

Subsidy support on par with 2021 budget

Subsidy support provided in the 2022 General Budget across a number of services broadly tracks allocations made by the Omani government during the previous year. According to the Ministry of Finance, the latest budgeted assistance is in line with the government's overall strategy to gradually rollback most subsidies over the course of the Medium-Term Fiscal Plan (2021 - 2025), while redirecting part of this support towards targeted low-income incomes. **SEE P13**



P10

SULTANATE OF OMAN
PAIR IMPRESS
AT WEST ASIA BEACH
VOLLEYBALL TOURNEY



P15

OIL STARTS 2022
WITH RALLY
TOWARDS
\$79/BARREL



P20

COVID RECOVERY
WITH PLANTS:
REGAINING
MENTAL STRENGTH



MUSCAT

PROPOSALS TO AMEND LAWS DISCUSSED

The State Council on Monday held a meeting during which it studied proposals to amend the Law on Records and Archives and the Securities Act in preparation to submit the drafts of both to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, along with the opinions of the State Council and the Majlis Ash'shura Council.

The drafts of the Archives and Records Law (promulgated under Royal Decree No 60/2007) and the Securities Act were earlier forwarded to the two councils for discussion by the Council of Ministers. **SEE P3**

PARIS

PLEDGE TO PREVENT N-ARMS SPREAD

Five global nuclear powers pledged on Monday to prevent atomic weapons spreading and to avoid nuclear conflict, in a rare joint statement setting aside rising West-East tensions to reaffirm a goal of a nuke-free world.

"We believe strongly that the further spread of such weapons must be prevented", said permanent UN Security Council members China, France, Russia, the UK and United States, adding: "A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought." **SEE P7**



INSIDE



US CALLS FOR CIVILIAN RULE IN SUDAN

P6



OMICRON 'PLAINLY MILD'; MEASURES NOT NEEDED

P7



HM to preside over ROP Annual Day, officers' graduation

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, will preside over a ceremony on January 5 marking the Annual Day of Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the graduation of new batches of officers. The ceremony will be held on the military parade grounds of the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences in the Wilayat of Nizwa. — **ONA**

Limit visitors to 50% capacity, business, establishments told

SAMUEL KUTTY
[@samkuttyp](#)

While issuing a warning against non-compliance of Covid-19 precautionary measures, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP) asked commercial and industrial establishments to limit the number of visitors to their firms.

"The ministry stresses the need for commercial and

industrial establishments to adhere to precautionary measures and to reduce visitors to 50 per cent of total capacity", the ministry reiterated in a statement.

DON'T LET GUARD DOWN
The directive from the ministry follows a surge in the number of Covid-19 cases and many people had let their guard down. And many commercial malls and centres as well as restaurants

and cafes, have not been abiding by the precautionary measures issued by the ministry in coordination with the health ministry to control the spread of coronavirus infection.

The ministry said that officials of MoCIIP, in cooperation with other competent authorities, would intensify checks at commercial and industrial establishments to ensure compliance with Covid-19 precautionary measures. **TURN TO P2**

Meteorite detection devices installed



MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism implemented a project to install devices for the detection of meteorites in Omani skies. The idea was to install four devices in different locations in the desert in order to detect and track any new meteorite fall. The project was carried out in cooperation with a specialised scientific team from the Natural History Museum in Berne in Switzerland. Technical support for the project is provided by Curtin University in Australia and Oman Telecommunications Company. The move comes within the Ministry's continuous endeavours to nurture and develop research related to meteorites and use the latest technologies in this field. — **ONA**

HEAVY RAIN ALERT ISSUED

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
[@lakshmioman](#)

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has issued a warning of heavy rains ranging between 30 mm to 80 mm on Monday night and Tuesday.

CAA said heavy rains are expected on Monday night and Tuesday in the governorates of Musandam, North Al Batinah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, South Al Batinah, Muscat, North Al Sharqiyah, South Al Sharqiyah.

The CAA advised all to exercise caution during rainfall and thunder showers and not to cross running wadis, to avoid low-lying areas and not to venture into the sea. The wilayats of Khasab, Bukha and Daba in Musandam Governorate witnessed heavy downpours associated with strong wind on Monday.

On Monday morning, the Wilayat of Bukha witnessed heavy rains centred on the villages and the mountainous areas causing overflow of wadis.

Monday saw wadis in Musandam flowing in full strength, and in three hours, Musandam recorded 19 mm of rainfall in the late afternoon. Also, North and South Al Batinah, as well as Al Buraimi, experienced rain.

Civil Defence and Ambulances Authority stressed not to risk crossing valleys during their

CLASSES, EXAMS SUSPENDED

The Ministry of Education has issued a decision to suspend study in all government and private schools in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, except the governorates of Dhofar and Al Wusta. The decision also postpones examinations scheduled to be held tomorrow, Tuesday, and states that the exams will be resumed the day after tomorrow, Wednesday. The exams of tomorrow will be postponed to the day following the last scheduled exam in each Directorate General. — **ONA**

flow and has called on parents to monitor children and protect them from water puddles left by rainwater in order to maintain the safety of everyone.

According to weather forecaster at Oman Met Office, Muscat is expected to receive rain shower on Tuesday morning. "While Musandam, Al Buraimi and North and South Al Batinah have been receiving rain, on Tuesday Muscat and Al Dakhiliyah are expected to receive their share of rain," said the weather forecaster.

The CAA has advised all to take precautions during rain and wadis and check sea state before venturing out to the sea.

SAYYID SHIHAB RECEIVES SAUDI CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF



HH Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received at his office in Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Monday Air Chief Marshal Fayyadh Hamid al Ruwaili, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The two sides exchanged issues of common concern. **SEE P2**



Bilateral cooperation reviewed with Saudi Chief of General Staff



MUSCAT: Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Numani, Minister of the Royal Office, received at his office here on Monday Air Chief Marshal Fayyadh Hamed al Ruwaili, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

They reviewed the areas of cooperation and discussed matters of common interest. The meeting was attended by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF). Separately, Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi received in his office at Muaskar



Al Murtafaa Air Chief Marshal Fayyadh Hamed al Ruwaili. They exchanged views and discussed military matters of common concern. The meeting was attended by several senior SAF officers and the Military Attaché at the Saudi embassy in Muscat.

Also on Monday, the Saudi guest visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC) at Muaskar Al Murtafaa. He was accompanied by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi. Upon the guest's arrival, he was received by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), Head of the Maritime Security Committee and Commodore Mohammed bin Hamoud al Zadjali, Head of the MSC. The guest toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies. He was also briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre within its national duties, as it coordinates with relevant authorities in search and rescue missions and the safety of the maritime environment. — ONA

Limit visitors by 50%, commercial firms told

FROM PAGE 1

"All commercial establishments must ensure compliance with precautionary measures to limit the spread of the Coronavirus and to abide by all decisions issued by the Supreme Committee. Failure to comply with the directives will result in legal action", the statement warned. The measures include mandatorily wearing of masks by all, maintaining social distancing, sterilising shopping carts and surfaces, providing sanitisers to consumers, and ensuring that visitors to the facility produce a certificate of two doses of vaccine, and other health requirements. The ministry called on

consumers to use e-shopping applications provided by many centres, shops and restaurants to avoid crowding at shopping centres. Towards the end of last year, the ministry has mandated businesses to provide electronic payment services from the beginning of this year. The directive for electronic payment covers all activities in industrial areas and complexes, commercial centres, gift markets, food sales, gold and silver shops, restaurants and cafes, fruit and vegetable vendors, building materials, tobacco as well as transactions involving electronic items in the first phase of its implementation programme.

Emphasis On Not Permitting Unvaccinated Individuals To Enter Business Establishments.

Adherence to COVID-19 preventive measures

Sanitize Shopping Carts & Surfaces

Wear a Mask

Provide Sanitizers to Consumers

Physical Distance

Entry to Fully Vaccinated Individuals

Commitment to 50% Capacity

Failure to comply with the above conditions will expose your facility to legal violation.



GCC officials discuss steps to check virus

MUSCAT: The GCC Health Under-Secretaries on Monday held their 20th meeting to discuss the latest developments of the new Covid-19 strain "Omicron". The meeting reviewed latest updates regarding coronavirus and the measures taken by GCC member states. It also touched on proposals submitted for the next period, among other topics. The GCC health Under-Secretaries commended the significant efforts of health workers, as well as their tangible contribution towards mitigating the spread of the virus.



They urged citizens and residents to adhere to preventive measures, such as wearing masks, avoiding gatherings and maintaining social distance. — ONA

TENDER NOTICE

Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company hereby announces the following tenders: -

Tender No.	Description	Eligibility	Tender Fee (RO)	Last Date of Sale Tender Documents	Bid Submission Date
T/2442733/2021	Transport Services of Dewatered Sludge & Preliminary Treatment Waste from Sewage Treatment Plants in Muscat Governorate	Local companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	300 /- (Plus %5 VAT) Non-refundable	13/01/2022	03/02/2022
T/2442735/2021	Call-off contract for Supply of Printers, Consumable Spare Parts, Toners and AMC for 3 Year	Local companies registered with Government Tender Board and specialized in the works mentioned	70 /- (Plus %5 VAT) Non-refundable	13/01/2022	27/01/2022
T/2442740/2021	Consultancy Services for Development of Business Plan for Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company for 5 Years	Local companies registered with Government Tender Board and International companies specialized in the works mentioned	30 /- (Plus %5 VAT) Non-refundable (VAT is not applicable for International Companies)	13/01/2022	27/01/2022

The tender documents can be purchased from Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company e-tendering page (Supplier Login) from the date of publication of this announcement until 13/01/2022. The applicants shall pay the tender fee through electronic payment gateway through Supplier Login.

Applicants who are not registered with Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company shall register from: <https://owwsc.nama.om/Business-with-Us/Vendor-Registration> to have the login credentials of Supplier Portal.

All applicants who have paid the tender fee shall have access to the Tender Documents through OWWSC e-tendering page (Supplier Login).

All participating companies shall submit a bid bond of %1 of bid value in a sealed envelope to OWWSC's Chairman of Tender Committee not later than 3:00 pm on the bid submission date. Bid bond must be obtained from a bank registered in the Sultanate of Oman and it should be addressed in favour of Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company. The bid along with all required documents shall be uploaded through Oman Water and Wastewater Services Company e-tendering page not later than 3:00 pm on the date specified above. For more details, refer to Tender Page of our website www.owwsc.nama.om or Email to: tender@owwsc.nama.om

ص.ب. ١٤٧ | الرمز البريدي ١٢٣ | الخويل، سلطنة عمان | IEEI
P.O. Box 1047 | PC 133, Al Khuwair | Sultanate of Oman | 1442 www.owwsc.nama.om

Women's assn holds course on innovation

MUSCAT: The Omani Women's Association concluded on Monday the innovation course in institutional work, which was implemented by the Development and Innovation Committee of the association over a period of three weeks, with the participation of a number of members of the association and women entrepreneurs. The course dealt with practical tools to enable and consolidate a culture of innovation in the institutional sector, in addition to strengthening mechanisms for enacting and analysing public innovation policies, in line with the challenges of the 21st century faced by institutions. The training course was divided into three phases: the first foundational phase, the most important output of which was to strengthen the links between the organisation and stakeholders. — ONA

SALE

20% - 70%

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Al Khamis Shoes Sohar - Tel. 26841178 | Al Khamis Shoes Al Hail - Tel. 24543045. 93894474



Credentials copy of Algerian envoy received

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received here on Monday a copy of credentials of Filali Guenni, Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to the Sultanate of Oman. Sayyid Badr welcomed the

ambassador, wishing him success in carrying out his duties, and the bilateral relations between the two countries further growth and progress.

The meeting was attended by several officials at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA

471,000 visitors till November last year

VINOD NAIR
vinot_nair

Around 1.6 million people departed the Sultanate of Oman compared to 471,000 inbound visitors, until the end of November 2021.

The monthly report issued by the National Center for Statistics and Information (NCSI) said that the total number of visitors coming to the country during November 2021 was 111,000, compared to 13,000 visitors a year ago.

Most of these visitors were of the Gulf nationalities (43,316 and 38.8 per cent), followed by visitors from India (14.7 per cent), Yemen (5.2) per cent, and Germany (4.4 per cent).

The data showed Omanis constituted 60.4 per cent of the total 279,000 outbound travellers in November. There has been an increase of 128,000 Sultanate of Oman outbound travellers from the previous year.

The data showed that RO13,200,000 was the revenues of hotels with a rating of 3-5 stars during the month of November of 2021, compared to RO6, 100,000 during the same month of 2020, an increase of 113.1 per cent.

The number of guests in those

4 per cent tourism tax

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has announced the tourism tax at four per cent has been reinstated on January 1, 2022.

MoHT had earlier exempted all tourist facilities from tax until December 2021, according to the economic stimulus plan approved by the Supreme Committee.

hotels reached 123,600, compared to 84,500 guests during the same period in 2020, an increase of 64.3 per cent.

The occupancy rate in these hotels was 46.8 per cent, compared to 23.7 per cent for the same month in 2020.

At the same time, MoHT issued violations against several hotels and ordered all establishments to reduce the number of restaurants, meeting and banquet halls, and the rest of the other facilities to 50 per cent of the total capacity.

State Council examines proposals to amend archives, securities laws

MUSCAT: The State Council on Monday held a meeting during which it studied proposals to amend the Law on Records and Archives and the Securities Act in preparation to submit the drafts of both to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, along with the opinions of the State Council and Majlis Ash'shura.

The drafts of the Archives and Records Law (promulgated under Royal Decree No 60/2007) and the Securities Act were earlier forwarded to the two councils for discussion by the Council of Ministers.

Today's deliberations took place as part of the 3rd ordinary session of the State Council's annual sitting of the 7th Term held under the auspices of Shaikh Abdulmalik bin Abdullah al Khalili, Chairman of the State Council.

Al Khalili said in a speech at the outset of the session that the meeting coincides with the start of a new year which, he wished, would be a year of bounty for the Sultanate of Oman and His Majesty the Sultan. He also wished that 2022 would see the eradication of coronavirus and the recovery of the global economy from the negative impacts of the pandemic.

Then, Dr Rashid bin Salim al Badi, Chairman of the Legal Committee at the State Council, said that the proposed amendment of the first draft law stems from a keenness to address the challenges facing the Records and Archives Authority so that the



The drafts of the Archives and Records Law (promulgated under Royal Decree No 60/2007) and the Securities Act were earlier forwarded to the two councils for discussion by the Council of Ministers

implementation of the law would conform with the provisions of the State's Administrative Apparatus's System promulgated under Royal Decree No 75/2020.

Amendments were proposed to be made to the 14th Article of the Records and Archives Law forwarded to the State Council, said Al Badi.

On his turn, Shaikh Mohammed bin Abdullah al Harthi, Chairman of the



Economic Committee, said that the proposed amendments to the Securities Act assume significance due to the fact that the law plays a great role in facilitating the activities of the national economy.

Al Harthi explained that the draft law deals with many vital issues, including the funding of existing productive units and new investment units, providing alternative opportunities for investors other than traditional

banking portfolios, allowing the owners of small and medium enterprises to become investors, contributing to the financing of development plans, consolidating internal and external credit and achieving efficiency in channelling resources to more profitable areas.

The views of the Economic Committee focused on ways to enhance the power of financial securities, augment employment opportunities funding, creating the desired balance among stakeholders dealing with the stock market and minimising risk factors, to name a few.

The meeting also discussed the reply of the Council of Ministers about two proposals made earlier by the State Council, one about a study on the Law on Environment Conservation (promulgated under Royal Decree No 114/2001) and the other about the 2020 Annual Report of the State Audit Institution. — ONA



Shura panel debates academic, job issues with UTAS chief

MUSCAT: The Education and Scientific Research Committee of Majlis Ash'shura on Monday hosted Dr Said bin Hamad al Rubaie, President of the University of Technology and Applied Science (UTAS), and several specialists of the university.

The committee members reviewed the challenges faced by the university to supervise the colleges, Omanisation plans, employment procedures, academic training programmes, the allocations sought by the university to keep up with the requirements of the labour market and ensure the quality of academic programmes.

The meeting discussed the mechanisms of replacement of



expats by Omanis, the training programmes and recruitment procedures of Omanis as academics or technicians at the university.

It has been indicated during the meeting that the UTAS is working on a replacement plan at the colleges of technology

through a scholarship programme for the master's degree in addition to employment via internal announcements in coordination with the Ministry of Labour.

The meeting also discussed the university's plans to replace the technical cadres and the replacement plans at the colleges

of applied science through scholarship for postgraduate programmes. It discussed the solutions adopted by UTAS to address the issue of intermediary companies that recruit Omanis to work as academics at the university.

The committee members

enquired about the university's admission capacity at different colleges and the possibility of launching new disciplines and academic programmes. It was noted that the university is reviewing and developing all of its academic programmes as part of a project to merge the technical

colleges and colleges of applied sciences.

The university is developing a number of new specialisations at the diploma, advanced diploma, bachelor's and master's programmes. Besides, the university has a project to set up a branch in Musandam Governorate which will be implemented in two phases according to the type of the programmes.

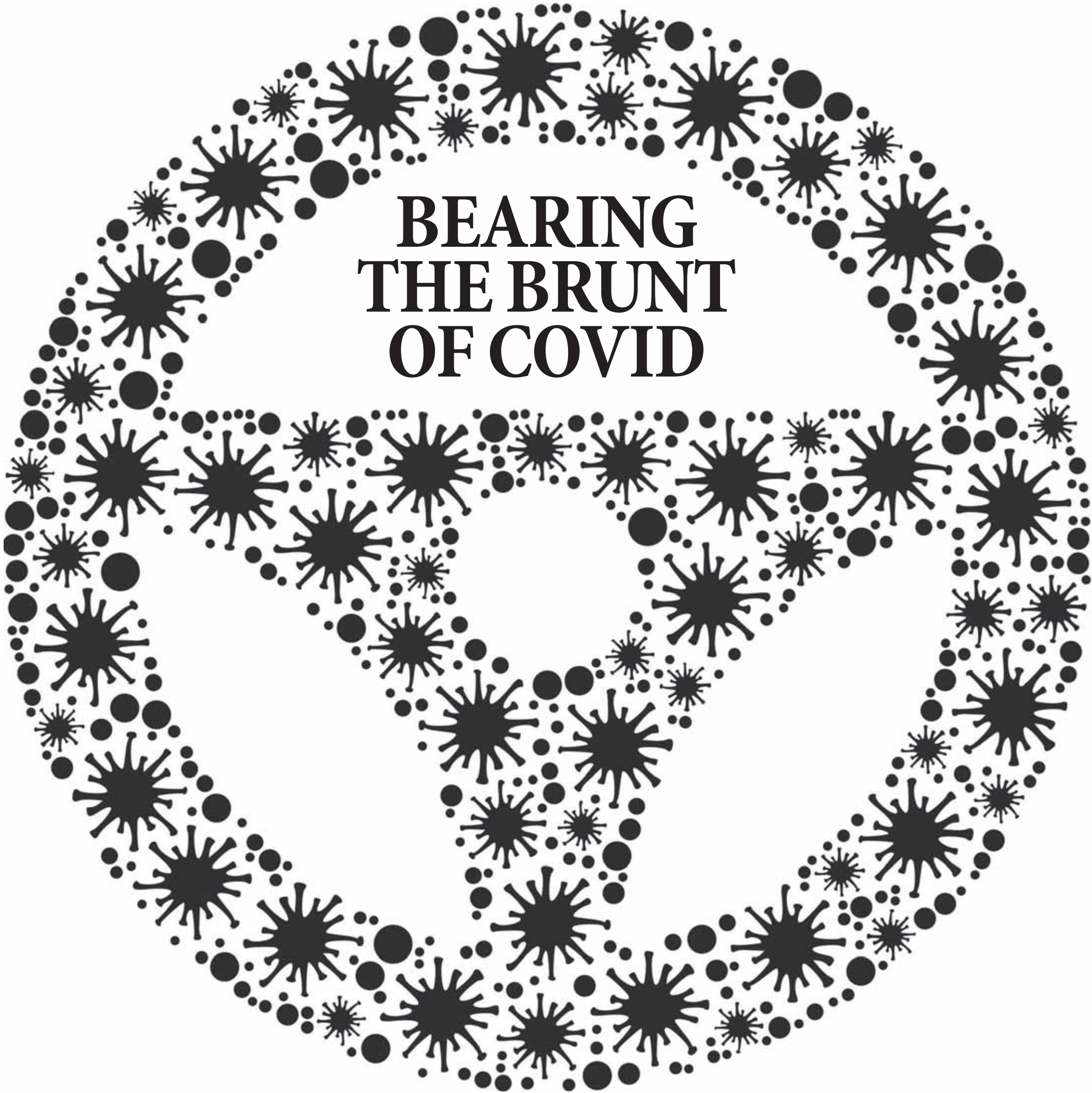
Among the proposed disciplines is: mechanical engineering, energy systems engineering, construction and maintenance engineering, logistics systems engineering, transportation systems management, and other specialisations related to modern technologies and marine sciences.



SCORES OF SCHOOL BUS OPERATORS AND DRIVERS IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

ARE STILL FEELING THE PINCH OF THE PANDEMIC,

ALTHOUGH SCHOOLS ARE OPEN WITH 50 PER CENT ATTENDANCE



BEARING THE BRUNT OF COVID

KABEER YOUSUF
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Needless to say that Covid-19 has had a toll on every single life on earth some way or the other, and the people employed in many sectors are trying to heave a sigh of relief as life is getting back to normal despite the surging number of Covid, Omicron cases even as the world is talking about a 4th vaccine dose.

Scores of school bus operators and drivers in the Sultanate of Oman are still feeling the pinch of the pandemic, although schools are open with 50 per cent attendance.

Even though drivers are back to work with the beginning of the schools’ offline-online mode, most of them are not able to meet their EMI payment requirement to the banks as a large number of parents are choosing to send their wards in personal vehicles

to avoid exposure to the virus to their children.

“Our plight is even worse because when the schools were not operating during the peak of Covid-19 spread and buses were halted for some time, no drivers were employed, and the banks showed a kind face against unpaid loan instalments”, says Rajeev, a bus operator with a fleet of vehicles and several drivers and other staff to maintain the buses.

There are dozens of such bus operators aiding the schools in the capital city alone.

“The scenario is such that our overhead expenses such as salaries and bank dues are back to square one, but our income is less than half and our going forward is lopsided”, he adds.

With the Covid-19 slowly showing its ugly snout prompting airlines to down their planes, parents are still in a ‘wait and see’ mode. They are either not

“
The scenario is such that our overhead expenses such as salaries and bank dues are back to square one, but our income is less than half and our going forward is lopsided
RAJEEV
Bus operator

sending their wards to schools or commuting them by themselves if they are sending them to school.

“I transport my two children three times a day up and down the school for two reasons”, says Ahmed Batarfi, a parent who sends his children to a private school in the capital area.

“In the first place, I cannot shell out RO 60 a month for transporting my kids for 12 days a month. Secondly, there are safety and security measures during the pandemic”, he added.

Experts opine that school bus operators and drivers are one of the worst-hit during the pandemic. This is because their overhead expenses remain the same with no income whatsoever.

“Unlike in other sectors, school bus operators and drivers have a compound impact on them. Their daily bread is dependent on various factors, such as schools’ functionality, kids’ ability to attend

classes, salary of the parents, and other factors which have a direct impact on their jobs”, said Ashalatha, an auditing specialist.

In this present situation, school bus operators are requesting the banks to allow them some breather by either opting for deferment or allowing them to pay lesser EMI so that survival is not a question for them.

“We request the banks to consider postponing the repayments or to allow smaller monthly instalments as we are overburdened with the expenses”, adds Rajeev.

Earlier, Majlis Ash’shura has discussed the issue of school bus owners and school guards during the session of the Council during the fifth periodic meeting of the committee for the second annual session (2019-2020) of the ninth term of the council (2019-2023) under the chairmanship of Jamal bin Ahmed al Abri and in the

presence of their excellencies members of the committee.

The committee also reviewed the response of the Ministry of Education referred to it by the Council’s office on the issue of school bus owners and school guards related to delayed payment of salaries for school bus owners, and the issue of the ministerial decision issued regarding the formation of a committee to organise the work of school guards and their facilities and as a follow-up, specialists from the Ministry of Education were hosted by the Council.

There are 1,191 schools for basic education in the country, with an addition of 22 new schools this academic year besides 13 schools for post-basic education, and as many as 446 special education students attend three schools, according to the Ministry of Education.



Govt steps up efforts to prevent another wave of Covid-19

VINOD NAIR

[vinot_nair](#)

The government has stepped up efforts to prevent another wave of Covid-19 by expanding the target groups for booster vaccines.

On Monday, the Ministry of Health (MoH) reported 176 new cases, of which 14 are hospital inpatients, including three in Intensive Care Units.

The booster or the third dose is now available for residents aged 18 and above at the Old Muscat Airport building in Al Seeb.

Speaking to the *Observer*, an official at the Directorate General of Health Services in Muscat, said the response has been positive. It is necessary to register, book an appointment and get a confirmation via SMS before visiting the centre between 8 am and 2 pm on working days.

Both residents and citizens can provide full details via call centre 1144.

As of last week, around 230,000 (citizens and residents) were yet to receive any vaccination, while four per cent of the target group had got the booster or the third dose.

Boosters are available at the designated public healthcare centres in various governorates



for citizens in the same target group. "Residents can also take booster vaccines from private healthcare centres by following necessary procedures."

A resident informed the *Observer*, "We tried to register at the MoH website, but there was no slot until the end of this week. Hopefully, the rush will fade as more residents take their jabs."

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health (MoH) has issued a clarification on reports that a citizen was asked to pay for eMushrif at the airport.

MoH said there had been no representative from eMushrif at border crossings since December 18, 2021, following the conclusion of the contract with the company. The citizen was instructed to pay for the PCR test like the rest of the travellers of the same flight whose tests were conducted more than 72 hours ago, in compliance with the decisions of the Supreme Committee. The citizen refused to follow this procedure and was asked to sign a written declaration about his refusal to

conduct a PCR test. The Royal Oman Police is the authority to verify that incoming passengers at border crossing meet the entry requirements of the SC.

MoH has also refuted reports about the possibility of stopping Friday prayers and the post is related to the restrictions imposed by the Sultanate of Oman imposed in March 2020.

It denied reports that a citizen was administered the expired vaccine and urged everyone to confirm with official sources for verifying facts.

Update vaccine certificates issued from outside Oman

KABEER YOUSUF

[@kabeeryousef](#)

Those who have taken vaccines from outside the Sultanate of Oman and possess vaccination certificates need to update their status with Tarassud Plus, according to Ministry of Health (MoH) sources.

Accordingly, anyone who has got their jabs administered from any country other than Sultanate of Oman but arrived in the country can log on to the mobile application and get their status localised, MoH said.

"Any person who has taken Covid-19 vaccine which are approved by the Sultanate of Oman can transfer their status by logging on to Tarassud Plus application and get their local vaccination certificate issued," said Dr Nihal Afifi, Head of Primary Health and contact point for vaccination.

In addition to filling up the e-form, the applicant needs to provide a civil ID number, date of birth, passport number, mobile number, vaccination details, name of the vaccine, dates of two doses taken, details of the place/ medical centre where the vaccine was taken, and copy of the e-Mushrif certificate which was issued while the person arrived from the country of origin.

"Any manipulation to the information provided is an offence and is subject to legal procedures against the offender."

The Sultanate of Oman has made vaccination certificates mandatory to enter public places, including shopping malls, commercial outlets, parks

Any person who has taken Covid-19 vaccine which are approved by the Sultanate of Oman can transfer their status by logging on to Tarassud Plus application and get their local vaccination certificate issued

DR NIHAL AFIFI

Head of Primary Health and contact point for vaccination

and the like, besides making it compulsory for international arrivals to show their vaccination certificates at the entry point.

There have been cases where people with vaccination certificates issued from outside the country were stopped from entering public places initially. All those carrying Non-Omani certificates have been urged to transfer the same online or offline.

"In order to do it offline, one needs to contact Tarassud outreach office on 71509360 and validate the same," the doctor said. While contacting the office, one needs to keep the documents ready with him/her in order to add the external certificate of vaccination in the Tarassud programme. Valid vaccination certificate, ID card/ residence card, passport, contact number are to be attached to the application.

Heavy rains expected tonight, tomorrow

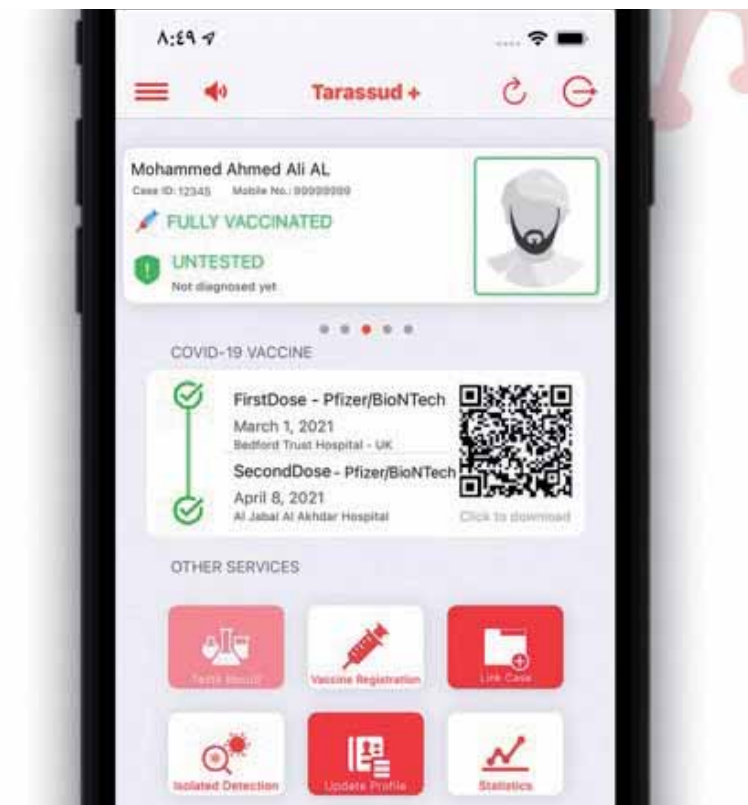


MUSCAT: The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has issued a warning of heavy rains ranging between 30 mm to 80 mm on Monday night and Tuesday.

The CAA said heavy rains are expected on Monday night and Tuesday in the governorates of Musandam, North Al Batinah, Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, South Al Batinah, Muscat, North Al Sharqiyah and South Al Sharqiyah.

The CAA advised all to exercise caution during rainfall and thunder showers and not to cross running wadis, to avoid low-lying areas and not to venture into the sea.

The wilayats of Khasab, Bukha and Dibba in Musandam Governorate witnessed heavy downpours associated with strong wind on Monday. On Monday morning, the Wilayat of Bukha witnessed heavy rains centred on the villages and the mountainous areas causing overflow of wadis. Cloudy conditions prevailed over much of the Sultanate of Oman with south-easterly wind that lasted for hours in Muscat Governorate and some other wilayats.



MAJIS INDUSTRIAL SERVICES SAOC (Majis)

P.O. Box No. 553, Falaj Al Qabail, Postal Code 322, Sultanate of Oman
Tel No. 26852421 Email: Tender@miscoman.com
(Office Location: Administration Building, Opposite Sohar Aluminium and Sohar Power co. at Sohar Industrial Port Area)



TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Majis Industrial Services SAOC (Majis) is a closely held joint stock company fully owned by the Government of Oman. Majis is engaged in providing various water utility services at the Sohar Industrial Port Area and Sohar Free Zone.

Tenders are invited from local and international qualified firms for the following (Note: small description of TOR is available in our e tendering system).

Sl. No.	Tender No.	Tender Description	Bids fees in R.O.	Last date for paying bid fee	Last date for tender submission
1.	Majis/52/2021	Design, Build GFS Potable Water Storage Tanks (6000 m3) at Majis R0 Plot 21A	262,500 incl. 5% VAT	Monday 10th January 2022	Tuesday 8th February 2022

Bidders who have made electronic transfer of bid fee will be issued soft copy of the tender document through the e tendering system on or before Monday 10th January 2022. The companies participating must be registered with Majis' in e-tendering system (<http://tendering.majis.om/VendorLogin.aspx>) during the tendering stage. The payment of bid fee should be made by direct transfer to the following bank account of Majis. (Account Name: Majis Industrial Services SAOC, Bank : Bank Muscat SAOG, Account Number: 0423010783830018).

Note: The registered companies who can upload the tender fee transfer receipt into our e-tendering system under the above referred tender section. Tender documents will be issued to such firms only through the system.

The Tender should be delivered in sealed envelopes, addressed to the EXECUTIVE, NOMINATION & REMUNERATION COMMITTEE "ENRC", Majis Industrial Service SAOC, P.O. Box No. 553, Falaj Al Qabail, Postal Code 322, Sultanate of Oman (at Majis' reception).

Tenderers must not display their identities on envelopes. Majis is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.

Questions regarding this procurement process shall be directed to tender@miscoman.com.



Yemen fighters seize vessel in latest escalation



Ansar Allah fighters riding on the back of a truck in the Red Sea city of Hodeida. – Reuters file photo

RIYADH: Yemeni fighters have seized an Emirati-flagged vessel in the Red Sea, the fighters and a Saudi-led coalition said on Monday, giving contrasting explanations for the latest escalation in a seven-year war.

The coalition, fighting in support of Yemen's internationally recognised government, said the vessel was carrying medical supplies but the fighters said they seized "a military cargo ship with military equipment".

The coalition has been fighting for nearly seven years in support of Yemen's government against the Ansar Allah, in a conflict that has displaced millions and created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according to the United Nations.

"The militia must promptly release the ship, or the coalition forces will undertake all necessary

measures and procedures to handle this violation, including the use of force if necessary," coalition spokesman Turki al Malki said.

In a statement cited by the official Saudi Press Agency, he said the vessel was travelling from Yemen's Socotra island, off the country's south coast.

It was returning to the Saudi city of Jazan carrying medical supplies after finishing a mission to set up a field hospital on the island, Malki said.

"The boat named *Rawabi*, bearing the flag of the United Arab Emirates, was pirated and kidnapped at 23:57 (2057 GMT) on Sunday while off Hodeida province," he said.

Malki was unable to confirm the number of people on board when contacted. There was no immediate comment from the United Arab Emirates. — AFP

US calls for civilian rule in Sudan after Hamdok quits as PM

KHARTOUM: The United States has urged Sudanese leaders to ensure civilian rule and end violence against protesters after Abdalla Hamdok resigned as prime minister, throwing a transition towards elections deeper into uncertainty.

"After PM Hamdok's resignation, Sudanese leaders should set aside differences, find consensus and ensure continued civilian rule," the US State Department's Bureau of African Affairs said in a tweet.

Hamdok, an economist and former United Nations official widely respected by the international community, had served as prime minister under a military-civilian power sharing deal that followed the overthrow of former leader Omar al Bashir in 2019.

The military dissolved his government in a coup in October, but he returned a month later under a deal that tasked him with forming a government of technocrats ahead of elections in 2023.

Hamdok announced on Sunday that he was resigning after being unable to forge a consensus to bring the transition forward. He called for dialogue to reach a new agreement for the transition.

Hamdok was reinstated on November 21 under a deal promising elections for mid-2023, but local media had recently reported he had been absent from his office for days, with rumours swirling over his possible resignation.

"I have tried my best to stop the country from sliding towards disaster," Hamdok said on Sunday



Sudanese protesters gather during a demonstration against the October 25 coup, in the capital Khartoum, on Sunday. – AFP



I have tried my best to stop the country from sliding towards disaster

ABDALLA HAMDOK

evening, addressing the nation on state television.

Sudan "is crossing a dangerous turning point that threatens its

whole survival," he said.

Hamdok was the civilian face of the country's fragile transition, while Burhan has been the country's de facto leader following Bashir's ouster.

Hamdok cited "the fragmentation of the political forces and conflicts between the (military and civilian) components of the transition" and said that "despite everything that has been done to reach a consensus... it has not happened".

Reaction on social media in Sudan was divided, with some saddened by the loss of a leader who they said stood out for his wisdom. Others, still angry with Hamdok for returning after the coup, expressed their resolve to end military rule.

Jibril Ibrahim, a former rebel leader who served as finance minister under Hamdok but expressed support for the military before the coup, called his resignation "regrettable".

"Our nation needs political compromise today more than ever to navigate safely through these turbulent times. There is a room to accommodate everyone."

Hamdok's resignation came hours after the latest round of mass rallies against the military. At least 57 civilians have been killed as security forces have moved to contain or disperse demonstrations since the October 25 coup, according to medics aligned with the protest movement. Further protests are planned for Tuesday. — Reuters/AFP

Coalition in Iraq targeted 2 years after Soleimani killing

BAGHDAD: The US-led coalition against the IS group in Iraq on Monday shot down two armed drones targeting a compound at Baghdad airport hosting its personnel, a coalition official said.

The incident, which was not claimed by any group, came two years after a US drone strike near the airport killed Iran's revered General Qassem Soleimani and his Iraqi lieutenant.

"Two fixed-wing suicide drones, or improvised cruise missiles, attempted to attack Baghdad Airport this morning at approximately 4:30 am" (0130 GMT), the official said.

A counter-rocket, artillery and

mortar, or C-RAM, system "at the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center engaged them and they were shot down without incident," added the source, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The BDSC compound houses "a very small number of coalition troops who are not in a combat role," the source said, describing them as logistical troops, contractors and civilian personnel.

The January 3, 2020 US strike killed Soleimani — who headed the Quds Force, the foreign operations arm of Iran's Revolutionary Guards — and Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, deputy leader of the Hashed al Shaabi coalition



Iraqis light candles during a commemoration ceremony held to mark the second anniversary of the killing of Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and his lieutenant Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, at the spot where they were killed, near Baghdad's International Airport, on Sunday. – AFP

of armed groups.

Photos obtained by AFP from the coalition official show remains of one of the projectiles from Monday's attempted strike, with the message "commanders' revenge operations" written on it.

"The Iraqis have opened an investigation," the coalition source said.

"There is no damage, but this is a civilian airport, it is very dangerous to launch this type of attack."

The night-time strike two year ago, ordered by then-US president Donald Trump, hit a car in which Soleimani and Muhandis were travelling on the edge of the airport.

The Hashed — a coalition of former paramilitary groups now integrated into the Iraqi state security apparatus — held a candle-lit vigil on Sunday at the airport for the two men killed.

The US said at the time that Soleimani was planning imminent action against US personnel in Iraq, a country long torn between the competing demands of its principal allies Washington and Tehran.

Five days after his killing, Iran fired missiles at an air base in Iraq housing US troops and another near Arbil in the country's north. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

BEIRUT

IS attack near Syria oil wells kills 9 soldiers

Militants killed nine Syrian soldiers and allied militiamen in an ambush near oil installations in eastern Syria, a war monitor reported on Monday.

"Nine army soldiers and allied militia fighters were killed in an ambush by the IS" group near oil wells, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported.

The attack was carried out late on Sunday in a remote region on the edge of the eastern province of Deir Ezzor where



The rocket attack on a convoy also left 15 pro-government fighters wounded, the UK-based organisation said.

TEL AVIV

Israel begins 4th jab for over 60s, health staff

Israel began on Monday administering fourth Covid vaccine shots to people over 60 and health workers amid a surge driven by the Omicron variant.

Health workers at Ichilov hospital in Tel Aviv lined up for the shot and over-60s received it at the nearby branch of Clalit, Israel's largest health fund.

The shot was given to those who received their third inoculation at least four months ago.

The health ministry on Sunday approved the fourth shot



for the over-60s and medical staff, two days after those with weakened immunity started to take the shot, making Israel one of the first countries to do so.

VIENNA

Talks on Iran's nuclear programme resume

Talks aimed at saving the agreement with Iran on its nuclear programme resumed in Vienna on Monday, with Iranian officials expressing cautious optimism.

The talks were proceeding initially in bilateral format, people close to the talks said. They added that a meeting of the so-called Joint Commission of the political directors was expected in the course of the week.

Tehran Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh



said good progress had been made in the last round concerning the lifting of sanctions and guarantees that the United States would not again withdraw from the agreement.



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TUESDAY | JANUARY 4 | 2022

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In brief

■ MANILA



AUTHORITIES TO IMPOSE ADDITIONAL CURBS ON UNVACCINATED

Philippine authorities in the capital region will impose additional restrictions on unvaccinated individuals amid a spike in Covid-19 cases, an official said on Monday.

The government earlier placed Metro Manila, a region covering 16 cities that is home to over 13 million people, under a stricter alert level in a bid to control infections due to the Omicron variant.

Mayors in the region have “agreed in principle” to issue separate ordinances imposing more curbs on the travel and activities of unvaccinated people, said Benhur Abalos, Chairman of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority.

“It will be hard for us to go into lockdown again”, he said. “For the unvaccinated, they shall remain in their residences at all times except for procurement of essential goods and services.”

■ BERLIN



MORE DEMOS EXPECTED AGAINST RESTRICTIONS

Several demonstrations against coronavirus restrictions in Germany are set to take place this evening in the north-eastern state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, as calls from politicians for compulsory vaccinations grew louder.

The biggest protests are expected to be in the coastal port of Rostock and state capital Schwerin. A previous protest on December 27 in Schwerin attracted a few thousand people. In addition to restrictions on daily life, the focus of much protesters’ anger is a planned compulsory vaccination law favoured by the coalition government. Germany’s vaccination rate is at just over 71 per cent and is only creeping up slowly. Many of those who have already had two jabs are having boosters, but a significant proportion of the population — 25.8 per cent — is not vaccinated at all. This includes children aged 5 and under who are generally not yet eligible.

■ NEW DELHI



VACCINATION TO TEENS AGED 15-18 BEGINS

India extended Covid vaccinations to teens aged 15-18 on Monday, after officials tightened restrictions in big cities to avoid a repeat of last year’s devastating outbreak. More than 200,000 people around India died in a huge spring virus wave that overwhelmed hospitals and crematoriums. Health workers have since administered more than 1.4 billion vaccine doses but less than half of India’s population is fully inoculated, according to government data. Hundreds of teenagers patiently queued with their parents on Monday morning outside a school turned into a makeshift medical centre in the capital New Delhi. “It’s really great to have your first vaccine”, said 16-year-old Soumadeep, after receiving his first dose of the Indian-made Covaxin.

World powers vow to prevent spread of atomic weapons, avoid nuclear conflict

PARIS: Five global nuclear powers pledged on Monday to prevent atomic weapons spreading and to avoid nuclear conflict, in a rare joint statement ahead of a review of a key nuclear treaty later this year.

“We believe strongly that the further spread of such weapons must be prevented”, said permanent UN Security Council members China, France, Russia, the UK and United States, adding: “A nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.”

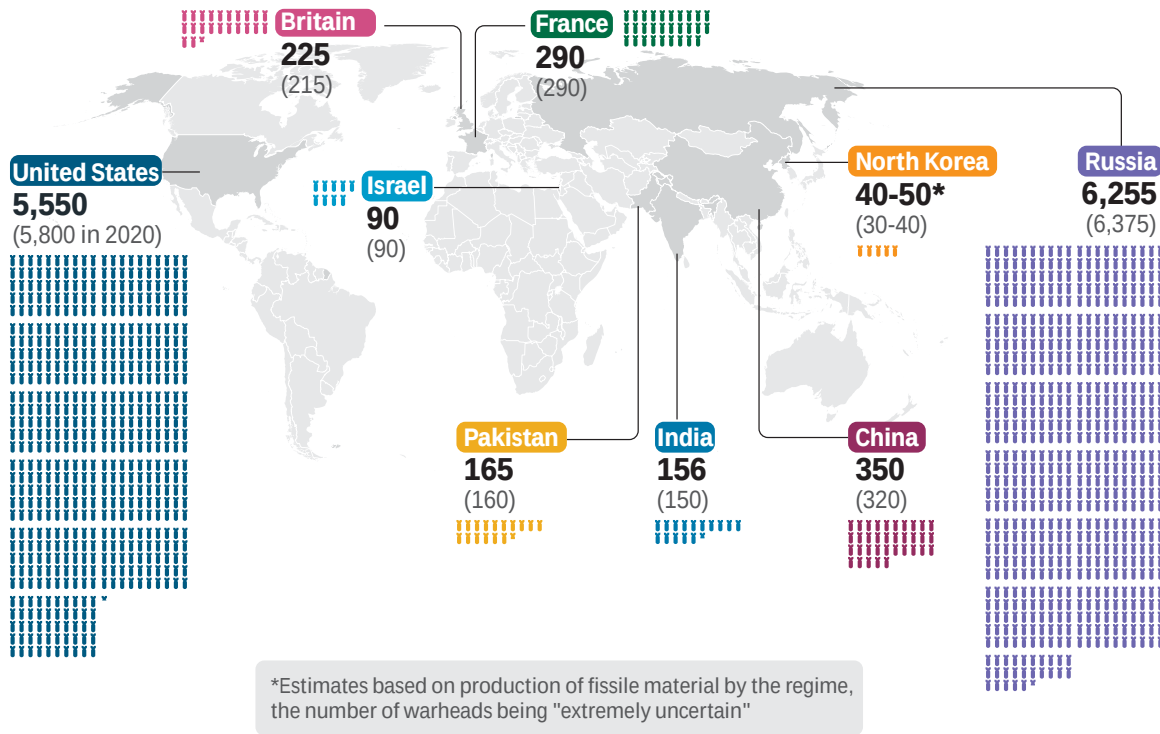
The statement was issued after the latest review of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) — which first came into force in 1970 — was postponed from its scheduled date of January 4 to later in the year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Putting aside current differences that have caused major tensions between both China and Russia and their Western partners, the five world powers said they saw “the avoidance of war between nuclear-weapon states and the reduction of strategic risks as our foremost responsibilities.”

“As nuclear use would have far-reaching consequences, we

Nuclear weapons stockpiles

Warheads by country in 2021, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)



Source: SIPRI estimates in 2021

also affirm that nuclear weapons — for as long as they continue to exist — should serve defensive purposes, deter aggression and prevent war”, they said according to the English text released by the White House. The powers

added: “We each intend to maintain and further strengthen our national measures to prevent unauthorised or unintended use of nuclear weapons.”

The statement comes as tensions between Russia and

the United States have reached heights rarely seen since the Cold War over a troop build-up by Moscow close to the Ukrainian border. That has raised fears that the Kremlin is planning a new attack on its pro-Western

neighbour. The rise of China meanwhile under President Xi Jinping has also raised concerns that tensions with Washington could lead to conflict, notably over the island of Taiwan. Beijing considers Taiwan part of its territory and has vowed to one day seize it, by force if necessary.

Russia welcomed the declaration by the atomic powers and expressed hope it would reduce global tensions.

“We hope that, in the current difficult conditions of international security, the approval of such a political statement will help reduce the level of international tensions”, the Russian foreign ministry said in a statement.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told the RIA Novosti news agency that Moscow still considered a summit between the world’s nuclear powers to be “necessary”.

The statement also comes as the world powers seek to reach agreement with Iran on reviving the 2015 deal over its controversial nuclear drive, which was rendered moribund by the US walking out of the accord in 2018. — AFP

Negligence could be behind S African parliament fire

CAPE TOWN: Arson and negligence are both under investigation by South African authorities following the fire that devastated the parliament buildings in Cape Town.

Speaking to news channel eNCA on Monday, Cape Town’s security commissioner Jean-Pierre Smith said he was left “speechless” at how this could happen at the parliamentary complex. He referred to a massive gap in security.

The costs for rebuilding the historic structure is estimated at the equivalent of several hundred million dollars. “We’ll need hundred of millions, if not billions of rands”, Smith said.

He also spoke of serious deficiencies that could be due to poor maintenance. For example, he said, the electricity system had not switched off automatically and the ventilation systems had continued to run. Also, the automatic fire alarm had only been activated after a long delay.

Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure Patricia de Lille said a 49-year-old man

would appear in court on Tuesday on charges including break-in, theft and arson after he was caught on camera entering the vacant building.

In the tourist metropolis of Cape Town, more than 70 firefighters had tried for hours over the weekend to get the fire under control — only on Monday morning was the all-clear given.

According to a parliamentary spokesperson, the flames had also destroyed the chamber in which the National Assembly meets.

The fire initially broke out at the back of the building complex that houses the old assembly chamber and the National Council of Provinces, de Lille explained.

The fire has sparked a debate about moving parliament from its historical location in Cape Town to the administrative capital of Pretoria some 1,400 kilometres away.

Proponents of the move note that the building is in danger of collapse and that much of its artwork has been destroyed beyond repair. — dpa



South African President Cyril Ramaphosa inspects damages after a fire broke out at the Parliament building in Cape Town. — Reuters



People walk through Waterloo train station in London. — Reuters

Omicron ‘plainly milder’, new measures not needed

LONDON: New measures are not needed now in Britain to fight the Omicron variant, which is “plainly milder” than earlier forms of the coronavirus, Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Monday.

“The way forward for the country as a whole is to continue with the path that we are on”, he told broadcasters. “Of course we will keep all measures under review, but the mixture of things that we are doing at the moment is I think the right one.”

Despite a huge surge in infections, Johnson has so far mainly resisted imposing new restrictions in England, which accounts for more than 80 per cent of the UK population. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which control their own rules, have imposed some

new measures. Johnson said pressure on hospitals would be “considerable” in the next couple of weeks, but Omicron was “plainly milder” than previous variants, and the country was in a stronger position than it was earlier in the pandemic.

Britain had a “very, very high level” of vaccination, he said, and it was continuing to build up its defences with the booster programme. “The majority of people who are in ICU (intensive care) have not been vaccinated and the vast majority — about 90% — have not been boosted”, he said during a visit to a vaccination centre in Buckinghamshire, south east England.

Johnson imposed limited measures in England, known as “Plan B”, last month, including

the wearing of face coverings on public transport and in shops, but stopped short of ordering restrictions on gatherings or closing businesses.

The government said on Sunday that older schoolchildren in England would be required to wear face coverings when they return after the Christmas break.

PENSION SCHEME PLAN

Meanwhile, working 18-year-olds would automatically begin paying into a pension under plans being presented to Parliament.

The proposal is aimed at boosting the pension pots of workers who do not go to university, giving them an extra four years of contributions, and potentially 50 years of compound interest. — Reuters/dpa

Rethinking the rules-based international order



Mark Leonard

The writer is a director of the European Council on Foreign Relations and the author of *The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict*

Will the West remain committed to the rules-based international order when it is no longer the one making the rules? That will be one of the most intriguing questions of the next two decades. If there is one principle that has united electorates, policymakers, politicians, and media across the West, it is that rules matter for just about everything else. Disrespect of common rules has long been met with intense anger and a forceful response.

Consider the United Kingdom, where Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s raw charisma enabled him to win and hold on to power, effectively redrawing the country’s political map in the process. Until recently, his public

approval had withstood florid displays of incompetence, a rising pandemic death toll, and an economic recession. But Johnson is now finally haemorrhaging support for one simple reason: he and his government went too far in disregarding the rules. The revelation that there was a Christmas party at 10 Downing Street last year while the rest of the country was in lockdown has hurt Johnson’s reputation more than any of his other scandals or transgressions.

At the international level, Western governments routinely condemn others for rule-breaking. Russia, for example, has been rebuked for its annexation of Crimea, repeated cyberattacks on

other countries, and physical attacks on Russian dissidents abroad. China, too, has been condemned as a major transgressor. US President Joe Biden may not agree with much that his predecessor said or did, but he has maintained a striking continuity with the Trump administration’s characterisation of China.

And yet, in the coming decades, the biggest global threat will not be China the rule-breaker, but China the rule-maker. China’s growing influence over international norms, standards, and conventions is a game changer. For centuries, Western powers have taken it for granted that they are the world’s norm-setters, massively influencing other countries’ policies through

the “Washington Consensus,” the “Brussels effect” and other channels.

Over the last decade, however, the free-market Washington Consensus has been challenged by a “Beijing consensus” of managed globalisation, industrial policy, and state capitalism, while the Brussels effect has run up against a potential “Beijing effect”: China’s export of technology standards through its “Digital Silk Road.”

Moreover, many global rule-setting bodies that once underpinned European and American predominance now have Chinese leaders. These include (or have included) the International Telecommunication Union, the International Organization

for Standardisation and the International Electrotechnical Commission. China is poised to set the standards for rapidly developing technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics, and Chinese companies’ technological infrastructure – built to Chinese standards – has spread to numerous countries.

As Bradford notes, while the Beijing effect operates differently than the Brussels effect, it still has far-reaching consequences. And as China becomes a bigger trade partner to more countries, its global influence will continue to increase.

Whether the Western commitment to rules will endure therefore has become an urgent question. © Project Syndicate

Turkey’s economic conundrum

RAZIYE AKKOC

Turkey’s consumer prices have soared by the highest rate since 2002, further undermining President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s unorthodox battle for his developing country’s “economic independence”.

Analysts attribute the jump of the official reading to 36.1 per cent last month to the surging cost of imports, which range from energy to many of the raw materials Turkey’s manufacturers turn into exports. Those costs jumped because of a historic collapse of the lira, which last year lost 44 per cent of its value against the dollar.

But ultimately, analysts blame both inflation and the lira crisis on Erdogan’s fervent belief that high interest rates cause inflation.

Conventional theory says the opposite is true because higher interest rates slow economic activity by making borrowing more expensive and providing incentives for people to keep their money in the bank.

How did the problems start?

Calling high interest rates “the mother and father of all evil”, Erdogan implemented a series of rate cuts starting in September that further undermined economists’ trust in the central bank’s independence.

“I reject policies that will condemn our people to unemployment, hunger and poverty,” Erdogan said last year, calling on his supporters to be patient. The Turkish currency weakened on Monday, trading at 13.4 lira to the dollar, after the inflation data was published.

It fell as low as 18.4 to the dollar at the height of the crisis last month, after starting the year around the 7.4 mark.

How bad is the crisis?

Turkey’s official inflation target is five per cent, but it has remained in the double digits for the past two years. The monthly inflation reading has turned into a contested political issue, with opposition leaders claiming the government is underreporting the actual price jumps, a charge it denies.

The cost of living is expected to rise further, especially after hikes in the price of consumers’ electricity and gas bills of around 50 and 25 per cent respectively.

What does Erdogan expect?

The president is prioritising growth, with the economy expected to expand by nine per cent in 2021 and 3.5 per cent in 2022.

During another currency crisis in 2018, the central bank aggressively hiked the main interest rate, but the likelihood of a repeat under a more determined Erdogan is low.

Some experts believe Erdogan may be trying to make Turkey more attractive as a hub for cheap production, with local wages worth less in dollar terms.

During a televised speech in Istanbul, Erdogan on Monday hailed a 32.9 per cent year-on-year increase in exports to \$225.3 billion in 2021. — AFP

Adapting to the Next Normal



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THE LATEST DISRUPTION CAUSED BY TECHNOLOGY HAS BEEN THE SHIFT TOWARDS FLEXIBLE, HYBRID AND REMOTE WORKING, WORKING FROM HOME AND VIRTUAL CONFERENCING, A MOVE ACCELERATED BY THE PANDEMIC

Organisations that win in competitive markets know that their workforce will need upskilling or re-skilling to be able to stay ahead of market disruption, changing demands and technological advances. Those that rely solely on experience and once-relevant knowledge lag behind. It is an evolution in action and the strongest survive, only this time it is in the workplace and technology is disrupting every industry at a rapid pace.

The latest disruption caused by technology has been the shift towards flexible, hybrid and remote working, working from home and virtual conferencing, a move accelerated by the pandemic. The need to adjust in order to stay ahead of the curve in this Next Normal is more important than ever.

The World Economic Forum reports that only 30 per cent of employees at risk of job displacement from technological changes received training in the past year, with those most at risk often being the least likely to receive any retraining at all. By 2022, at least 54 per cent of all employees will need reskilling and upskilling.

Far too often companies focus on the sporadic gathering of knowledge, where staff are equipped with the skills to just do their job. However, at the speed that the role of the workforce across all sectors is changing companies and individuals must continue to evolve in order to keep up.

The rise of flexible working will become the Next Normal and to

stop learning means to stagnate. The environment is changing and the way we work is also changing, so the skills to inhabit this landscape must also change. To meet this ongoing and ever-evolving business challenge, there needs to be a major culture shift towards continuous learning.

Organisations should embrace the need to keep learning as part of this Next Normal corporate strategy, where professional development is as much of a priority as profit. After all, without professional development, there might not be any profit or growth in the future.

The move away from an interval knowledge-gathering existence will see both the organisation and the individual thrive, but we must understand what is meant by moving into a learning-centric approach. But what exactly is a learning culture, and why does every company already investing in training and development not already have one? A learning culture supports an open mindset, an independent quest for knowledge, and shared learning directed toward the mission and goals of the organisation. According to a recent study published in the Harvard Business Review, the single biggest driver of business impact is the strength of an organisation’s learning culture and companies who effectively enable their employees to learn and grow are at least 30 per cent more likely to become market leaders in their industries over an extended period of time.

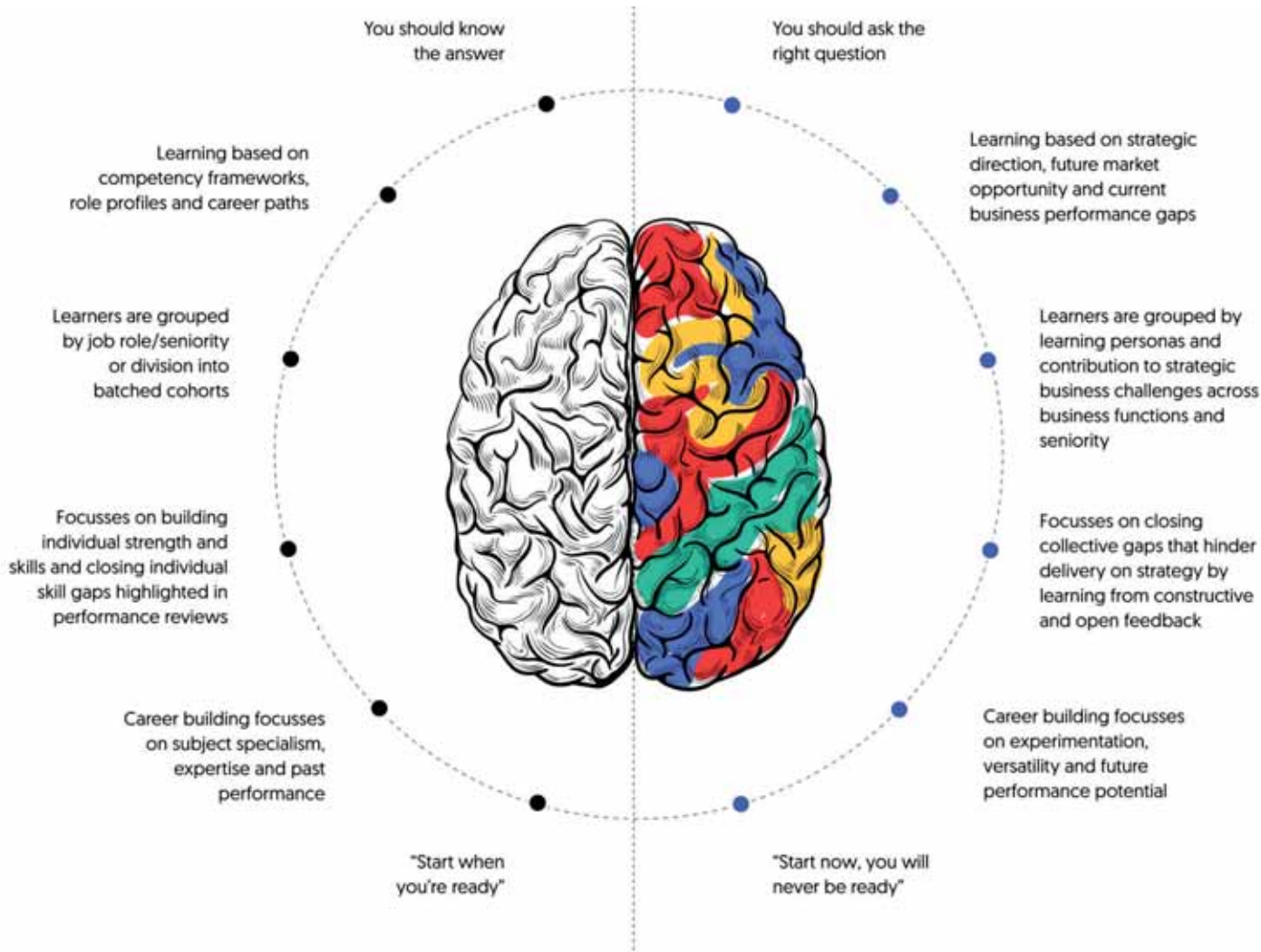
Unsurprisingly, many of the big

players have already made continuous learning an integral part of their growth strategy and treat learning as a day-to-day necessity, deeply embedded into rituals, management practices, and talent management approaches.

Recent research by the Society for Human Resource Management revealed that only 10 per cent of organisations have managed to create this environment with just 20 per cent of employees demonstrating effective learning behaviours at work.

This suggests, that whilst most companies do invest in upskilling their employees, many of these programmes act as interval knowledge injections. To achieve a true Learning Culture, the emphasis on development needs to be embedded in the day-to-day work and delivered in a way that suits the environment and is targeted at solving current and future business challenges at hand. As the way we work changes, so must the delivery of learning. This does not mean employees must put what they are working on hold to sit in a classroom everyday. Programmes can be delivered modularly via different channels to suit different learning personas and tailored to the challenge at hand. Whilst learning about future technologies may work well in virtual seminars or as online courses, learning about delivering a better service may work better embedded into the day-to-day via job aids, self-directed tutorials, prompts, gamified activities and on the job mentoring.

KNOWLEDGE CULTURE VS LEARNING CULTURE



Difference between a learning-centric culture and a knowledge-centric culture?

A Learning Culture focuses much more on creating a learning and feedback-centric approach to day-to-day people management aligned with the business’s challenges and strategic directions. This requires an agile deployment of learning budgets to create highly bespoke just-in-time interventions across multiple channels to suit different learning personas and groups. To stay ahead of the curve and move an organisation towards a true Learning Culture, companies must first focus on developing a portfolio of dynamic capabilities by creating an always-on learning eco-system underpinned by reimagined processes, reward systems and talent management frameworks. This will allow each individual, team or group to access learning when it is needed the most in order to deliver effectively against a change in strategy, a new market opportunity and any industry disruption.

Redressing an injustice by returning art objects

FABIAN SOMMER

The return of art objects looted in the colonial era to their original owners must not, in the view of Berlin's Senator for Culture Klaus Lederer, become a "question of selling indulgences."

"It is not a question of returning individual selected collector's items with a grand symbolic gesture and then simply ticking off that box," the left-wing politician said.

"2022 will be a milestone in this process with the restitution of part of the Benin bronzes" but the process must continue, he said.

BASIC QUESTION

About 1,100 of the ornate bronzes from the palace of the then Kingdom of Benin, which today belongs to Nigeria, can be found in about 20 German museums. Most of the objects come from looting by the British empire in 1897.

Germany aims to return substantial numbers of the artworks this year from the five largest museum collections.

Federal Culture Minister Claudia Roth has said she wants to bring together all German museums with such objects in January for talks on the subject.

"Ultimately, it's about the basic question of how we evaluate colonialism... and how we talk about the lingering after-effects of this colonial period in the present," Lederer said.

"This does not mean that the warehouses here will be emptied and our museums will be empty in the future, nor that we will just ship everything back overnight without batting an eyelid," he added.

It is a matter of dealing with today's demands in a contemporary way, the local politician said.

Returning the looted art objects does not mean that our museums will be empty in the future, nor that we will just ship everything back overnight without batting an eyelid

KLAUS LEDERER

Berlin's Senator for Culture



COVID ON CRUISE

The cruise ship *Aida Nova* is pictured at Lisbon dock. The German cruise ship *Aida Nova* which has 4,197 passengers and crew due to go to Funchal and then to the Canaries has been stranded for 3 days in Lisbon due to passengers positive for Covid-19. The last few days have seen an increase in the spread of the virus on board, from 14 cases to now 64 people infected.

- AFP

Harness the power of expectation



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LOOKING AT A FLOWING WADI MIGHT BE TEMPTING TO CROSS AND CHALLENGE THE WATER BUT WE ALSO HAVE TO REMEMBER LIVES ARE PRECIOUS

We believe in hope and that is why we have been wishing so many people the best as we ushered in New Year 2022. Didn't you have the urge to wish the whole world?

We know days have been tough so here is a day, a year to rejuvenate oneself with 365 opportunities and possibilities.

Could it be that when we feel stuck and when it is so long it is a sign from the universe to get up and move on? Try another approach to life but no way can we stay put and think suffering is destiny.

There is destiny but it is a mystery because we only know in the end what is the true destiny. After all, why should we even be scared of change? There could be so many surprises awaiting us. If it does not work let us not remain there too. But of course give it because experts say it takes at least six months for a brand to establish itself so do not be in a rush to give up and conclude "This is not my scene".

Comparing oneself to others are absolute waste of time as that would mean one has not understood or reached their true own path. When one does there could only be time to fulfil the stream of

ideas that flow from within and appreciate others journey.

Let us not give 'fear' too much space this year and we can do that by being responsible. Being fearless does not necessarily mean opting to take risks at every given opportunity. Looking at a flowing wadi might be tempting to cross and challenge the water but we also have to remember lives are precious and there are so many other lives connected to you. A running wadi can also teach you acceptance and patience.

Entrepreneurial spirit has a flair towards taking risks but it is most probably a calculated risk that is successful, where probabilities of failure have been estimated. Maybe we should apply this in other aspects of life too. It all goes on to prove how valuable is our mind. Situations can make us vulnerable and it is okay to take time to recover your composure but once you do it is time to get up and take action in your own terms.

Just this morning I came across a list of advices for handling 2022, and it said, 'Planning is key, if you fail to plan, you plan to fail.'

It is fabulous to go with the flow there

is magic in it too, but there are essential parts in our life where genuine planning can guarantee peace of mind. After all peace of mind is what we knowingly or unknowingly striving for.

So far we have just started writing the first few pages of the new chapter in the new book titled Year 2022. May it be about achieving your dreams too no matter how hard it may seem, one step you take gets you that closer to the future of your dreams. Never mind how far the water has taken you back the wind will change directions again and it would be your turn to set the sail. And when you reach the destiny be there for others.

After all it's the mentors that make the sailing inspiring. Let there be no moment indulged in self-pity as it does not lead us to anywhere. If one is stuck in that zone talk it out with the person you trust most. The right friends would matter quite a bit this year too.

So if you like taking risks pick on the challenges the year might throw as well as the recovery from the obstacles of last year and while being successful be a guiding force to others. So set your compass and go!

Sudan PM quitting risks return to Bashir-style rule

HAMDOK SAID HE HAD TRIED TO PREVENT SUDAN 'FROM SLIDING TOWARDS DISASTER' BUT THAT IT WAS NOW AT A 'DANGEROUS CROSSROADS THREATENING ITS VERY SURVIVAL'

The resignation of Sudan's prime minister leaves the military in full command and threatens a return to the repressive policies of the ousted regime of strongman Omar al Bashir, analysts say.

After months of street protests and violent crackdowns that have claimed at least 57 lives, observers fear more bloodshed ahead after premier Abdalla Hamdok stepped down late on Sunday.

In his farewell address on national TV, Hamdok said he had tried to prevent Sudan "from sliding towards disaster" but that it was now at a "dangerous crossroads threatening its very survival".

"Hamdok's resignation has left the military in sole command of the country," said Magdi al Gizouli of think-tank the Rift Valley Institute. "Protesters will

take to the streets again and will be left to face more violence."

Since its independence from Britain and Egypt in 1956, Sudan, now one of the world's poorest countries, has been mostly under military rule with only rare democratic interludes.

It has been navigating a fragile transition towards full civilian rule since the April 2019 ouster of veteran president Bashir following an unprecedented wave of youth-led protests.

Bashir, who is wanted for war crimes in the Darfur region by the International Criminal Court, was jailed as Sudan took steps to rejoin the international community and obtain debt relief, foreign aid and investment.

But the already rocky transition was derailed on October 25 when Sudan's new de facto ruler, top

general Abdel Fattah al Burhan, launched a coup, detaining Hamdok and his cabinet ministers.

The power grab sparked international condemnation and a new wave of street protests, with 57 people killed, hundreds wounded and at least 13 women raped during renewed street unrest.

FACADE REMOVED

Burhan reversed Hamdok's ouster and reinstated him on November 21, also promising elections in mid-2023 — but the protest movement had lost all faith in both leaders and kept up their demonstrations.

They accused the civilian leader Hamdok, a former international economist, of "betrayal" and "legitimising the coup regime".

In the weeks since, Hamdok had failed to form a new government, and local media reported in recent days that he had not shown up at his office. Gizouli said the parties to Sudan's November deal had hoped it would "reduce the agitation on the streets" and allow them to find a way "to rework the constitutional arrangements".

"But all this did not happen," he said.

Instead, Hamdok had found himself "paralysed" and "not able to get anything done, neither politically nor administratively".

Some observers now fear the Hamdok's resignation signals a reversion to the kind of rule Sudan saw under the hardliner-backed regime of Bashir.

Sudanese analyst Kholood Khair wrote on Twitter that Hamdok's resignation "removes

any facade the #SudanCoup generals can enjoy and present this coup as anything other than a reversion to the politics of Bashir.

"Though Sudan's future is uncertain, the clarity helps all to see this coup for what it is."

STAKES ARE HIGH

Following Hamdok's resignation, Britain's Minister for Africa Vicky Ford tweeted that she was "deeply saddened" by the departure of the man who "was serving Sudan and its people's desire for a better future. "Millions have raised their voices since 25/10 coup to demand civilian rule: security forces and other political actors must now respect those demands." The United States urged Sudanese leaders to "set aside differences, find consensus and ensure continued civilian rule. — AFP

sport

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Sultanate of Oman pair impress at West Asia Beach Volleyball tourney

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 3

The Sultanate of Oman beach volleyball team delivered an impressive performance, claiming runner up place, in the West Asia Beach Volleyball Zonal Tour which concluded in Qatar on Monday.

At Aspire Zone in Doha, Sultanate of Oman team bikers represented by Haitham al Shuraiqi and Mazin al Hashmi suffered a 2-0

loss against the hosts Qatar in the final match of the Asian tourney to end in second place.

With two points only, the Qatari duo managed to complete the first half of the concluding fixture by 19-20 after tough competition.

In the following set, Oman's duo Al Shuraiqi and Al Hashmi worked hard to bounce back as they managed to bring the gap to one point only at 6-7 in the earlier part of the half.

Later, the hosts raised the gap to two points at 7-9. Qatar's experienced bikers dominated the game and reached four points difference.

Prior to the dying minutes, Sultanate of Oman heroes brought the match to square one as they registered a draw at 18-18. The final attempts of the second half went to the opposition team who managed to end the encounter on a winning note at 19-21.

At Aspire Zone in Doha, Sultanate of Oman team bikers represented by Haitham al Shuraiqi and Mazin al Hashmi suffered a 2-0 loss against the hosts Qatar in the final match of the Asian tourney to end in second place

The national team secured a slot in the semifinals of the championship after beating Syria 2-0. The first game ended at 21-7 while the second game finished in 21-13. In the group matches, the Sultanate of Oman's duo recorded three victories against Iraq 2-0, Jordan 2-0 and Palestine with the same result.

The championship featured participation of seven teams distributed into two groups. The

group A included the hosts Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

Sultanate of Oman was clubbed in group B beside Jordan, Palestine and Iraq. The top two teams from each group advanced to the semis. Qatar and Syria qualified from group A while Sultanate of Oman and Palestine moved from group B to the next round.

The third-place award went to Palestine team as they defeated Syrian team 2-0.

Royal Stars Barka lift Barka Champions League title



MUSCAT: UGB Barka's revered superstars failed to dazzle on the 'D-Day' as Royal Stars Barka deservingly walked away with the inaugural Barka Champions League title after a thumping 102-run win in the final.

The game exposed multiple frailties in a team led by Rehmat Ali at Al Nasr Sports Stadium in Wadi Mawel on Friday.

After winning the toss & opting to bat here, Royal Stars Barka batting line-up put up a competitive total of 162 runs in 16 overs, losing only five wickets.

Shripathi Acharya was the top performer for the side as he scored an impressive 59* runs including eight huge sixes & one four. He was ably supported by Ramees (34) & Nikesha (30*) for Royal Stars. Hafiz Rana from

UGB's side was the pickup bowler with two wickets, giving away 28 runs in his four overs. Looking to chase down the mammoth target of 163, the UGB's side faced a complete collapse as they could only muster 60 runs in 13.1 overs.

Abrar Ahmed of UGB top scored with 15 runs for his side whereas all other batters faced difficulties to survive on the wicket & were outplayed magnificently by Royal Stars bowling attack. Shripathi Acharya and Ashok were the pick of the bowlers claiming two wickets. Shripathi Acharya was adjudged the Man-of-the-final for his brilliant all round performance.

Brief Scores: Royal Stars Barka 162/5 in 16 overs (Shripathi Acharya 59*, Ramees 34, Nikesha

30*; Hafiz Rana 2-28) beat UGB Barka 60 all out in 13.1 overs (Abrar Ahmed 15; Acharya Ashok 2-6, Shripathi 2-13)

Sufyan Mehmood, the pacer of Oman National Cricket team served his presence as a chief guest for the final match of BCL-1, where the winners & runners up trophies were handed by him to the respective captains.

Also honourable Guest Khamis bin Salim al Harrasi, the owner of United Gulf Beacons made his presence for the event and congratulated all the players. The BCL committee takes the opportunity to thank all of their sponsors, organisers, all of their participating teams, support staff & volunteers for making this event much more successful with their efforts.



Bangladesh's batsman Mominul Haque plays a shot as New Zealand's wicketkeeper Tom Blundell (R) looks on. — AFP

Mominul, Das build Bangladesh lead

MOUNT Maunganui, NZ: Mominul Haque and Liton Das led Bangladesh to a historic first innings lead over New Zealand in the first Test on Monday before both fell to Trent Boult in a dramatic final session at Mount Maunganui.

At stumps on day three Bangladesh were 401 for six in reply to New Zealand's 328, a lead of 73 with four wickets in hand.

They had reached 361 for four before Boult ended a 158-run stand with the wicket of Mominul for 88, followed 11 deliveries later by Das for 86.

"It looks like it might go down to the wire," Boult said as the Bangladesh players left the field talking of extending their innings towards 500.

"The game's pretty well poised. Test matches which have been played here have gone late into day five ... and probably we'll be bowling last," Boult said.

"The game's pretty well poised. Test matches which have been played here have gone late into day five ... and probably we'll be bowling last," Trent Boult, New Zealand pacer

"I presume Bangladesh want to bat once and bat big and put a lot of pressure on us."

It is the first time Bangladesh have taken a first-innings lead batting second outside of Asia.

They led New Zealand at Wellington four years ago when batting first, although a disastrous second innings saw them lose that Test by seven wickets.

It has been an exceptional Test

for Mominul, a part-time spinning option who dismissed New Zealand's top two run-scorers Devon Conway and Henry Nicholls and then batted through 244 deliveries as he notched his 15th Test half-century.

Mominul rode his luck with the bat, surviving multiple chances as he put his side in a strong position before being trapped lbw by Boult.

He had the decision reviewed but there was no doubting the outcome as Boult's inswinger crashed into the back pad in front of off stump.

Mominul's innings included 12 boundaries to all corners of the ground and his partnership with Das kept New Zealand wicketless for more than 52 overs. Das, like Mominul, also struck boundaries on both sides of the wicket, as well as straight down the ground and he had 10 fours to his credit before edging Boult to wicketkeeper Tom Blundell.

Boult had switched to around

the wicket and with the ball heading outside off stump Das could not resist an attempted cut and sent a thick edge the keeper.

Bangladesh batted cautiously in the morning session, only scoring 45 runs for the loss of classy opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy for 78 and Mushfiquir Rahim for 12. — AFP

SCOREBOARD

New Zealand first innings:	328
Bangladesh first innings (O/n: 175-2):	
S Islam c and b Wagner	22
M Hasan Joy c Nicholls b Wagner	78
N Hossain Shanto c Young b Wagner	64
M Haque lbw Boult	88
M Rahim b Boult	12
L Das c Blundell b Boult	86
Y Ali (not out)	11
M Hasan Miraz	20
Extras (LB-7, NB-3, W-5, pen-5)20	
Total (for 6 wickets, 156 overs)401	
Fall of wickets: 1-43, 2-147, 3-184, 4-203, 5-361, 6-370	
Bowling: Southee 32-4-94-0, Boult 30-11-61-3, Jamieson 30-9-72-0, Wagner 38-9-98-3, Ravindra 26-4-64-0	

Jatinder helps Qurum to victory, Hussnain spurs Ghubrah

MUSCAT: Sultanate of Oman opener Jatinder Singh struck an elegant 55 off 39 including 4 sixes, steering Qurum Thunders to a 7-wicket win over Bousher Busters in a D20 Cricket League game at Oman Cricket Turf 1 in Amerat on Sunday.

Bousher's total of 159 for 8 saw 59 by Abdul Rauf and 37 by Asif Khan. Munis Ansari and Sandeep Goud took two wickets each.

Qurum opens Jatinder and Kashyapkumar Prajapati (51 off 38) dominated the chase with an entertaining 94-run partnership in less than 11 overs. Shoaib Khan came on to complete the formalities with a solid 37 off 21 as Qurum sealed the win in the 19th over, scoring 163 for 3. Asif Khan bagged 2 for 23.

Brief Scores (D20): Bousher Busters 159 for 8 in 20 overs (Abdul Rauf 59 - 3x4, 3x6, Asif Khan 37 - 1x4, 4x6, Munis Ansari 2-19, Sandeep Goud 2-23) lost to Qurum Thunders 163 for 3 in 18.4 overs (Jatinder Singh 55 - 3x4, 4x6, Kashyapkumar Prajapati 51 - 5x4, 2x6, Shoaib Khan 37 - 3x4, 2x6, Asif Khan 2-23) by 7 wickets.

HUSSNAIN BOWLS GHUBRAH TO VICTORY

In the day's other game, Hussnain Ali's brilliant spell with the new ball in which he claimed 4 for 21 was the highlight of Ruwi



Jatinder Singh



Hussnain Ali Shah



Muhammed Rafique, Majid Rafique and Mohammed Asif of Khalsa United



OCT Muscat

Rangers' thumping 6-wicket victory against Ghubrah Giants.

Ghubrah failed to post a fighting total on the board, folding up

for a dismal 96 in 16.5 overs due largely to Hussnain's heroics and

Sanuth Ebrahim's 2 for 2 in 2 overs. Azmat Ullah was the only Ghubrah batsman to bat well, scoring a defiant 50 off 35.

Ruwi raced to the target in only 12.4 overs, scoring 100 for 4 thanks to 37 off 20 by Khalid Kail and 25 off 20 by Zohaib Amanat. Aqil Khan took 2 for 12.

Brief Scores (D20): Ghubrah Giants 96 all out in 16.5 overs (Azmat Ullah 50 - 5x4, 3x6, Hassnain Ali 4-21, Sanuth Ebrahim 2-2) lost to Ruwi Rangers 100 for 4 in 12.4 overs (Khalid Kail 37 - 5x4, 2x6, Zohaib Amanat 25 - 3x4, 2x6, Aqil Khan 2-12) by 6 wickets.

MUNTHIR STARS IN OCT MUSCAT WIN

Excellent all-round performance by Munthir al Balushi helped OCT Muscat to an easy 34-run win over OCT Al Seeb in a 30-over B Division League match at Muscat Municipality ground 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Muscat scored 175 all out in 29.3 overs thanks to top knocks from Rashad al Balushi (44) and Munthir (40). Issa al Balushi was the pick of Seeb bowlers, taking 4 for 28 whereas Younis al Balushi claimed 3 for 22.

Struggling at 27 for 4 in 7 overs, OCT Seeb never really recovered despite Samir Othman's unbeaten 76 off 86, getting bowled out for 141 in the 27th over. Munthir

excelled with the ball too, taking 3 for 20 while Khalid al Balushi and Shaed Ali bagged two wickets each.

Brief Scores (B Division): OCT Muscat 175 all out in 29.3 overs (Rashad Al Balushi 44 - 8x4, Munthir al Balushi 40 - 5x4, Issa al Balushi 4-28, Younis AB 3-22, Samir Othman 2-31) beat Oct Seeb 141 all out in 26.5 overs (Samir Othman 76 - 10x4, Munthir al Balushi 3-20, Khalid al Balushi 2-26, Shaed Ali 2-22) by 34 runs.

RAFIQUE STEERS KHALSA TO BIG WIN

Mohammed Rafique's magnificent batting and bowling saw Khalsa United to a solid 49-run victory against Nibrass Tech in a C Division T20 League game at Muscat Municipality ground 2.

Khalsa's 201 for 4 was powered by Rafique's 75 not out off 44 and Majid Rafique's 32 off 16. Waqas Khalid claimed 2 for 28.

Rafique bowled brilliantly too, taking 3 for 22 whereas Mohammed Asif picked up 3 for 24 as Khalsa was bundled out for 152 in 20 overs, Tarun Bhaskaran topscoring with 46.

Brief Scores (C Division): Khalsa United CT 201 for 4 in 20 overs (Muhammed Rafiq 75 - 8x4, 1x6, Majid Rafique 32 - 5x4, 1x6, Waqas Khalid 2-28) beat Nibrass Tech 152 all out in 20 overs (Tarun Bhaskaran 46 - 6x4, 1x6, Muhammed Rafiq 3-22, Muhammed Asif 3-24, Harminder Singh 2-25) by 49 runs

India struggle despite Rahul fifty

JOHANNESBURG: India stand-in captain KL Rahul made a half century as India reached 146 runs for five wickets at tea on the opening day of the second test against South Africa at the Wanderers on Monday.

Rahul proved the steadying factor in the batting line-up, after taking over from Virat Kohli as skipper just before the start of play, before being dismissed for 50.

Kohli had to pull out of the test because of an upper back strain, handing over the captaincy to Rahul, who played an organised and circumspect innings before a stray shot saw him caught at fine leg by a diving Kagiso Rabada off the bowling of Marco Jansen.

It proved the big wicket of the session for the home team, who added two more after having India 53-3 at lunch. It was a second wicket for Jansen, who had claimed the first scalp of the test when opener Mayank Agarwal feathered a slight touch to the tall left-arm quick to depart for a brisk 26 off 37 balls.

Duanne Olivier then took two wickets in two balls before lunch with Cheteshwar Pujara caught off a top edge for three followed by Ajinkya Rahane, out first ball as he was caught by Keegan Petersen at second slip.

The 29-year-old Olivier was returning to test cricket for the first time in almost three years, having exploded onto the scene in 2017 and snagging 48 wickets in 10 tests at an average below 20, but then taking up a Kolpak contract with English county Yorkshire that meant he could not play for South Africa.

But after returning home when the Kolpak system fell away due to the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union, Olivier finished the top wicket-taker in the domestic four-day competition and has won back a test place. After lunch, Rahul and Hanuma Vihari, who was brought into the team to replace Kohli, put together a 42-run partnership before Vihari was caught at short leg by a flying one-handed catch by Rassie van der Dussen off Rabada.

At tea, Rishabh Pant was 13 not out and Ravichandran Ashwin had scored 24 runs off only 21 balls. India won the first test in Pretoria last week and are looking for a first series triumph in South Africa.

— Reuters

Brief scores: India 146-5 in 51 overs (K Rahul 50, D Olivier 2-47, M Jansen 2-18)



India's KL Rahul plays a defensive shot during the first day of the second Test against South Africa at The Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg. — AFP

Chelsea, Liverpool share honours in classic game

ANDY JALIL
LONDON, JAN 3

This should be the best game of the season. It was pulsating, fizzing and an absolute classic.

In a game played at a frenzied pace, neither side was able to find the winning goal after each had scored twice in the first half. The clash between the second and third teams on the Premier League table lived fully up to expectations.

Chelsea went into the game without Romelu Lukaku. It was a big talking point of the day. It was a major decision to drop their £97.5m striker for disciplinary reasons as he had given an unauthorised, damaging interview with Sky Sport Italia, claiming that he was unhappy at Chelsea playing under manager Thomas Tuchel.

Tuchel said: “First we have to understand what he said and why he said it. He is our player, there is always a way back (into the team) and we’ll clear things behind closed doors. This is not to be discussed. I take decisions for the team. I have players to listen to and hear their opinion and then I take my decisions. It is not a personal thing for me to decide because of my belief.”

He added: “We have a squad to protect with strong beliefs and strong values. It is not the first time an interview out there causes some noise nobody needs. But we can handle it. I don’t feel personally angry. On Saturday, there were new statements and it got too big, too much noise, and we lost totally the focus of the match. We need to speak with him, read the full interview and stay calm and not lose our heads.”

The much anticipated, action packed match produced four wonderful goals. There was controversy at the start when after just six seconds, Chelsea’s captain, Cesar Azpilicueta was elbowed in the face by Sadio Mane.

There was apparently a sending-off foul and Mane was only shown the yellow card.

Liverpool opened the scoring in the 9th minute, a minute after Christian Pulisic had missed a golden chance to give Chelsea the lead when he failed to round the goalkeeper to score. Liverpool



Liverpool's Kostas Tsimikas in action. – Reuters

scored after a misjudged header by Trevoh Chalobah sent the ball to Mane who rounded Edouard Mendy to slot the ball home.

Liverpool doubled the lead 17 minutes later when Trent Alexander-Arnold passed to Mohamad Salah who beat Marcos Alonso and then Mendy with a wonderful finish from an acute

Chelsea went into the game without Romelu Lukaku. It was a big talking point of the day. It was a major decision to drop their £97.5m striker for disciplinary reasons as he had given an unauthorised, damaging interview with Sky Sport Italia, claiming that he was unhappy at Chelsea playing under manager Thomas Tuchel

angle at the edge of the six-yard box.

Then came two goals in a space of three minutes from the Home side. Three minutes before half time, Caoimhin Kelleher punched away a free-kick which sent the ball to Mateo Kovacic whose superb right-foot volley from 23 yards went in off the right post.

Just as the game went into the first minute of the first half’s added time, Chelsea drew level. Antonio Rudiger’s long passes went to N’Golo Kante who found Pulisic and the midfielder’s lofted shot went into the roof of the net. Despite the goalless second half the intensity remained throughout breathless encounter.

Brown scores 50 points as Celtics rally to beat Magic

LOS ANGELES: Jaylen Brown scored a career-high 50 points and the Boston Celtics needed all of them in a 116-111 NBA overtime victory over the Orlando Magic on Sunday.

Brown scored 21 points in the fourth quarter, helping the Celtics rally from 14 down with 4:20 left in regulation.

He opened overtime with his fifth three-pointer of the contest, adding 11 rebounds, four assists and a blocked shot.

“I was just trying to be aggressive the entire time,” said Brown, whose previous career-high was 46 against the New York Knicks on October 20. “My team-mates encouraged me to take the shots. I feel like I took some good looks and they went down tonight.”

Brown’s layup with 38 seconds left in regulation knotted the score at 98-98.

He scored again to put Boston up 100-98 with 30 seconds left, but Tim Frazier scored for Orlando to

force overtime.

Boston had led 45-42 at half-time after leading by as many as 14 before the break.

But the Magic surged in the second half, outscoring Boston 35-20 in the third quarter to take a 77-65 lead into the final frame.

Marcus Smart added 17 points, seven assists and seven rebounds for Boston and Dennis Schroder scored 21.

Both teams were missing their leading scorers. Orlando’s Cole Anthony was sidelined by a sprained right ankle and Boston’s Jayson Tatum missed a fourth straight game because of Covid-19 concerns.

SUNS STING HORNETS

The Phoenix Suns, trying to keep pace with the Golden State Warriors atop the Western Conference despite having four players and coach Monty Williams in Covid protocols, thrashed the Hornets in Charlotte 133-99.

Devin Booker scored 24 points



Boston Celtics guard Jaylen Brown (7) drives to the basket against Orlando Magic guard Terrence Ross (31) during the first half at the TD Garden. – USA Today Sports

and Jalen Smith tied his career-high with 19 points and 12 rebounds as the Suns improved to 28-8 — half a game behind the Warriors for the best record in the league.

Phoenix, who had lost three of their previous four games, drained 17 three-pointers and outrebounded the Hornets 52-35.

LeBron James cooled off a bit in Los Angeles, scoring a relatively modest 26 points in the Lakers’ 108-103 victory over the Minnesota Timberwolves.

James’s streak of seven straight games of 30 points or more — including a 43-point outburst in a New Year’s Eve win — ended. So did Russell Westbrook’s run of four successive triple-doubles.

But Malik Monk contributed 22 points, Westbrook chipped in 20 and Avery Bradley and Carmelo Anthony scored 14 apiece to help the Lakers hold on for the win.

Naz Reid led the Timberwolves with 23 points and 11 rebounds, but Minnesota couldn’t manage

a third win in as many meetings with the Lakers this season.

DONCIC BACK FOR DALLAS

Dallas star Luka Doncic, returning from a 10-game absence, came up just shy of a triple-double with 14 points, 10 assists and nine rebounds in the Mavericks’ 95-86 victory over the Thunder in Oklahoma City.

Doncic missed five games with an ankle injury, then missed five more over Covid.

“My chest was burning,” said Doncic, who played 31 minutes in his return. “It was a weird feeling, but happy. Very happy.”

Oklahoma City rookie Josh Giddey, back after three games in Covid protocols, became the youngest NBA player to post a triple-double with 17 points, 14 assists and 13 rebounds.

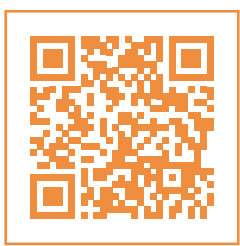
Giddey, at 19 years, two months and 23 days old surpassed LaMelo Ball as the youngest player with a triple-double and came up with four steals as well. — AFP

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Buoyant oil, gas prices boost 2021 revenue: MoF

STRONG GROWTH: Against estimated revenue of RO 3.550 billion from oil exports in the 2021 Budget (based on an assumed price of \$45 a barrel), preliminary results now put the figure at RO 5.555 billion (based on an actual average price of \$61/b)

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 3

Net revenue from oil exports surged 56 per cent in 2021, buoyed by a strong uptick in international oil prices, according to the preliminary results of the 2021 Budget published by the Ministry of Finance (MoF) earlier this week. Gas revenue spiked a hefty 40 per cent on the back on higher global gas prices and an upturn in LNG exports. Against estimated revenue of RO 3.550 billion from oil exports in the 2021 Budget (based on an assumed price of \$45 a barrel), preliminary results now put the figure at RO 5.555 billion (based on an actual average price of \$61/b). Likewise, gas revenue estimated at RO 1.870 billion



last year has soared to RO 2.628 billion in the preliminary results. The resulting effect in bringing down the annual deficit was significant. “The preliminary results of 2021 Budget show an increase in total revenue that led to a lower deficit than what was estimated in the 2021 Budget. The total revenue is projected to reach RO 10.9 billion compared to the budgeted figure of RO 8.6 billion, up by 27 per cent. Public spending has increased to nearly

RO 12.2 billion, up by 12 per cent compared to the 2021 Budget. Moreover, the deficit dropped by RO 1 billion i.e., 45 per cent, totalling RO 1.2 billion in 2021,” the Ministry noted. However, non-oil revenue declined by 14 per cent due to persistent implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on the business activities, notwithstanding measures taken by the Government to stimulate the private sector. Boosted by strong hydrocarbon

revenues, total revenues reached nearly RO 10.9 billion by the end of 2021, up by 27 per cent compared to the budgeted figures of RO 8.6 billion. **Public Spending** Public spending, per preliminary results, increased 12 per cent to about RO 12.2 billion as compared to the budgeted figure of RO 10.9 billion. “Such an increase is mainly due to the following: Increase of current expenditures of civil ministries and defence and security units

“
The total revenue is projected to reach RO 10.9 billion compared to the budgeted figure of RO 8.6 billion, up by 27 per cent
”
MINISTRY OF FINANCE

by 2 per cent; Continued support of the Government to cover expenses of the oil and gas sector until EDO completed the required legal procedures and commenced funding its operations; and Increase in contributions and other expenses by 7 per cent as a result of settling water subsidy for previous years,” the Ministry said. Importantly, a new budget-item was introduced within the 2021 Budget to repay future debt obligations. By the end of 2021, the total appropriations allocated for this budget item amounted to RO 150 million. Development spending is anticipated to reach RO 1,100 million by the end of 2021, up by 22 per cent compared to the

budgeted figure of RO 900 million estimated in the 2021 Budget. This is due to settlement of payments deferred from previous years, and expenses required to address the damages caused by Cyclone Shaheen. Further, with a view to expedite the settlement of payments to private contracts, around RO 1.2 billion in payments were completed by the Ministry of Finance as of end-December 2021. The total cost of expenses required for the Covid-19 pandemic amounted to RO 53 million. Such expenses included costs of vaccines and medicines. Deficit and Financing The 2021 Budget deficit declined to RO 1.2 billion, down by RO 1 billion i.e., 45 per cent less than the estimated deficit of RO 2.2 billion in the 2021 Budget. This is attributed to higher public revenue, the Ministry said. “As per the anticipated deficit rate by the end of 2021, the MoF has reduced financing requirements versus estimated figures of 2021. Accordingly, the 2021 Budget deficit was financed through external and domestic borrowing by RO 823 million, as well as drawing on reserves by RO 400 million.”

New matrix for delivery of 10th FYP projects: MoE

NEW APPROACH: Development projects worth an estimated RO 900 million are envisaged for implementation as part of the 2022 Budget

JOMAR MENDOZA
@JmObserver

The Ministry of Economy has formulated a new matrix to help with the prioritisation and effective implementation of developmental projects during the 10th Five Year Development Plan (2021 – 2025). An overview of the new format was outlined in the 2022 General Budget Statement published by the Ministry of Finance earlier this week. “The Ministry of Economy has developed a matrix to identify sectoral and project priorities for the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan to ensure social and economic return, in addition to capturing the (spinoffs) that would contribute positively to the national economy and serve the social aspect,” it explained. Significantly, development projects worth an estimated RO 900 million are envisaged for implementation as part of the 2022 Budget. They represent the estimated amount to be paid during the year as per the “actual work in progress for the projects”.



“The development projects have been reprioritised in terms of their urgency, cost, and economic and social return, using the Matrix of Projects developed by the Ministry of Economy,” it was noted in the budgetary statement. The matrix spells out a clear mechanism for evaluating the priority of projects selection to meet current and future requirements. It also sets out unified standards for ministries to prepare and submit the project file. Additionally, a clear and flexible methodology is outlined for project selection in line with the strategic objectives of development. “The matrix features criteria for measuring the positive economic and social impact of the projects through the related elements. It also assesses the readiness of the units to implement the projects. Depending on the availability of full details on a project, a score is given for each criterion, and then the total scores of each project are measured according to mathematical equations.”

2022 Budget subsidy support broadly on par with 2021 levels

GRADUAL ROLLBACKS: RO 500 million earmarked as financial support for electricity sector in 2022

CONRAD PRABHU
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Subsidy support provided in the 2022 General Budget across a number of services broadly tracks allocations made by the Omani government during the previous year. According to the Ministry of Finance, the latest budgeted assistance is in line with the government’s overall strategy to gradually rollback most subsidies over the course of the Medium Term Fiscal Plan (2021 – 2025), while redirecting part of this support towards targeted low-income incomes. An allocation of RO 575 million has been made towards electricity and water subsidies during 2022. This is significant lower than levels seen a couple of years ago before the introduction of Cost Reflective Tariffs (CRT). Last year, power and water subsidies were rolled back for



non-Omani consumers – a move that will be gradually extended to cover Omani customers as well. The subsidy allocation towards electricity services alone was RO 500 million in the 2022 Budget, on par with the budgeted allocation during the previous year (although preliminary results show the figure rising to RO 550 million for 2021). A grant of RO 35 million was also included in the 2022

Budget towards subsidising retail petrol and diesel supply to low-income Omani vehicle owners and fishermen. A further addition of RO 80 million was earmarked as ‘Transport Subsidy’ in the latest budget. Furthermore, the Ministry of Finance pledged to maintain support in the form of housing aid, social housing schemes and housing loan assistance at the same level as in 2011.

In 2021, as many as 1,247 households benefited from the social housing scheme towards which an expenditure of RO 29.631 million was incurred, the Ministry noted. “The amount allocated for such a scheme shall remain at the same level in 2022,” the Ministry said in its Budget Statement. Significantly, subsidy allocations, bundled together with ‘Contributions and Other Expenses’, amounted to well over RO 1 billion for 2022, according to the Ministry. “The appropriations allocated for this budget-item are estimated at RO 1,071 million, including subsidies for electricity, water, sewage and waste sectors. In addition to subsidies for oil products, housing and development loans,” it said, adding that the budget-item accounted for a 9 per cent share of total budgeted expenditure of RO 12.130 billion for 2022.

talabat recaps what was ordered most in 2021

MUSCAT: Throughout the entirety of 2021, talabat, the region's leading food and q-commerce delivery platform, has been there for its customers — anytime, anywhere. Here's a rundown of orders on talabat from around the region in 2021, and some fun facts that we don't want to forget in a hurry!

The numbers are in — and french fries has conquered all in 2021

Looking at the most popular food items ordered during the year, french fries conquered all — reigning supreme in the region over other delicious items like chicken shawarmas, potato wedges and even pizza (Yes, over pizza! We're as shocked as you are — believe us!).

Everyone did their best to stay a bit healthier this year, with fruits and vegetables taking the lead as the most ordered grocery items on talabat Mart across the region!

Whether you want to admit it or not, we know you have been ordering more fruits and vegetables this year. So, bravo to you! With many of you choosing to place their last-minute grocery orders from tMart at around 6:00 pm in the evening, choosing to finish their day with a filled fridge!

Only morning coffee runs? Not



really, you showed us that coffee is also popular in the evenings for that after-work kick!

That's right! We discovered that many across the country tend to place their coffee orders at around 9:00pm, indulging in their love of caffeine to end the work day.

Which city loves burgers the most in the country?

Residents of the Omani capital, Muscat, ordered the most burgers. We now know who the country's burger experts are!

Mini pancakes and Oreo ice cream reign supreme as the most popular desserts in the Sultanate of Oman.

We found that customers absolutely love mini pancakes, making it the most popular dessert ordered in the country, along with Oreo flavoured ice cream! Who would've thought that mini pancakes are that popular!

Consumers can now download talabat on the iOS App Store, Google Play Store and Huawei App Gallery.

BankDhofar wins Excellence in Priority Banking Services award

MUSCAT: BankDhofar has recently won "Excellence in Priority Banking Services" award, at the Red-Carpet Signature Luxury 100 event. The award recognises BankDhofar's Al Riadah Priority Banking Services for the exceptional services, products and financial solutions.

The high-profile event was attended by a number of dignitaries and corporate leaders, where the distinguished brands were recognised for their excellence. BankDhofar has been providing a world-class experience to the customers through Al Riadah Priority Banking Services.

On receiving the award, Hani Habib Macki, AGM & Head of Priority Banking at BankDhofar, noted: "We are proud to have been recognised with this prestigious award, which is a testament of our ongoing efforts to provide a top-notch banking experience to our Al Riadah customers. At BankDhofar, we have designed services, products and financial solutions that cater to the needs of our priority customers and exceed their expectations."

Al Riadah Priority Banking provides a unique range of



banking products and services that are tailored to suit the unique lifestyle of priority customers, ranging from personalised cheque book, exclusive Al Riadah card, including: Visa Infinite Debit Card, Visa Signature Debit Card, Visa Infinite Credit Card, and MasterCard Platinum Credit Card.

Customers can enjoy

exceptional times at restaurants, shops, as well as procurement protection, extended warranty, access to airport lounges around the world, travel insurance for cardholders and their families, in addition to other exclusive services.

BankDhofar has tailor-made financing solutions to meet the needs of its priority banking

customers with low insurance fees and simple and fast procedures. The bank also provides deposit accounts at competitive interest rates and low insurance fees.

Al Riadah customers may benefit from the distinct monthly interest rate of the Savings Account, and get the chance to win in the special draws for Al Riadah segment.

Sohar International to hold 9th virtual Viewpoints session

MUSCAT: Sohar International is set to conduct its 9th Virtual Viewpoints Session scheduled to be held on January 5, 2022 (Wednesday). The event will be live-streamed via the Zoom app and will commence at 7:30 pm welcoming its guest speaker — Mary Louise Gorno who is the Managing Director of Ingenuity International LLC and specialises in organisational governance, succession planning, and leadership issues.

To join the conversation and benefit from the wealth of knowledge transfer, Sohar International invites all to register for free through its corporate website — www.soharinternational.com.

Commenting on the platform, Mohammed bin Mahfoudh al Ardhi, Chairman, Sohar International said, "The insightful conversations with industry leaders have truly inspired our Viewpoint viewers and listeners. With growing popularity and traction, it gives me immense



pride to state that the forum has garnered much appreciation from the community, and was recently honoured with the coveted "OER Business Excellence Award" for creating a world-class knowledge platform, at the recent OER Business Summit 2021."

The upcoming Viewpoints edition targets university students, as well as people from private and public sectors, especially the new-age entrepreneurs, and professionals who will become future leaders. The session will give participants the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogues

with the speaker, connect with industry leaders and enhance individual leadership skills.

"Viewpoints has hosted several well-known international experts in the past, and this time we are delighted to welcome Mary Louise Gorno who will take the topic beyond just standard leadership skills to highlight the need to encourage even established leaders to adopt a more courageous approach to tackling different scenarios, therefore transforming challenges into opportunities," added Al Ardhi.

Maserati meets David Beckham

MUSCAT: A letter written to the magical city of Miami: this is how MC20 Fuoriserie Edition for David Beckham was born. The ambassador of the Italian automotive brand becomes a designer with the help of the Maserati Centro Stile.

Thanks to this union, the passion of the British champion for his second home city takes shape in a customised car that exemplifies the concepts of performance and sportiness: the MC20.

This project is part of Maserati's Fuoriserie customisation programme, which in its various styles allows customers to create their tailor-made Maserati. The car, intended as a symbol of true luxury in the third millennium, shows the world its unique nature and personal character.

Maserati Fuoriserie is a blank canvas and the House of the Trident truly offers an array of instruments to create with. The rest is left to the clients taste and inspiration, giving them



the opportunity to set their own trends and express their personality.

After a personalised and collaborative design process, Beckham and the designers of the Maserati Centro Stile created the MC20 Fuoriserie Edition for David Beckham.

This car translates true passion into a carbon fiber monocoque, entirely Made in Italy, and powered by a patented V6 petrol engine derived from Formula 1 technologies.

David Beckham said: "I have

always been a car enthusiast, so to be part of designing and creating my MC20 through the Fuoriserie customisation programme has been an amazing experience. Cars are about individual taste whether it's the model, colour or small personal details on the inside.

It has been incredible to collaborate with the Maserati team and designers to create this one-off car that is inspired by my second home, Miami and my football club there. It is a joy to be behind the wheel."

Alizz Islamic Bank signs pact with Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah

MUSCAT: Alizz Islamic Bank has signed an exclusive cooperation agreement with Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah, Muscat featuring a variety of unique offers and special benefits, designed for female customers of the female banking segment 'Hiyya'.

The agreement was signed by Mohammed al Ghassani, Chief Consumer Banking Officer, Alizz Islamic Bank and Rene D Egle, Area General Manager of Shangri-La Resorts in Muscat in the presence of a number of senior management members from both sides.

Shangri-La Barr Al Jissah, Muscat is offering the first 50 women with 'Hiyya' Titanium Debit cards 50 complimentary vouchers for a one night stay with bed and breakfast in Al Bandar for two adults. If the card holder wishes to extend the stay for an additional night, they will get 20% discount on the best available rate in addition to 20% discount on food & beverage during the stay and 20% discount on treatments and massages (exclusively for women only) at Chi, The Spa during the stay. Hiyya card holders can also



book a deluxe room in (Al Bandar or Al Husn), for two nights where they can get the second night with 50% discount on the best available rate. The offer comes with a 20% discount on food and beverage during the stay and 20% discount on treatments and massages (exclusively for women only) at Chi, The Spa. Alizz Islamic Bank's Hiyya card holders can also book a 60-minute massage (exclusively for women only) and enjoy an instant upgrade to a 90-minute massage on selected spa treatments.

Prior reservation is required on all the offers, and it will be subject to availability at the time of booking and discounts are only applicable by using a Hiyya Card.

'Hiyya' is designed to meet all the investment, health and financial needs of female customers and will provide customers with a tier based savings account to enhance their profits. The Sharia compliant account is based on the principle of Mudaraba where you will be Rabb-ul mal, and the bank will be the Mudarib.

Sri Lankan business delegation to meet Omani counterparts

KABEER YOUSUF
@kabeeryousef

Backed by a series of talks and webinars in investment promotion with the Sultanate of Oman, Sri Lanka is aiming to enhance its trade ties with the country on investments in a plethora of sectors.

Accordingly, nearly 75 Sri Lankan exporters from a cross section of sectors ranging from tea and tea-based products and food products to gems and engineering products will be receiving Omani counterparts at the Sri Lankan pavilion at the Expo 2020 in Dubai.

Letters of invitation and official negotiations are currently under way with M Shiham Marikar, Secretary General of National Chamber of Exporters of Sri Lanka and OL Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman who have met with Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of the OCCI Board.



“We are happy to welcome the Sri Lankan export-Import and trade initiatives and liaison between the national chambers of the two friendly countries which is part of our ongoing drive to enhance mutual trade relations between countries in the region and beyond”, said Eng Ridha.

The top notch representatives of nearly 150 sectors and sub-

sectors will interact with the Omani investors and business partners on February 17, 18, 19 and 20 at the venue.

“Besides allowing free business initiatives in Colombo, we are also mulling over relaxed visa formalities and other incentives in a bid to attract more foreign investments the way we do for our exports to the Sultanate of Oman”, said Shiham

Marikar.

The delegation will also comprise representatives of leading business houses specialised in health, agriculture, food, farming, tourism, boat building, fisheries, garments and ICT in both the Sultanate of Oman and Sri Lanka seeking more areas for mutual cooperation.

“Nearly 75 representatives of business communities from Sri Lanka comprising exporters, importers as well as investors will be networking with Omani business fraternity and both sides can make use of this opportunity to seek opportunities in both countries”, OL Ameer Ajwad, Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the Sultanate of Oman told the *Observer*.

Earlier, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the two Chambers of Commerce of Oman and Sri Lanka was signed to promote business cooperation between the private sectors of both countries.

Oil starts 2022 with rally towards \$79/barrel



A 3D printed oil pump jack is seen in front of displayed Opec logo. — Reuters

LONDON: Oil rose towards \$79 a barrel on Monday supported by tight supply and hopes of further demand recovery in 2022 spurred in part by a view that the Omicron virus is unlikely to dampen the outlook.

Libyan oil output will be cut by 200,000 barrels per day for a week due to pipeline maintenance. Opec and its allies, known as Opec+, are expected to stick to a plan to raise output gradually at a meeting on Tuesday.

Brent crude rose 95 cents, or 1.2 per cent, to \$78.79 a barrel. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude added \$1.03 or 1.4 per cent, to \$76.10.

“Infection rates are on the rise globally, restrictions are being introduced in several countries, the air travel sector, amongst others, is suffering, yet investors’ optimism is tangible”, said Tamas Varga of oil broker PVM.

“It seems that the current strain produces less severe symptoms than its predecessors, which might just help us to struggle through the fourth wave of the pandemic.”

Last year, Brent rose 50 per cent, spurred by the global recovery from the pandemic and Opec+ supply cuts, even as infections reached record highs worldwide. — Reuters

Turkish annual inflation soars 36 per cent as lira crisis flares

ISTANBUL: Turkey’s annual inflation soared to its highest in 19 years, laying bare the depths of a currency crisis engineered by policies that the country’s president has espoused.

Consumer prices rose 36.08 per cent, outstripping a median forecast of 30.6 per cent, with staples such as transportation and food and drink — which took increasing shares of Turkish households’ incomes during 2021 — rising even faster.

In December alone, the consumer price index took a rare step into double-digits at 13.58 per cent, the Turkish Statistical Institute data showed.

Turkey’s lira shed 44 per cent of its value last year as the central bank slashed interest rates under



A US one dollar banknote is seen next to Turkish lira banknotes in this illustration taken in Istanbul. — Reuters

a drive by President Tayyip Erdogan to prioritise credit and exports over currency stability.

On Monday it fell a further 4 per cent to 13.7 against the dollar. One economist forecast that

inflation could reach as high as 50 per cent by spring unless the direction of monetary policy was immediately reversed.

“Rates should be immediately and aggressively hiked because this is urgent”, said Ozlem Derici Sengul, founding partner at Spinn Consulting in Istanbul.

The central bank was however unlikely to act, she added, and annual inflation “will probably reach 40-50 per cent by March”, by when administered price rises would have been added into the mix, including a 50 per cent minimum wage hike.

Last year was the worst for the lira in nearly two decades, while the annual CPI was the highest since the 37.0 per cent reading of September of 2002, two months

before Erdogan’s AK Party first took office.

Erdogan, a self-declared enemy of interest rates, overhauled the central bank’s leadership last year. The bank has slashed the policy rate to 14 per cent from 19 per cent since September, leaving Turkey with deeply negative real yields that have spooked savers and investors.

The subsequent accelerating surge in prices and drop in the lira have also upended household and company budgets, scuttled travel plans and left many Turks scrambling to cut costs.

Many queued last month for subsidised bread in Istanbul, where the municipality says the cost of living is up 50 per cent in a year. — Reuters

India’s gasoil sales rise, but Omicron seen dampening demand



An oil tanker driver waits outside a fuel depot in Mumbai. — Reuters

NEW DELHI: Indian state refiners’ daily gasoil sales rose in December from the previous month but a rapid surge in infections due to the Omicron coronavirus variant could hit fuel demand in Asia’s third largest economy. State retailers sold about 208,150 tonnes of gasoil a day in December, up 8.75 per cent from November and 1.48 per cent higher than the same month last year, preliminary sales data compiled by the industry showed.

However, it represented a 1.60 per cent decline versus December 2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic had spread globally. Movement of gasoil-consuming trucks in India picked up in December as more fruits and vegetables were transported across the country than usual that month, while factory output and exports continued to grow, truckers association Indian Foundation of Transport Research & Training said in a statement.

But it added that the rapid spread of Omicron in India in the last few days of December had “initiated (a) sense of nervousness” in trade and commerce, which was beginning to impact the road transport business. — Reuters

Euro zone manufacturing growth remains strong

LONDON: Manufacturing activity in the euro zone remained resilient at the end of 2021 as factories took advantage of an easing in supply chain bottlenecks and stocked up on raw materials at a record pace, a survey showed.

The global coronavirus pandemic had left factories struggling to get the materials they need and sent costs soaring, but a tentative easing of the supply issues led to a marked decrease in price pressures.

IHS Markit’s final manufacturing Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) dipped to 58.0 in December from November’s 58.4, matching an initial “flash” estimate and still comfortably above the 50 mark separating growth from contraction.

An index measuring output, which feeds into a composite Purchasing Managers’ Index due on Wednesday and seen as a good guide to economic health, held



A man works at the Volkswagen assembly line in Wolfsburg, Germany. — Reuters

steady at November’s 53.8. “It has been an incredibly

challenging period for euro zone manufacturers this second half

of 2021, but the latest survey data hasn’t spoiled the festive cheer

too much”, said Joe Hayes, Senior Economist at IHS Markit.

“We’re seeing some tentative, but very welcome signs that the supply chain crisis which has plagued production lines all across Europe is beginning to recede.

Although what gains to be had were only marginal... PMI data showed stocks of purchases rising at a survey-record rate in December.”

That easing meant the input prices index sank to an albeit still high eight-month low of 86.7 from 88.9, allowing factories to raise their prices at a much slower pace than in November.

“Easing inflation rates are again a welcome sign, but we’re still in hot territory”, Hayes added.

The European Central Bank took another small step in rolling back crisis-era stimulus last month but raised its inflation projections and now sees it at 3.2 per cent this year, well above its 2.0 per cent target. — Reuters

Companies will take breakup pitch too far in 2022

Old-guard companies are at risk of dismemberment. With titans like General Electric or Toshiba breaking up, bankers will try to run the same playbook in 2022 for technology, energy and automotive firms transitioning their businesses.

They should remember that casting out their best shots at staying relevant is a very different proposition from carving up the disparate pieces of an industrial conglomerate.

GE, Japanese giant Toshiba and healthcare firm Johnson & Johnson were at the forefront of a renaissance in corporate splits in 2021, all opting to spin off various units.

The theory is that, by allowing their unrelated businesses to stand apart, they can be more efficiently — and more richly — valued by the market.

It seems like an easy enough trick to replicate.

An oil company might separate clean energy operations. Or a chip firm with profitable designs should step away from the vast investments required to be a leading manufacturer.

These ideas have all been floated for automaker General Motors, oil major Royal Dutch Shell and chip kingpin Intel, which need to spend big to remodel their legacy business.

Spinning out new initiatives might be tempting, especially for those whose profitability is crimped by all that spending.

Intel's shares fell 12 per cent when it said its profits would take a hit as it invests in manufacturing. GM predicts its electric cars will only become as profitable as gas-powered cars in 2030.

But while GE's healthcare team probably didn't need a jet engine business under the same roof, GM's car efforts benefit from integration. The company expects to save up to \$30 billion in spending on the path to becoming fully electric by reusing existing equipment and upgrading its current plants, rather than starting from scratch.

Intel's cash flows are the lifeblood of its chip plants. And spin-offs are not a guaranteed winner: DuPont's spins collectively trade at a lower market cap than the old combined company.

Nonetheless, some of these firms are already testing the waters, like Intel which in December said it would look to list its auto-oriented unit Mobileye. When taking meetings with bankers in 2022, it and others should be wary of offers to separate from the rest of the family jewels.

— Reuters

Spinning out new initiatives might be tempting, especially for those whose profitability is crimped by all that spending



OIL PIPES INSPECTION

A worker inspects pipes for the Nord Stream 2 at a site on Germany's Baltic Sea coast. The Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline is ready for launch, according to the Russian energy giant Gazprom. The second pipe of the dual pipeline is completely filled with technical gas, Alexei Miller, the company's CEO, said. Nord Stream 2 is supposed to bring gas from Russia to Germany, bypassing Ukraine. Construction was completed weeks ago, but is not yet in operation. — dpa

Is cooperation with China possible?



MICHAEL SPENCE

The author, a Nobel laureate in economics, is Professor of Economics Emeritus and a former dean of the Graduate School of Business at Stanford University

ONE MIGHT HAVE EXPECTED THE WORLD'S LEADING POWERS TO PURSUE A DIFFICULT BUT REASONABLE BALANCE BETWEEN STRATEGIC COMPETITION AND STRATEGIC COOPERATION

Looking at the economic landscape one cannot help but notice the emergence of new obstacles to a robust recovery. The United States, Europe, China, and others face a growing list of remarkably similar short- and longer-term challenges.

The pandemic remains the most immediate concern. Without full global vaccination, new Covid-19 variants will continue to emerge, potentially forcing governments to renew partial or full lockdowns. The coronavirus thus represents a permanent drag on the recovery.

A second challenge is the blockage of global supply chains, which, together with supply-side shifts in labour markets, has created persistent inflationary pressures unlike anything seen in over a decade.

Without cross-border efforts to resolve supply bottlenecks and shortages, central banks may be forced to curtail today's surging demand by tightening monetary policy.

Another common issue is the complex task of properly regulating the digital technologies and sectors that now account for an increasingly large share of most economies.

Regulators in Europe, the US, China, and India have been intensifying their efforts on this front, writing new rules for data security, access, and usage, and launching investigations into potential

abuses of market power, especially by the mega-platforms.

As the financial sector shifts to digital payments and currencies, and as new entrants emerge in credit, insurance, and asset-management markets, there is an urgent need to adapt regulations to ensure fair competition, access to valuable data, and financial stability.

It is no secret that a substantial share of incremental wealth creation in recent decades has occurred in technology sectors such as e-commerce, payments, fintech, and social media.

The result has been high concentrations of new wealth, which in turn raises concerns about undue influence over policy. Such worries are particularly evident in the US and China, even though the two countries have very different systems of governance, and thus different channels through which influence is exercised.

Similarly, although the terminology differs in the US and China, both countries are struggling to reverse rising income and wealth inequality and declining social mobility. In the US, many politicians speak of delivering more inclusive growth.

In China, the government has launched a new campaign to achieve "common prosperity." Heated debates in both countries about how best to pursue these goals reflect concerns that an excessive or overly narrow approach to redistribution could adversely affect economic efficiency

and dynamism.

The similarity between these national policymaking efforts suggests that the US and China have a common interest in establishing new rules of engagement in the global economy and the financial sector. Both must adapt to the new realities implied by the digital revolution and shifting global power balances.

There is also a clear need for new agreements to limit the offensive use of digital and cyber technologies, and to free up benign cross-border flows of technology (in health, education, and other sectors) that are at risk of being blocked by national-security considerations.

Finally, there is the global challenge of climate change.

Without the free and frictionless movement of the necessary technologies and financing, the world will have no chance of limiting global warming to 1.5° Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Here, too, success will depend on whether the US and China can work together. With so many common challenges, one might have expected the world's leading powers to pursue a difficult but reasonable balance between strategic competition and strategic cooperation.

After all, both China and the US would benefit from acknowledging that they have compelling common interests, not just unavoidable disagreements.

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Indonesia miners seek solution to coal export ban

BY FRANSISKA NANGOY, BERNADETTE CHRISTINA AND SUDARSHAN VARADHAN

ANALYSTS EXPECT THE MINERS' WILLINGNESS TO DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO RESTORE EXPORT FLOWS WOULD LEAD TO A QUICK RESOLUTION, ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY HAVE ABUNDANT SUPPLY CAPACITY

Indonesian coal miners are seeking a quick resolution to a government coal export ban that is already causing fuel prices to rise and could disrupt the energy needs of some of the world's biggest economies.

The world's biggest exporter of thermal coal on Saturday banned the shipments because of concerns it could not meet its own power demand. But the prohibition risks undermining the energy needs of global economic linchpins China, India, Japan, and South Korea, which together received 73 per cent of Indonesian coal exports in 2021, according to ship tracking data from Kpler.

Though key coal trading hubs such as Australia are closed on Monday, prices for coal to India's west coast have already climbed by as much as 500 rupees (\$6.73) per tonne since the ban was announced, said Riya Vyas, a business analyst at iEnergy Natural Resources Limited.

But, she did not know of any exporters who had declared force majeure, which describes when companies cannot supply fuel because of events beyond their control.

The ban follows a tumultuous year for global coal as prices surged amid a supply crunch in China, the world's biggest consumer.

Prices of the most commonly exported grade of Indonesian coal rose to a record \$158 per tonne in October though it slipped \$68 on

December 29, according to data from Caixin.

Indonesia enacted the ban because low coal inventories at domestic power plants could lead to widespread blackouts, though the government plans to reevaluate the decision on Wednesday.

Ridwan Jamaludin, the director-general of minerals and coal at the Indonesian energy ministry, said at the weekend that without the ban almost 20 power plants would have to shut.

Under its so-called Domestic Market Obligation (DMO) policy coal miners must supply 25 per cent of their annual production to state utility Perusahaan Listrik Negara (PLN) at a maximum price of \$70 per tonne, below current market prices.

The Indonesian Coal Mining

Association (ICMA) met trade ministry officials during the weekend to thrash out a solution, ICMA Chairman Pandu Sjahrir said on Monday.

"The main objective now is to avoid power outages. For the very short term, the solution is for ten of our biggest members to try to help with PLN's shortage," he said.

The ICMA called for the ban to be revoked since it was "taken hastily without being discussed with business players".

Shares of Indonesia's coal miners fell early on Monday. Adaro Energy dropped 3.1 per cent, while Bukit Asam lost 3.3 per cent and Bumi Resources shed 2.9 per cent. However, Adaro shares later rebounded.

Pandu said some miners are unable to sell to PLN since the company requires coal with a

heating value of 4,200 kilocalories per kg or less, which is considered a low-grade form of the fuel.

A spokesperson for Adaro, one of Indonesia's biggest coal miners, said that in 2021 it sold about 27 per cent of its output domestically, more than required.

Analysts expect the miners' willingness to do whatever it takes to restore export flows would lead to a quick resolution, especially since they have abundant supply capacity.

I believe total monthly output from Indonesian mines is just below the 40-million-tonne mark, which would represent roughly a third of annual domestic demand. As such, it's difficult to envision this dragging on for more than a few weeks," said coal market analyst Matt Warder of Seawolf Research. — AFP

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Announcement of Capital Reduction

IN accordance with the provisions of Article 150 of the Commercial Companies Law. The company **Jebal Wadi Al Halti Trad. Co.**, which is registered with the Commercial Registration No 3205070, hereby announces that it is going to reduce its capital from RO 25,000 to 5,000. Whoever has any objection to the foregoing shall present the reasons for such objection to the Secretariat of Commercial Registry at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion within 30 days from the date hereof.

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#Living_with_COVID19

features

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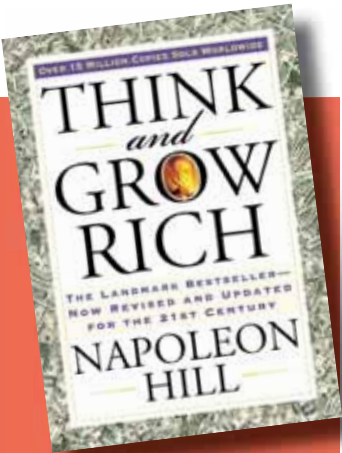


Covid- 19 recovery with plants: Regaining mental strength

Plants sense the environment through its outer layer and respond according to the physical stress just like we do... **P20**

ENVIRONMENT

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British farmers ‘to be paid to help restore natural habitats’

FARMERS ARE TO be paid to help restore natural habitats and rewild Britain in government plans aimed at filling the gap left by EU subsidies, according to reports.

A full announcement on two new schemes is set to be made at the Oxford Farming Conference on Thursday by

Environment Secretary George Eustice.

The Sunday Telegraph says that the plans include a Local Nature Recovery scheme, where funding will be provided to build new habitats, plant trees, and restore peat and wetland areas.

There is also a Landscape



Recovery scheme, which is aimed at helping return the British countryside to the wild. It is expected to be open to

landowners and farmers or groups in charge of managing schemes that cover 500-5,000 hectares. It is believed the

scheme will begin with funding for 15 projects.

The newspaper reports Eustice said: “Successful and profitable agricultural production is crucial to our food security. “We are facing challenges on issues like biodiversity loss and climate change, so we must use our freedom from the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy to establish a new system of rewards and incentives in agriculture.” The government wants to stop the decline in British species by 2030 and restore up to 300,000 hectares of habitat by the 2040s.

Opponents in the farming industry have criticised the move amid fears that it focuses on giving up land for rewilding rather than looking towards backing domestic food production and self-sufficiency. — dpa

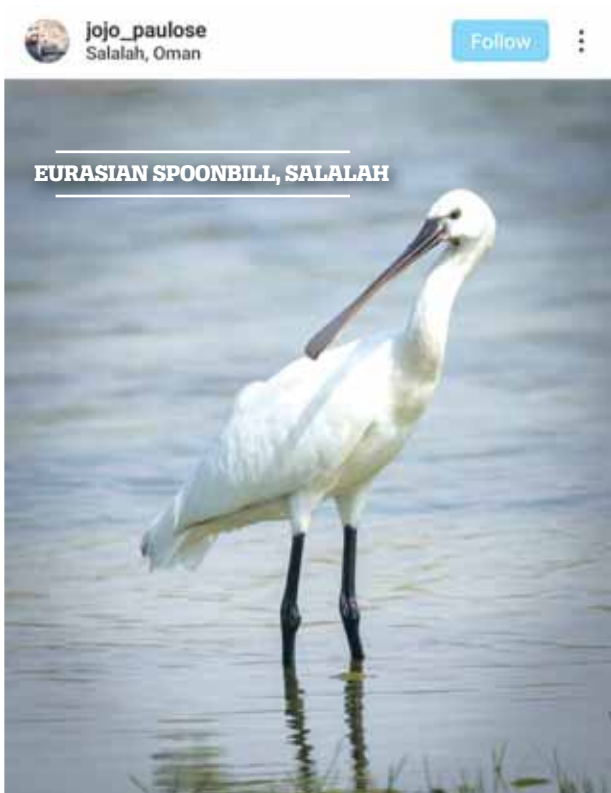


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A WINDOW INTO CONTEMPORARY OMANI LITERATURE

STUDY

1,500 languages acutely threatened with extinction

THERE ARE ABOUT 7,000 recognised languages worldwide, but many of them could soon be lost forever.

According to a study from Australia, about half of all languages are endangered, and 1,500 could be extinct by the end of the century.

"Without intervention, language loss could triple within 40 years, with at least one language lost per month," the authors write. They advise creating curricula that support bilingual education and encourage both indigenous language mastery and the use of regionally dominant languages.

Fifty-one independent variables were analysed, including education policy, socioeconomic indicators and environmental characteristics.

The study, led by the Australian National University (ANU), was published in the online journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution*.

The research also uncovered unexpected and surprising causes of language threat, said co-author Lindell Bromham. These include a well-developed road network, for example, he said.

"[W]e found that the more roads there are, connecting country to city, and villages to towns, the higher the risk of languages being endangered.

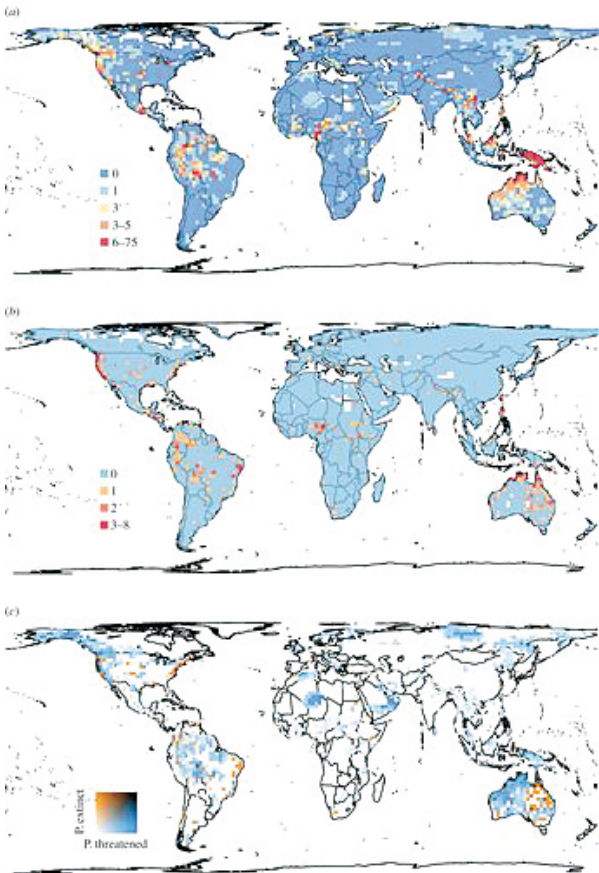
It's as if roads are helping dominant languages' steamroll' over other smaller languages," Bromham said.

Contact with other local languages, on the other hand, is not the problem: in fact, languages that come into contact with many other indigenous languages are less at risk.

ACCORDING TO A STUDY FROM AUSTRALIA, ABOUT HALF OF ALL LANGUAGES ARE ENDANGERED, AND 1,500 COULD BE EXTINCT BY THE END OF THE CENTURY

The study also contains lessons for the preservation of endangered Indigenous Australian languages.

"Australia has the dubious distinction of having one of the highest rates of language loss worldwide," said co-author Felicity Meakins. Of the 250 languages once spoken by Indigenous people, she said, only 40 remain — and children learn only a dozen of them in the first place. — **dpa**



LIFESTYLE

Haiti's traditional joumou soup: a tasty reminder of freedom



A MIX OF MEAT, vegetables, pasta and the squash for which it is named, Haitians enjoy joumou soup every January 1 to celebrate the new year and their country's independence.

Before it became a symbol of Haiti's freedom, the soup was one of oppression.

The enslaved Haitians who grew the 'giraumon' or turban squash, the key ingredient, were forbidden from eating the dish. It was reserved solely for the French plantation masters.

But on January 1, 1804, when the first black-led republic was born, Marie-Claire Heureuse Felicite — the wife of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a leader of Haiti's revolution and the independent nation's first ruler — chose to serve the soup.

Cooking joumou soup "was a way to mark those years of deprivation and oppression, and to claim victory over the colonisers," says Port-au-Prince resident Nathalie Cardichon as she buys ingredients for the national dish at the market.

"That's the meaning of this soup," she adds. Traditionally, serving the dish is also a time of reunion for families. But for many, 2022 will be different.

RISE OF GANGS

In 2021, not long after Haiti's president was assassinated, the country suffered a devastating earthquake. Political turmoil and poverty have intensified, as have violence and kid-

nappings by gangs that have become all-powerful.

A lack of security and inability to travel on roads guarded by armed gangs have forced many Haitians to spend the symbolic day far from their loved ones.

"I have friends at university whose parents don't live in Port-au-Prince and who can't go home to the provinces because of the security situation, so I invited them" to my house, says Stephanie Smith, a student in the Haitian capital.

Her mother, Rosemene Dorceus, often makes joumou soup for their family. But for the national holiday, she makes whole pots of it.

It's enough to feed "about 20 people," the 54-year-old estimates modestly — but her daughter thinks it all could easily feed at least 30.

"We are eight in my family but unfortunately, in the neighbourhood, there are people who can't afford to make the soup, so we think of them," explains the 27-year-old Smith.

The work in the kitchen starts on December 31.

Before the sun has even risen on January 1, the women in the family are busy around the stove.

Dorceus recalls a time when she and her husband would make the soup together, when the children were small.

"Now that my daughters are

grown, they help me," she says.

Delighted with the family time spent preparing the feast, Smith says her younger brothers do help a little, "but they mostly come by to eat, especially the meat."

TRADITION OF OUR ANCESTORS

The richly historied soup has just received international recognition, with UNESCO designating it as part of the "intangible cultural heritage of humanity."

"Haiti's struggle and its voice have been made invisible, and this is now a way to record it," said Dominique Dupuy, Haiti's ambassador to the UN cultural agency.

She noted Haiti's "fundamental and crucial role in humanity's history," as the first country to have abolished slavery.

The designation of joumou soup constitutes a "just historical rectification," according to Dupuy. Her delegation did everything possible to obtain the listing, requesting accelerated processing for the request in August. On December 16, the designation was granted.

With 2021 having been an "exceptionally painful year," it was necessary to have "systems to help us keep our heads high," said Dupuy, a native of Cap-Haitien, which suffered a tragedy on December 14 when a gas truck exploded, killing dozens. — **AFP**



Dr Khalid Mohammed al Balushi
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Seeking Shelter in Gloom

The following are translations of poems by the Omani poet Hilal al Hajri (1968-) from his first collection titled: "Night Is Mine", (Muscat: 2006):

The following are translations of poems by the Omani poet Hilal Al Hajri (1968-) from his first collection titled: "Night Is Mine", (Muscat: 2006):

Al Wasil
My village, Al Wasil ,
Is a Trojan horse
Running without reins
to Doomsday.
How could I even catch
its tail,
I, the armless, with one
foot in the mud
And the other drowned
By the vanity of knowledge?

Abu Nuwas
From temple to tavern
Won't you wait
Till Wodhu on your
forehead dries?
Like a tear on the
cheek,
Like the coyness dot,
On a virgin forehead
My steps take me
towards
It
Without my knowing.

Vanity
Shiny
Juicy
Bodies
Were created for nothing
But to be penetrated by
-me-
Through the lightning
of my eyes.
Shiny bodies
Arriving and departing
Leaving behind my
heart
As sap for other bodies.

Alone
He squeezes cans
Declaring their end
Like a god squeezing
souls to their
Doom
And chews his loneliness
In classic fashion
Like a proficient prostitute.
The self-same who
once thought
He'd swallowed all the

wisdom tablets.

Seeking Shelter in Gloom
At the dead of night
I'm the one
Who sinks solo into bed
Like an orphan
Like a spear.
Oh God for anything
To cram my wasteland in
Even were it the size of the navel!
... Oh no my God
More gloom!
No tree
Could shelter me from this flood
Except for my long gloom!

Durham
In Durham
Temple of the saints
And postgraduates,
Every night
He returns alone
Proud of his sadness
Rejects a glance
Even to the pavement
Who'd shelter this desert man?
Will he nibble at his fingers
Or take the pillow as his sweetheart?

Surrender
I'll burn out tonight
Very early.
Nothing would seduce me
To wrestle tonight.
Off you go,
You the black giant
How could my little body
Resist your tyranny?
I left you for pimps and adulterers of the night
For spies and intellectuals
For brokers and wor-shippers
For all your old wrestlers!
I myself
Will leave and kiss
The first star in my village
And nap
Like an orphan child.



By Priyanka Verma

The world stopped when the Covid-19 pandemic struck. The restrictions were not only physical but also mental. The restriction on movement led to decreased social interactions and increased time spent on social media, further adding to the mental distress. Confinement, boredom, monotony, uncertainty and financial crisis was just the beginning. Fear of infection led to Fear of Interaction, Increased attachment and emotional issues. Actual infection led to a whole range of other problems. Social exclusion from the society and the course of treatment and recovery takes an emotional toll on the person and their loved ones. Covid-19 Pandemic at best will become Endemic to few areas, it is not going to go away.

There has been a recent rise in diseases caused due to the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources and destruction of animal habitats, resulting in animal stress, thereby making them vulnerable to being carriers of various diseases. The threat of diseases will continue lurking outside, threatening our mental state inside and the world will have to move on but how will we?

Protection and care of nature just might be the panacea of this conundrum. Taking care of the environment cannot only reduce human and animal conflict but also reduce the level of stress on animals that is causing them to become carriers of contagious viruses. Taking care of nature, plants and animals, likewise has proved to be contribute to healing and growth.

Growing plants itself has the potential to improve mental health. When you add creativity to it, it reduces mental stress, relieves depression and gives a sense of

peace. Personally, it helped me recover from a very traumatic phase amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. In my garden, I have recycled various discarded things to give new life to them while stimulating my creativity. Milk tin boxes, discarded car truck and cycle tyres, anything

which helps me take the plants off the ground and onto the walls and accommodate more plants in less space, I tend to use it. Contrary to popular belief, plants need not be restricted to sunlight receiving areas of your house. I have spread out my plants from the lawn and the

balcony to the living room and the kitchen according to their specific requirements. Another misconception about plants is that they need soil to grow. Soil is only one medium, plants can be grown in water (hydroponics) I tend to several hydroponics that sit on my kitchen, bed-

room windowsill and living room.

Plants sense the environment through its outer layer and respond according to the physical stress just like we do. Plants have a complex sensory system that responds to the danger and any environmental changes that occur in

their immediate surrounding. Plants grow towards light, resist wind by changing shape, growing around rocky surfaces due to this sensory system. Plants sense the negative environment and respond accordingly. Plants started dying in my well established indoor and outdoor garden during the covid-19 infection phase. Everyday I woke up with less energy and felt sad about them. This may be due to my overlooking their routine nutrient check due to covid infection and recovery phase. But at the same time they showed immense ray of hope as a new bud emerged from almost dead plant. That's the time when I realized life is much more progressive and beautiful. I reestablished my well grown, lushly, bushy, indoor and outdoor garden filling it with life, hope and perseverance so I can resonate with it if I find myself dwindling again. Air purifying and carbon dioxide absorber plants like money plants, snake-plant, nerve plant, drace-nas umbrella tree, along with the medicinal plants like mint, aloe, loban, coleus are the main attractions of my garden. Everyday, when I wake up and see them grow, my hope of life and recovery of my mental strength grows with it.

A plant growing in the middle of a concrete pathway symbolises as much hope as the one which is just recovering from not being watered for days because we were busy tending to the family members who got sick from Covid-19. Watching my dying plants recover gave me the strength to get a hold of myself and, for once, slow down and look within to find that I need to recover too. I hadn't watered myself in awhile too. By taking care of my plants, I gained some control back in life which was thrown into chaos by a virus. The Love and care that I gave to my plants was the love and care I gave to myself. Plants might as well be a part of my identity henceforth.



Covid-19 recovery with plants: Regaining mental strength