invested in new technologies to analyse data, and 33 per cent have retrained employees to work with data. This skills shortage was cited by 61 per cent of respondents as being a barrier to meeting strategic change initiatives.

Oman Post launches delivery to 220 destinations worldwide

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 24

Oman Post Asyad Express has launched its new international shipping service, Asyad Express International. Offering door-to-door deliveries worldwide, customers can easily send and track their documents and parcels at competitive prices to over 220 destinations.

Available at all 86 Oman Post branches across the Sultanate, as well as pickup collection services for corporate customers, Asyad Express International makes it easier than ever to send shipments abroad, with the confidence of knowing they are in good hands.

Nasser al Sharji, Acting CEO of Oman Post Asyad Express said, "At Oman Post Asyad Express, we are continually working on enhancing our services to meet our customers' evolving needs."

As e-commerce continues to gain momentum, we are supporting our business customers, while focusing on small and medium enterprises to scale their businesses, reach to online shoppers beyond the



Sultanate and access new markets, with the choice, convenience and control they need to expand their business."

Fast, reliable and affordable, Asyad Express International enables customers to ship packages of up to 25kg, delivering to over 220 destinations between 48-72 hours, and major cities in the GCC in as little as 24 hours.

With convenience as a top priority, the service includes a track and trace feature, which customers can access through the company's website and contact centres.

Oman Post Asyad Express continues to build on its strategy to provide tailored delivery services across Oman, the region and internationally, for its growing

B2C and B2B customer base.

In addition to Asyad Express International, the company offers a variety of freight services, nation-wide door-to-door delivery, express mail, government services, enhanced traditional postal services and e-commerce solutions, while working to position the Sultanate as a leading trade and logistics hub.

Bank Muscat offers RO 5.6m in Al Mazyona prizes

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has encouraged all its Premier Banking customers to save more and take full advantage of the attractive prizes reserved for them in the Al Mazyona 2021 savings scheme.

With a record 7,470 prizes totalling over RO 11 million to be given away during the year, the country's biggest savings scheme was launched at a special event held at the bank's Head Office at Airport Heights recently.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir al Raisi (pictured), Deputy General Manager - Premier Banking, Bank Muscat, said: "The bank is pleased to launch the 2021 Al Mazyona scheme with a large number of high value prizes reserved for its Premier Banking customers."

We have been continuously innovating over the past three decades on the basis of feedback from our customers. We are also keenly supporting the nation and the bank has been keenly developing the Al Mazyona programme over the years given the positive impact among members of society as well as its support for the economy."

A large number of high-value prizes worth over RO 5.6 million have been exclusively reserved for them in this year's scheme.



Customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO 30,000 in their Al Mazyona accounts will be automatically entered into the prize draw for two mega prizes of RO 250,000 each in the special Mid-year draw as well as the End of Year draw.

High savings Asalah Priority Banking customers maintaining a minimum balance of RO 30,000 are eligible for 10 monthly prizes of RO 25,000 each, 10 Mid-year and 10 End of Year prizes of RO 50,000.

Al Jawhar customers who maintain a minimum balance of RO 10,000 are eligible to win one of the 20 prizes of RO 5,000 each in the monthly draws as well as 10 Mid-year and 10 End of Year prizes of RO 20,000 each.

Al Jawhar customers with a salary of more than RO 1,000 will also get a chance to win a fixed salary prize of RO 500 every month for a year, with 10 winners being chosen every month.

AI and drone technologies to unlock Oman's mineral potential

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 24

Esbaar, an Omani provider of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Autonomous Systems, has completed its first magnetic survey of Liwa, Shinas, Mahdah and Samayil covering an area of over 1000 km linear distance using drones equipped with magnetometres.

The survey of this very challenging terrain will provide accurate details of possible mineral seams, map geological features and highlight areas of interest for further study in hope of identifying key strategic areas for mineral deposits.

Sara al Mazyadi, a project manager at Esbaar, said, "This technology is fairly new to the Omani market and by



utilising Esbaar's resources and experienced team of licensed Drone Pilots, we hope to demonstrate to mining companies how we can boost their exploration activities by adopting this new technology.

Using AI and drone technologies is not only safer and more cost-effective in hard-to-

reach areas but is faster compared to traditional methods." A home-grown company established in 2017 by Omani entrepreneurs, Esbaar has been supporting government and private entities in the oil and gas, mining, logistics, utilities, construction and security industries.

PRESS RELEASE

KR ESHRAQA DONATES MEDICAL EQUIPMENT TO IBRA HEALTH CENTRE

As part of its objective to provide continuous support to the health sector in Oman, Eshraqa

- Social Development arm of the Khimji Ramdas Group recently donated a range of medical equipment to the Ibra, Health Centre to augment the facility's efforts to boost health care delivery.

The medical equipment was handed over in the presence of Shaikh Hamad bin Salim bin Saif al Aghbari, Wali of Ibra; Mohammed bin Khalifa al Abri, Director General, General Directorate of Health Services in Sharqiyah Governorate and a number of other officials.

Eshraqa initiative works towards the social development of the nation and the donation pledges Khimji Ramdas' readiness to continue to impact positively on the communities it operates in. It also reflects Eshraqa's goal of supporting government institutions to enhance health care services in the Sultanate.



MAZOOON ELECTRICITY HOLDS WORKSHOP ON NEW ELECTRICITY TARIFF

To disseminate information on the newly announced electricity tariff, Mazoon Electricity Company is organising workshops in various governorates of Oman.

The workshops are part of a wide awareness programme planned to educate about the new tariffs using different channels and targeting different stakeholders. The company has plans to target different customers through various channels in all areas under Mazoon Electricity service coverage which is in the Governorates of Al Dakhiliyah, South Al Sharqiyah, North Al Sharqiyah, and South Al Batinah, in addition to the Wilayat of Al Suwaiq of North Al Batinah Governorate.

The first of the workshops was held on January 24 at the Omani Women's Association in Suwaiq. The second workshop will be held on January 27 at Nizwa Sports Club in Nizwa.

Four main workshops to be held in the four governorates affiliated with the company's services will be attended by governors and members of the Municipal Council. These workshops will closely identify the objectives and details of the initiative to reform subsidies in the electricity sector.

HSBC commits \$1tn of financing to aid transition to sustainable economy

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 24

HSBC has announced the formation of a dedicated Sustainable and Transition Finance Team in the Middle East, North Africa and Turkey (MENAT). The Team will help institutions, corporates and individuals transition to a more sustainable economy.

Speaking at Abu Dhabi Sustainability Week, Noel Quinn, HSBC Group Chief Executive, said: "Our best chance to achieve a successful global transition to net-zero is in partnership, where the public and private sectors are working together to create the

optimal conditions for sustainable growth and are aligned on a common goal."

The MENAT Sustainable and Transition Finance Team will work closely with HSBC's recently launched global ESG Solutions Team to bring the bank's extensive global experience and expertise in ESG finance to customers in MENAT.

To support customers in their transition to lower carbon emissions, HSBC is aiming to provide up to \$1 trillion of financing and investment globally by 2030, an unprecedented commitment that will help to build a thriving, resilient future for society and the economy.



In 2020, HSBC saw a six-fold increase in its sustainable and

transition finance activity in MENAT over 2019, with the bank

The MENAT Sustainable and Transition Finance Team will work closely with HSBC's recently launched global ESG Solutions Team to bring the bank's extensive global experience and expertise in ESG finance to customers in MENAT

bringing a number of innovative deals to market.

Most recently, HSBC played a key role in the issuance of the world's first 'transition' sukuk, which was issued by Etihad Airways. The \$600 million raised

by the airline will be used for energy-efficient aircraft and research and development into sustainable aviation fuel.

The sukuk also included a commitment from the airline to pay a penalty in the form of carbon offsets if it fails to meet its short-term target to reduce the carbon intensity of its passenger fleet.

Meanwhile, in September 2020, HSBC helped Saudi Electricity Company raise \$1.3 billion in the first public USD-denominated green issuance from the Kingdom, and then a few weeks later Egypt, which issued the region's first sovereign green bond.



London stock market facing blockbuster IPO year

LONDON: London will enjoy a very strong year for stock market flotations, analysts say, arguing that both Brexit and coronavirus offer firms a unique opportunity to expand.

Various big-name businesses that have seen booming online demand from home-bound customers during COVID-19 lockdowns have revealed eye-catching plans for initial public offerings (IPOs) in recent weeks.

Clarity over Britain's final departure from the European Union on January 1 acted as a catalyst for many companies to raise funds, according to specialists, while the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines also soothed investor concerns over the deadly pandemic.

So far this year, the celebrated shoemaker Dr Martens, app-driven meals delivery service Deliveroo and online greetings card seller Moonpig have all outlined plans.

"Looking to the year ahead, we can expect 2021 to be a very strong



A man with umbrella walks past London Stock Exchange in London. – Reuters

year for the UK IPO market," said Scott McCubbin at London-based financial services giant EY.

"An uptick in IPO activity may well intensify the competition for investment, placing greater emphasis on preparing early for IPO and raising profile with investors.

"Confidence continues to build with the Brexit deal

now giving clarity around the future relationship with Europe and the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations."

Added to the mix, online money transfer specialist TransferWise has reportedly appointed banks to coordinate a planned float.

British media report that others could include insurer Canopus, EDF-owned electric vehicle

charging business Pod Point, and online fashion retailer Very. The IPO market has also attracted interest in recent years due to the easier availability of financing, alongside ultra-low interest rates.

"Over the past few years we have also seen a strengthening in the financing available for UK and European companies in the early stages of their growth," said

Marcus Stuttard, head of UK primary markets at the London Stock Exchange.

"This means that there are now an increasing number of dynamic businesses at the stage and size of development that are ideal for an IPO.

"These factors coming together have contributed to the strong IPO pipeline we are seeing at the start of 2021," he said.

At the same time, investors have lots of cash, owing to low borrowing costs and several billion pounds worth of central bank stimulus funds.

London thus hopes to steal a march on rival IPO destinations such as Frankfurt, Hong Kong and New York.

Britain ranked only behind China and the United States in terms of the total amount of cash raised on the stock market last year, according to a recent EY study.

The British capital represented more than 40 per cent of the total IPO amounts raised in Europe. Brexit could deliver a further boost

because the government wants to relax certain stock exchange regulations as it seeks to attract more big-name businesses to list.

The Brexit trade deal, which took effect on January 1, did not encompass the finance sector — but Britain and the EU aim to seal a memorandum of understanding about financial services by March.

The City of London Corporation revealed on Friday in a study that the British capital still trails the United States and Hong Kong in attracting foreign company listings.

London now wants to compete more effectively against European rivals and EU officials are concerned it could dump highly-priced standards.

Catherine McGuiness, policy chair at the City of London Corporation, said: "The competitive strengths of London and the UK should mean that we are well placed to seize opportunities as we start a new trading chapter outside the European Union." — AFP

Taiwan urged to help ease auto chip shortage

BERLIN: Germany has asked Taiwan to persuade Taiwanese manufacturers to help ease a shortage of semiconductor chips in the auto sector which is hampering its fledgling economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Automakers around the world are shutting assembly lines due to problems in the delivery of semiconductors, which in some cases have been exacerbated by the former Trump administration's actions against key Chinese chip factories.

The shortage has affected Volkswagen, Ford Motor Co, Subaru Corp, Toyota Motor Corp, Nissan Motor Co, Fiat



A car body is moved in a production line at the Volkswagen plant in Wolfsburg. – Reuters

Chrysler Automobiles and other car makers.

German Economy Minister Peter Altmaier asked his Taiwanese counterpart Wang Mei-hua to address the issue in talks with Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co Ltd (TSMC), one of Germany's main suppliers. — Reuters

Bangladesh to buy Myanmar rice, putting aside refugee crisis

DHAKA: Bangladesh will buy 100,000 tonnes of rice from Myanmar, putting aside a rift over the Rohingya refugee crisis as the government races to overcome a shortage of the staple food for the country's more than 160 million people.

High rice prices pose a problem for the Dhaka government, which is ramping up efforts to replenish its depleted reserves after floods last year ravaged crops and sent prices to a record high.

Bangladesh will import white rice in a government-to-government deal at \$485 a tonne, including cost, insurance and freight (CIF) liner out basis, said Mosammat Nazmanara Khanum, the secretary at the country's food ministry.

"Our main priority is to bring



Two women harvest rice in Nyaung Shwe, Shan state, Myanmar. – Reuters

down the prices of rice," Khanum said, adding the government could buy as much as 10 million tonnes while private traders are allowed to buy another 10 million

tonnes in the year to June.

The deal will be signed soon and the rice will be delivered by April in phases, the food ministry secretary said. — AFP

Libya oil output makes high stake but fragile return

TRIPOLI: Oil cartel Opec saw production rise in December, as Libya's energy sector sprang back to life following a ceasefire deal in the war-torn country. Sitting atop Africa's largest proven crude oil reserves, Libya has been ravaged by conflict since a 2011 Nato-backed uprising that toppled and killed long-time dictator Moammar Gaddafi.

As global oil prices remain volatile in the midst of the novel coronavirus pandemic, which has rattled the world economy, and further rounds of UN-backed peace talks to build on the October ceasefire and resolve Libya's long conflict, what are the prospects for the country's production?

Libya is now producing 1,224 million barrels per day (bpd) — a tenfold increase from a 121,000 bpd average in the third quarter of 2020, before the ceasefire deal.

But that is still below the levels of the Gaddafi era, said Francis Perrin, head of research at the Paris-based Institute for International and Strategic Affairs.

Libya was then producing



An oil pier is pictured at Benghazi port, Libya. – Reuters

between 1.5 million and 1.6 million barrels per day, he said.

Demand for crude has sunk under the impact of COVID-19 and producing nations have been adjusting output to support prices. Libya's surge has meant production for the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries reached 25.36 million bpd in December, an increase of 278,000 bpd compared with the previous month.

Libya is exempt from Opec's production quotas, so the cartel

needs to keep an eye on its output.

Libyan petroleum engineer Al Mahdi Omar, however, said his country's industry was "still in difficulty", despite the spike.

"It's a miracle that the oil sector continues to function despite the dilapidation and damage of infrastructure due to war, negligence or sabotage," he said. The oil and gas sector represents around 60 per cent of Libya's GDP.

In January last year, armed groups loyal to eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar blocked production

Libya is now producing 1,224 million barrels per day (bpd) — a tenfold increase from a 121,000 bpd average in the third quarter of 2020, before the ceasefire deal.

and exports from Libya's most important oil fields and terminals. They demanded a "fairer" distribution of revenues, which are managed by the UN-recognised Government of National Accord in Tripoli. The GNA is backed by Turkey, while Haftar is supported by Russia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt.

Haftar agreed in September to lift the blockade, several months after the failure of an offensive by his fighters to take the capital. The blockade resulted in lost revenues of almost \$10 billion, the National Oil Corporation has estimated.

On October 26, just days after

the ceasefire was agreed, the NOC said it had lifted force majeure — external unforeseen elements that prevent a party from fulfilling a contract — on the last oil facility in the country.

And while all Libya's oil fields are back online, the NOC announced earlier this month that a pipeline had been closed for maintenance, causing a drop in production of around 200,000 bpd, Bloomberg reported.

"This gives you an indication that the infrastructure in Libya is really in bad shape," Bloomberg quoted NOC chief Mustafa Sanalla as saying.

Perrin said there was scope for further improvement to Libya's oil production, "but not immediately". "In the short term, if it manages to maintain its current levels, that would be very good," he said.

"The main uncertainty is political." Lifting the blockade has allowed production and exports to rise since September, but "this is part of a temporary agreement, a truce — it's not a peace deal", Perrin warned. — AFP

Google seals content payment deal with French news publishers

PARIS: Google and a French publishers' lobby said they had agreed to a copyright framework for the US tech giant to pay news publishers for content online, in a first for Europe.

The move paves the way for individual licensing agreements for French publications, some of which have seen revenues drop with the rise of the Internet and declines in print circulation.

The deal, which Google describes as a sustainable way to pay publishers, is likely to be closely watched by other platforms such as Facebook, a lawyer involved in the talks said.

Alphabet-owned Google and the Alliance del'information générale (APIG) said in a statement that the framework included criteria such as the daily volume of publications, monthly Internet traffic and "contribution to political and general information".

Google has so far only signed licensing agreements with a few publications in France, including national daily newspapers *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*. These take into account the framework agreed with APIG, a Google spokesman said.

Google's vehicle for paying news publishers, called Google News Showcase, is so far only available in Brazil and Germany. — Reuters

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features



Changing lifestyle in Al Amerat

After doing many travels abroad, Said al Hadhrami was inspired by the bike culture which many countries in Europe embraced. Thinking not only of profit but its health and environmental benefits, he coordinated with local authorities which resulted in the biking culture that is starting to take root in Al Amerat... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

TECHNOLOGY



CYBERSECURITY AWARENESS FOR SOCIETY

Cybersecurity presents an "old" and renewed challenge, especially with technical leaps and human association with many devices for an easy life, accompanied by increased threats to the security of individuals and government and private institutions... **Story on Page P20**

CHANGING WORLD



CHILDREN OF INCAN NOBLES FOUND ENTOMBED IN PERU AFTER 500 YEARS

Tombs containing the remains of two children thought to have belonged to the Incan societal elite have been discovered by a group of experts in northern Peru in the boundaries of a 500-year-old archaeological site, the leader of the team that carried out the excavations said on Thursday... **Story on Page 19**

READ



ANIMAL FARM

BY GEORGE ORWELL
This novel is an allegory — even though it is set on a farm and stars a cast of farm animals, it reflects the events of the Russian revolution of 1917. The animals are all clever representations of Russian politicians, voters and workers.

ENTERTAINMENT



LADY GAGA, JLO OFFER RARE WASHINGTON FASHION MOMENT

Joe Biden's inauguration offered the American capital city a rare occasion for glamour, with Lady Gaga leading the way in a billowing ball gown and enormous dove brooch as she belted out a classic rendition of the US national anthem... **Story on Page 19**

DISCOVERY



ANCIENT COINS RETURNED AFTER ITALY CHURCH CONFESSION

More than 200 ancient coins were returned on Thursday to a museum in southern Italy by a priest who was told about the theft in confession.



Changing lifestyle in Al Amerat

BY TALIB AL WUHAIBI

Dreams are universal, opportunity is not, says Said al Hadhrami who was inspired by a bicycles project during his travel and sought the chance to implement it in Oman immediately after he came back to the Sultanate.

"The idea of the project came when I was travelling to some countries and saw this idea. I liked it and thought it would make a good project in the country," he said.

He added, "I worked hard to study this project to realistically implement it in a safe area or

place designated for pedestrians and bicycles. I contacted the competent authority to know the requirements and suitable sites for such kind of sports and entertainment activities," he shared.

"I raised the issue to Muscat Municipality, which in return welcomed the idea and advised me to follow the necessary procedures to get started," he said.

Muscat Municipality has already allocated many places for various types of outdoor activities and sports, whether it is walking or cycling. One of the most recent projects includes the Al Mahaj Walk in Al Amerat where people go to for exercise.

"I believe that Al Amerat Walkway is a distinguished

location and has high specifications of safety for such outdoor activity. This contributes to stimulating and encouraging everyone to exercise", Said said.

Not only focusing on the profit from this project, but Al Hadhrami has also thought of changing the lifestyle of people in the area. This project aims to empower communities by encouraging bicycle culture.

Along with taking you from place to place using no fossil fuels, bikes can teach you about safety skills and keep you fit. The bicycle offers positive change and development to villagers who use them for health, wealth, and education. It combines entertainment and fitness.

The biggest challenge was determining the design specifications of the (bicycles room) so that it is aesthetically pleasing to reflect the nature of the work and the general appearance of the place, but with proposals and finding appropriate solutions, the municipality is always helping to facilitate all the obstacles that we face where the appropriate design was agreed upon.

"Among the challenges was the inadequate lighting at the site. However, I depended on solar energy lights. Sometimes when it gets cloudy, the lights don't store enough energy," Said noted.

"One good thing is that I chose the right place geographically

and in terms of population density", he said.

Said also said, "The prices are affordable to all segments of people, I believe. People come from different areas to Al Amerat and they come to Al Amerat Park and when seeing this service, many would wish to try a ride."

He added, "There is a plan to develop the project and I am trying to bring multiple types of bicycles that give a positive impression to everyone. I also hope that the municipality will permit me to open other new branches in some public parks and open places to facilitate access for everyone."

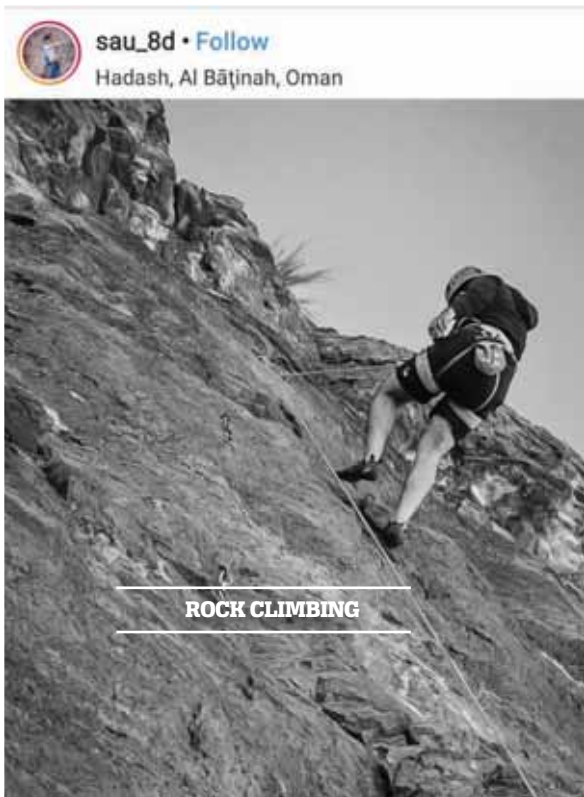
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CHANGING WORLD

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ENTERTAINMENT

Lady Gaga, JLo offer rare Washington fashion moment



JOE BIDEN'S inauguration offered the American capital city a rare occasion for glamour, with Lady Gaga leading the way in a billowing ball gown and enormous dove brooch as she belted out a classic rendition of the US national anthem. The long-sleeved gown

Spangled Banner," Jennifer Lopez took the stage wearing Chanel, performing Woody Guthrie's classic "This Land Is Your Land", a tune with a socialist bent that the folk legend is said to have written in response to the more nationalistic "God Bless America."



featured a fitted navy drop-waist bodice with a demure mock neck collar, a look completed with a voluminous scarlet skirt that ensured she kept her Covid-friendly distance.

"My intention is to acknowledge our past, and healing for our present, and passionate for a future where we work together lovingly. I will sing to the hearts of all people who live on this land," Gaga tweeted ahead of her performance.

Daniel Roseberry, the Schiaparelli designer behind the dress, said in a statement to The New York Times that "as an American living in Paris, this ensemble is a love letter to the country I miss so dearly and to a performer whose artistry I have so long admired."

Following Gaga's performance of "The Star-

Bronx-raised with Puerto Rican roots, Lopez finished with "America The Beautiful," adding in a line from the national Pledge of Allegiance in Spanish: "Con libertad y justicia para todos" ("With liberty and justice for all").

Sporting a white pantsuit ensemble with a ruffle collar, Lopez also shouted "Let's get loud!" during her performance, a nod to her turn-of-the-millennium signature hit, delighting social media.

Garth Brooks, in a black jacket and cowboy hat with baggy blue jeans, sang "Amazing Grace." And the youngest inaugural poet ever, Amanda Gorman, wore a sleek canary yellow coat, gold hoop earrings and a bright red headband to recite her moving work "The Hill We Climb." —AFP

Children of Incan nobles found entombed in Peru after 500 years

Tombs containing the remains of two children thought to have belonged to the Incan societal elite have been discovered by a group of experts in northern Peru in the boundaries of a 500-year-old archaeological site, the leader of the team that carried out the excavations said on Thursday.

The tombs were discovered in December as part of excavations at the "Huaca de las Abejas" complex in the region of Lambayeque that began in 2017. Archaeologists have uncovered the remains of 49 people, including most recently the two children, Jose Escudero, archaeologist at the Tucume museum 780 kilometres (485 miles) north of Lima, said.

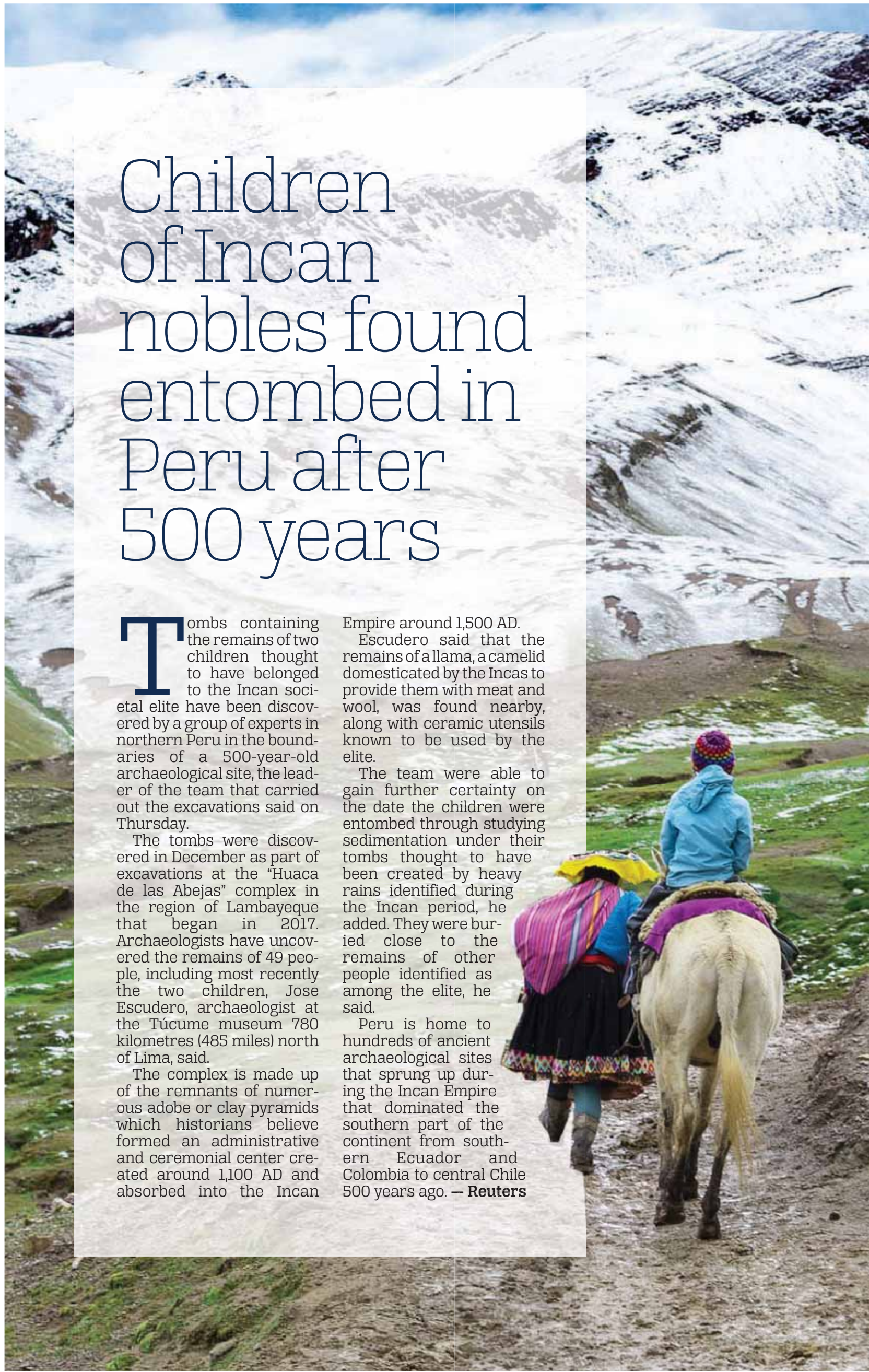
The complex is made up of the remnants of numerous adobe or clay pyramids which historians believe formed an administrative and ceremonial center created around 1,100 AD and absorbed into the Incan

Empire around 1,500 AD.

Escudero said that the remains of a llama, a camelid domesticated by the Incas to provide them with meat and wool, was found nearby, along with ceramic utensils known to be used by the elite.

The team were able to gain further certainty on the date the children were entombed through studying sedimentation under their tombs thought to have been created by heavy rains identified during the Incan period, he added. They were buried close to the remains of other people identified as among the elite, he said.

Peru is home to hundreds of ancient archaeological sites that sprung up during the Incan Empire that dominated the southern part of the continent from southern Ecuador and Colombia to central Chile 500 years ago. — Reuters





Cybersecurity awareness for society

BY DR FATMA AL BALUSHI

Cybersecurity presents an “old” and renewed challenge, especially with technical leaps and human association with many devices for an easy life, accompanied by increased threats to the security of individuals and government and private institutions.

Cyber penetration is now inevitable for everyone who has smart devices or any devices that are considered the Internet of things (IoT). These devices allow digital specialists to steal personal data, according to the London-based *Asharq Al-Awsat* newspaper (2020).

It further says that no one can hide the unconscious use of technology for hacking, fraud and extortion that has become part of the daily concerns raised by malware and stolen data. The report points out that the cost of recovery from the penetration of government and business networks has become lacklustre, yet the world is witnessing an increase in the types of platforms that could be used for cyber-aggression and cyber-phishing. Cyber-phishing is based on the principle of deceiving others to do things that make a profit to the aggressor, as this type of attack is becoming common and its victims are growing rapidly. This type of phishing is also developing, to the point that some fraudulent emails are difficult to monitor except in cases of severe scrutiny, which most people do not do.

In addition to general threats, there are often unintended internal threats, often overlooked by many in cyber-attacks, namely, the identity of the employees who are allowed access to the data, and whether these employees have the required reliability. That is why Apple, for example, had to expel a road map drafter that explains the details of the company's operational programme in 2018.

Internal threats can occur in many ways, including sending a tired employee data or confidential information to the wrong person or application workers may be misplaced from programmatically locking all ports that make it easier to penetrate applications and systems. Employees are also likely to be exposed to direct attacks by hackers



using social engineering techniques to penetrate a particular network and collect sensitive data.

Mobile malware is a “big threat” and efforts to protect mobile devices from attacks are still modest. In the case of these devices, hacking can occur as a result of loading an application, even from supposedly trusted platforms. Our mobile phones are a store of our most personal and sensitive information, and people are still railing millions to load free apps without thinking about their security.

All of this led specialists to expect the growth of the cybersecurity market in the Middle East, at an annual rate of 22.5 per cent, between 2018 and 2024, according to news published by the new *Gulf* newspaper (2020). According to the report, cybercriminals can beat an average of 1,861 victims worldwide in a minute.

Despite intensive and vigorous efforts to sensitize the community to the importance of maintaining the confi-

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tions of “Trend- Micro”. Threats were distributed between 1,764,518 threats via email, 644,303 users who were victims of malicious Internet addresses, and 187,102 malicious software. Statistics show a jump in the total number of cyber-attacks on the Sultanate from 2018 when the number of information security incidents in 2018 reached 2,334. The number of attempts at cyber-attacks in the Omani cyberspace was approximately 432,978, in addition to 71,472 attacks on Omani websites (Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology-2019).

All of these challenges to cybersecurity are manageable, assuming that “everyone on the Internet in this increasingly online world has become a potential target for cyber-attacks, but understanding existing risks can help to mitigate the threat.

This situation, and with the approach of remote work, requires that awareness of the security risks associated with it be intensified.

The Omani Information Technology Society has recently launched an awareness campaign for society in the form of lectures as an additional effort towards educating people. No doubt that all these kinds of efforts are appreciated but concerning the opening session of that campaign, a few days ago, there was a census among participants that although we have executed many conferences, lectures and meetings in TV and radio channels there is a gap in reaching all populations. In addition, there still some people do not care about cybersecurity issues.

Therefore, this requires greater cooperation from the authorities concerned in the Sultanate to contribute to a community awareness initiative in the form of short movies so that all those threats related to the security of information and the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of personal data could be grasped. Messages from movies usually stick into the mind of human beings. The movies should consider children, adolescents, employees and others. The number of reported incidents reported to the authorities should be measured at the same time as the issuance of such work as an effective tool to see how this method works in comparison with other methods previously experienced.