

HM condoles Emir of Kuwait

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent condolences to Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait on the death of Sh ikha Moudhi Salem Ali Al Malek al Sabah. His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sympathies, praying to the Almighty Allah to rest the deceased's soul in peace in paradise and grant her family patience to bear the loss.



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OMAN OBSERVER

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MUSCAT FC PLAYER
MUKHALED
AL RAOADI PASSES AWAY



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TOTALENERGIES' SOLAR
POWERED LNG BUNKER
PROJECT GETS BOOST



P20
A MEMORABLE
FIRST TRI P TO A
BEDU'S HOME



MUSCAT

FIRST OMANI-MADE 3D
PRINTER LAUNCHED

The first Omani-made 3D printer and its production line was launched on Wednesday in a ceremony held under the patronage of Dr Saif Abdullah al Haddabi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation. The 3D printer, launched through a strategic cooperation between the 3D Factory company and Makers Oman Center at Innovation Park Muscat. SEE P3

SANAA

UN AGENCY CUTS FOOD
AID TO YEMEN

The World Food Programme said Wednesday it was "forced" to cut aid to Yemen due to lack of funds, and warned of a surge in hunger in the war-torn country. "From January, eight million will receive a reduced food ration, while five million at immediate risk of slipping into famine conditions will remain on a full ration," the United Nations agency said in a statement, adding that it was "running out of funds". SEE P6



INSIDE



DUTERTE DECLARES STATE
OF CALAMITY

P7



TEEN PILOT CLOSER TO
CIRCLE GLOBE

P8

THIRD DOSE
ESSENTIAL
TO TAKE ON OMICRON

MUSCAT: As the Sultanate of Oman on Wednesday reported 42 new cases of Covid-19, which is the highest single-day tally since September 14, doctors urged the people aged 18 and above to get a third dose of coronavirus vaccine.

Dr Faryal al Lawati, Senior Consultant, Infectious Diseases, Head of the Infectious Diseases Unit at the Royal Hospital, said, "There is urgent need for a third booster dose, now that preliminary studies point to the probability that the efficiency of the first two doses might have dwindled to as low as 30 per cent." Studies found that antibodies decrease between the 5th and 6th month of the Pfizer vaccine, and between the 4th and 5th month of the AstraZeneca vaccine. It was initially hoped that T-cells would generate/trigger long lasting immunological memory, even in the event of B-cell deficiency, said Dr Faryal.

Dr Faryal pointed out that, due to fresh infections among two-dose recipients in the aftermath of Omicron outbreak, it became clear now that time is

No. Covid 19 cases.
No Death

DEC 1	18
DEC 2	9
DEC 5	22
DEC 6	9
DEC 7	19
DEC 8	23
DEC 9	25
DEC 11	35
DEC 13	10
DEC 14	17
DEC 15	20
DEC 16	22
DEC 17-19	60
DEC 20	31
DEC 21	22
DEC 22	42

Source: Ministry of Health

ripe for a third booster dose to avoid a similar Covid-19 surge as in Europe.

Dr Zaid bin Al Khattab al Hinai, Assistant Professor at the College of Medicine, and an infectious diseases consultant at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital, said that the third dose augments the quantity and efficiency of antibodies capable of neutralising Omicron, as was proven in lab tests. Field studies in more than one country showed that the booster dose offers protection against symptoms from 30 per cent to 75 per cent, Dr Zaid said.

TURN TO P3



RAO WELCOMES NEW OFFICERS



The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) on Wednesday celebrated the passing out of a batch of cadet officers, as well as the first batch of female cadet officers from the Sultan Qaboos Military College. The ceremony was held at Muaskar Al Murtafaa under the auspices of Shaikh Al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers. The event was attended by several high-ranking officials and officers, as well as families of the graduates. SEE ALSO P4

RO 1.5 million worth projects to
be implemented in Al Dakhiliyah

AMAL AL RIYAMI
NIZWA, DEC 22

As part of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's Governorates Development Programme and in line with Oman Vision 2040, developmental projects worth RO 1.5 million will be implemented in Al Dakhiliyah.

Shaikh Hilal bin Said bin Hamdan al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah, signed the agreements with companies on in Nizwa on Wednesday.

The agreements included the design and construction of

internal roads in the industrial layout in the Wilayat of Adam, and the design and implementation of public parking spaces in Nizwa Souq.

The agreements also included designing and implementing road connections and municipal abattoirs in the wilayats of Nizwa and Manah, in addition to the construction of the road from the wastewater plant in the Wilayat of Bahla to Bahla Public Park.

Furthermore, the agreements also included the establishment of air-conditioned waiting sheds in

the wilayats of Nizwa, Manah and Adam, as well as the establishment of a market for vegetables and fruits in Qal'at Al Awamer in the Wilayat of Izki, besides projects for annual maintenance services for horticulture and irrigation in the wilayats of Izki, Samayil, Bidbid, Nizwa and Adam.

Other projects include providing and transporting irrigation water to Izki Park, Manah Park, Al Dakhiliyah Municipality building, the public street and Al Haditha Park in Adam.

Empty Quarter Festival in Dhofar begins today

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

The Empty Quarter Festival in Dhofar Governorate will begin on Thursday and will last till January 8. The festival, which is organised by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, will be inaugurated by His Highness Sayyid Fahr bin Fatik al Said.

The festival could be the best place to usher in the New Year. According to the organisers, the festival will take the visitors on an unparalleled tour around one of the largest sand deserts in the world. Celebrating the Empty Quarter for the first time also indicates Dhofar's distinct

feature of being a destination for all seasons.

"Everybody knows Dhofar as a destination during Khareef season, the Empty Quarter Festival will showcase the fact that Dhofar is a destination for all seasons. Another objective of the festival is to give an insight to the investors the potential projects such as resorts that could be developed in the desert," said Rawas bin Hafedh bin Abdullah al Rawas, Assistant Director General for Heritage and Tourism in Dhofar.

The festival will highlight the desert lifestyle and culture in addition to activities such as



paragliding, dune adventures, sand boarding as well as endurance sports such as riding camels, horses and motorbikes. In addition there would also be a shooting competition.

The festival also brings into

highlight the archeological site Shisr, recognised as World Heritage Site by Unesco for its important role in frankincense trade routes.

On Thursday at 10 am a symbolic camel caravan will start their journey with frankincense covering 30 km all the way till the festival square — Oasis of Al Khithaf.

On the sidelines of the festival, the Authority for SME development in association with MoHT is hosting the Oasis Festival food court at Ramlet al Khif located in the Wilayat of Thamrait from December 23 to January 1.

"There are about 10 camps with 250 beds run by companies. All what the visitors have to do is call the number for reservations and book and arrive on location," said Al Rawas.

At the Festival Oasis the events lined up are children and family theatre shows, entertainment shows, children's play areas, craft fair and heritage corner, food trucks and renting of camping and hiking supplies. The tourist camps at night will have musical sessions presenting Bedouin arts in addition to competitions in traditional games such as shooting and sand boarding.

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 29°C Min 22°C SALALAH: Max 27°C Min 21°C NIZWA: Max 29°C Min 17°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:45 FAJR: 05:25 DHUHR: 12:11 ASR: 15:11 MAGHRIB: 17:31 ISHA: 18:47

Forever in Our Hearts



The Board Members, Management Team and All Employees of the Group express their profound grief over passing of our beloved founder,



Mr. Gulabsi Ratansi Khimji

A noble soul, a visionary entrepreneur who transformed the face of business. His legacy lives on in our businesses and culture forever. His lifetime achievements have been an inspiration and have a great impact on the hearts of all the employees.

His passing is a tragic loss for our company and our thoughts and prayers are with his family and loved ones during this difficult time





Shura to host transport minister on Monday



MUSCAT: Majlis Ash'shura is hosting Engineer Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, on Monday.

This was stated by Shaikh Ahmed bin Mohammed al Nadabi, Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura (pictured).

Majlis Ash'shura will convene its 5th and 6th ordinary meetings of the third annual session (2021-2022) on December 27-28. The fifth meeting will be dedicated to discussing the minister of transport, communications and information technology to make the case for road projects. During the sixth meeting, the council will

discuss standing committees' reports and review some oversight tools, Al Nadabi said.

The Secretary-General of Majlis Ash'shura said that Monday's meeting will be the first one for the current term to be dedicated to requests for discussion. He added that the Council of Ministers has recently approved some requests for discussion presented by Majlis Ash'shura. Accordingly, Majlis Ash'shura will host the minister of higher education, research and innovation and the minister of economy, to discuss the topic of the academic outputs that join the labour market and the minister of commerce, industry and investment promotion to discuss finding a legal framework for regulating cooperative societies.

During the sixth meeting to be held on Tuesday, Majlis Ash'shura will discuss the mechanisms applied for the disbursement of assistance and compensations to citizens affected by cyclone Shaheen, Al Nadabi concluded.



250 housing units ready in Al Mazyouna

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning said that a project undertaken by its departments to set up 250 housing units in the Wilayat of Al Mazyouna has been completed.

The project, which cost RO 7 million, will provide suitable accommodations for Omanis, the ministry said, noting that

the project occupies a total area of 645,000 sqm, with each land plot accorded 1,000 sqm. A unit's constructed area stands at 190 sqm.

The ministry added that the project adds to 590 residential units set up earlier in Al Mazyouna over the past period, along with 7 mosques, one public hall and 67

housing units set up under the scheme of Residential Housing Assistance and Loans.

During this year, a total of 553 residential housing units in different wilayats of the Sultanate of Oman were distributed, of them 81 in Saham, 96 in Shinas, 68 in Al Suwaiq, 3 in Suhar, 29 in Al Khabourah (North Al Batinah),

7 units in Al Musannah, one unit in Barka (South Al Batinah), and 45 units in Jaalan Bani Bu Hassan (North Al Sharqiyah), the ministry said. Between 1973 and 2020, the ministry built 15,000 housing units for eligible citizens (low-income and Social Security Scheme segments) to the tune of RO 340 million. — ONA

Third dose essential to take on Omicron



FROM PAGE 1

Recently, many countries saw major rise in Covid-19 infection, hospitalisation and death cases that compelled them to go for lockdowns, said Dr Zaid, who cautioned against a probable similar scenario in the Sultanate of Oman if not enough measures are undertaken, among them the booster dose.

Meanwhile, Dr Zakaria bin



Yahya al Balushi, Senior Consultant, Inflammations and Infections, the Royal Hospital, said that Omicron, which originated in South Africa, devastated the world at a greater and faster pace than Delta and that the Sultanate of Oman is no far cry.

Dr Zakaria affirmed that the 3rd dose provides a great proportion of protection against Omicron, notably for people who are



at risk because of low immunity.

Echoing a similar view, Dr Ridha bin Issa al Lawati, Internal Medicine Consultant at the Royal Hospital, said that a study in Canada showed that a person infected with Omicron transmitted the virus to four other persons in one instance, while a person infected with Delta could transfer only one person at a time.

Quoting a study conducted in



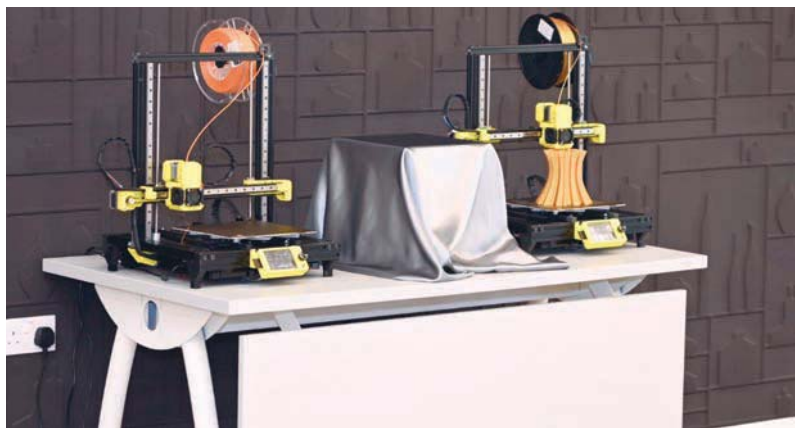
Britain, Dr Ridha also cautioned against the subsiding efficiency of earlier vaccinations that dropped as low as 20 per cent among AstraZeneca recipients and 40 per cent among Pfizer recipients. "All evidence point to the conclusion that the booster dose assumes maximum significance in combating the new mutant that has spread fast, far and wide in the world," said Dr Ridha. — ONA

First Omani-made 3D printer launched

MUSCAT: The first Omani-made 3D printer and its production line was launched on Wednesday in a ceremony held under the auspices of Dr Saif bin Abdullah al Haddabi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation for Research and Innovation.

The 3D printer, launched through a strategic cooperation between the 3D Factory company and Makers Oman Center at Innovation Park Muscat of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, is a high-quality, accurate and ultra-quiet printer that keeps pace with rapid advances in object manufacturing and prototyping technologies as well as converting ideas into masses of tangible products. It is hoped that it will contribute to support the national economy and enter the local and global markets.

Moosa al Amri, CEO of 3D Factory, affirmed that "this launch came about to keep pace with the



growth witnessed in the field of 3D printing around the world in general and the Sultanate of Oman specifically and meeting the scientific needs of those interested, manufacturers, students and researchers in the production of prototypes or commercial manufacturing".

He added that the printer is characterised by its ability of resuming printing in the event of a power loss or a sudden power outage, in addition to its ability to print with most modelling

materials and engineering materials with shortened time and effort.

The printer has a high-definition touch screen that contributes to making the experience easy for all groups with the one click of a button, said Al Amri.

He explained that the team of programmers in the company is currently working on making Arabic the main language for the printer, with the possibility of changing the language.

The 3D Factory was established

in 2017 and comprises 9 young Omanis working full-time, with high academic qualifications and various technical skills, such as mechanical engineering, space science engineering, mechatronics and robotics, as well as finance, accounting and human resources. It is a company specialised in 3D printing and its technologies, production and mass manufacturing. It is also the first founder of the largest printer farm in the Sultanate of Oman.

As for Makers Oman Centre, it is one of the most prominent national projects implemented in a strategic partnership between Innovation Park Muscat of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, the Ministry of Finance and Makerspace People. The centre covers an area of approximately 1,200 square metres and includes the latest devices, equipment and interactive work techniques.

— ONA





RAO CELEBRATES GRADUATION OF CADET OFFICERS



MUSCAT: The Royal Army of Oman (RAO) on Wednesday celebrated the passing out of a batch of cadet officers, as well as the first batch of female cadet officers from the Sultan Qaboos Military College.

The ceremony was held at Muaskar Al Murtafaa under the auspices of Shaikh al Fadhl bin Mohammed al Harthy, Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers.

The event was attended by

several high-ranking officials and officers, as well as families of the graduates.

The graduates also comprised cadet officers from the office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, the Royal Air Force of Oman, the Royal Guard of Oman, the Sultan's Special Force, the Royal Oman Police and other security departments, besides cadet officers from the Kingdom of Bahrain and the State of Qatar.

— ONA





Training workshop on Expanded Programme on Immunisation

MUSCAT: The Directorate-General of Health Services in Governorate of Muscat, represented by the Department of Diseases Surveillance and Control, organised a training workshop on the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI) at Darsait Al Sahel, Bahara Hall.

Dr Jamal al Khadhoori, Director-General of Nursing Affairs at the Ministry of Health, as well Dr Thamra al Ghafri, Director-General of Health Services, attended the workshop, in addition to senior officials.

The three-day workshop, which began on Tuesday, targets EPI nurses in addition to newly EPI enrolled nurses working in Muscat health institutions.

The workshop is held within the continuous training and education process of the EPI nurses to keep them abreast with the latest development of the programme along with promoting and exchanging expertise among senior and junior EPI nurses.



Participants of fresh nurses at the primary health institutions will be trained on the programme that covers requesting vaccines, storage method as per the Ministry of Health policy, and vaccine administration to the target group.

The workshop, managed by specialised lecturers from DGHS-Muscat's health institutions, is focusing on number of topics including vaccination chain management and storage according to MoH's

policy, in addition to the method of writing the monthly report for children and adult vaccinations.

Actions taken to report delay in children vaccination and refusers, vaccination adverse effects notification, and registration method in health workers' vaccinations registry will be identified in the workshop.

It is hoped that the workshop will be concluded by recommendations that would bear positive impact on the national EPI work.

Banks caution customers over fake text messages

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Banks in the Sultanate of Oman have warned their customers of a spam message that's taking rounds on mobile phones seeking the customer to part with vital numbers that appear on the phones, apparently part of a money swindling attempt.

A WhatsApp message from a number with respective Bank's logo that warns the customers that their ATM is blocked/will be blocked due to an unidentified transaction by the customer and would advise the customer to get in touch with a number mentioned in the message.

A senior banker advised all customers who use banks' services not to respond to these messages, instead, block the number immediately.

"One should, upon receiving such a message, block the sender's number and alert us. We will report it to our management to take action," she said.

When a panicked customer responds to such a message by calling them back, he/she would be guided through various bank policies and packages in their language to win the trust and ask for their account number followed by an OTP (One Time Password).

"This is where the real problem starts. By getting their account number and the OTP to establish a new password, spamsters are all set to rip the customer of his/her savings in few seconds," says Samir al Hajri, an IT expert.

A message received by the customer who was about to part with the bank account by calling them back reads thus:



"Dear Customer, your ATM has been blocked at any ATM machine as you have not updated yet. If you want your ATM card to work properly, then contact this number immediately 78671016."

Many customers have fallen prey to such unscrupulous messages and lost their funds.

"I lost nearly RO 1,700 when I acted according to what the person said on phone," says Narendra Naik, supervisor of a cleaning company.

Banks have reiterated their customers not to share their banking details with anyone, and not to respond by calling unknown numbers.

"The bank will never ask you for PIN, OTP, CVV, Card Number, Account Details or Password over phone, SMS, WhatsApp or through a web link. Whenever

required, kindly call only Bank's Contact Centre numbers," a warning message sent by a bank reads.

The Royal Oman Police (ROP) has alerted of such spams taking place from time to time.

"Spamsters feel that WhatsApp is one of the number one platforms where such things can be carried out. The app at the moment has over 2 billion users worldwide and is also ranked as the number one messaging app out there," opines Samir al Hajri, an IT expert.

"When such a message is received, one shouldn't act immediately. Without getting worried, contact the bank on any channel and if one doesn't know, approach anyone who knows about banking transactions and online spams," Al Hajri adds.




Tender Announcement

The Internal Tender committee of **Ministry of Social Development** hereby announces the following tender :-

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)
25/2021	Provision of cleaning services for the buildings of Al-Wafa Centers for the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in (Suhar - Shinas - Liwa - Suwaiq and Al- Khaboura) affiliated to the General Directorate of Social Development in the Governorates of North and South Al Batinah	Companies registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board, which have the activities of cleaning, washing and pest control services, and which are registered in excellent, first or second or third or fourth degree.	Monday 10-1-2022 02:00 PM	Sunday 30-1-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) , On wednesday 22/12/2021.

❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.

❖ For Inquiry , please contact through the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

" The lowest or any other tender shall not be binding to the Ministry "

www.mosd.gov.om

Children draw inspiration from 'Maritime Glories of Oman'



MUSCAT: The National Museum, represented by the Learning Centre and in cooperation with the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), organised an artistic workshop themed "Maritime Glories of Oman".

The workshop, which coincides with the celebration of the Armed Forces Day, was held at the headquarters of the Sultan's Armed Forces Museum.

The workshop was presented by Abdullah bin Muhammad al Rajaibi, Education Specialist (Outreach Programme) at the National Museum, to an audience of school students.

The students painted the *Shabab Oman* ship, which plays a prominent role in spreading the message of peace and strengthening friendship with all nations. They also painted various equipment belonging to the Royal Air Force of Oman and the Royal Army of Oman.

The workshop came as part of the activities accompanying the inauguration of "The Biography of a Leader and his Glorious Reign" exhibition at the headquarters of the Sultan's Armed Forces Museum in Bait Al Falaj. — **ONA**



Sultan Qaboos University Hospital

TENDER ANNOUNCEMENT

Sultan Qaboos University Hospital announces the following tender:

Tender No.	Subject	Non-Refundable Fee	Last Collection Date	Site Visit Date	Last Date of Submission
TAD/T/ 826/2021	SUPPLY INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE OF GENERAL HOSPITAL FURNITURE IN RADIOLOGY EXTENSION BUILDING IN BLOCK 8 LEVEL 2 AND 3 AT SQUH	OMR. 25	04/01/2022	05/01/2022	31/01/2022

Tender Conditions:

- The companies who are registered in Tender Board shall collect the documents during office hours from 8.00 am to 1.00 pm from the Procurement Department/ Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.
- The site visit shall be at 10.00 am in the Technical Affairs Department building / Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.
- The Tenderers shall submit with the form of tender a certified cheque or tender bond from a locally registered bank in the sum of (1%) of the tender value and valid for 90 days from the date of tender submission and addressed to the chairman of tender committee, Sultan Qaboos University.
- The tender quotations shall be sealed and addressed to Procurement Director; Sultan Qaboos University Hospital. The tender number and the name of the tender shall be mentioned on the tender document. It is not accepted to indicate or mention the name of the company or its logo on the envelop.
- The quotations are subject to the Tender General Terms & Conditions for the Sultan Qaboos University Hospital.
- Sultan Qaboos University Hospital is not bound to accept the lowest bid or any other bid.

Procurement Directorate
Sultan Qaboos University Hospital
AL Khoudh / Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24144688 / 24144633
Fax: 24413156
E-mail: hospitalprocure@squ.edu.om
www.squ.edu.om

UN AGENCY CUTS FOOD AID TO YEMEN FOR WANT OF FUNDS

SANAA: The World Food Programme said on Wednesday it was “forced” to cut aid to Yemen due to lack of funds, and warned of a surge in hunger in the war-torn country.

“From January, eight million will receive a reduced food ration, while five million at immediate risk of slipping into famine conditions will remain on a full ration,” the United Nations agency said in a statement, adding that it was “running out of funds”.

Yemen has been devastated by a civil war between the Saudi-backed government and Ansar Allah since 2014, and millions of civilians are on the brink of famine.

The fighting has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions and left some 80 per cent of Yemenis dependent on aid.

“Every time we reduce the amount of food, we know that more people who are already hungry and food insecure will join the ranks of the millions who are starving,” said WFP Middle



Ahmed Abdo Salem, a two-year-old Yemeni child displaced by conflict suffering from malnutrition (weighing only five kilograms), is measured at a health clinic in the war-ravaged western Hodeida province. — AFP file photo

East and North Africa director Corinne Fleischer, according to the statement.

“But desperate times call for desperate measures and we have to stretch our limited resources and prioritise, focusing on people who are in the most critical state.”

WFP said that it needs \$813 million to continue to help the most vulnerable in Yemen

through May and \$1.97 billion during 2022 to continue to deliver food assistance to families on the brink of famine.

The UN warned in March of a “death sentence” against Yemen after a donor conference yielded less than half the funds needed to prevent famine.

It had appealed for \$3.85 billion to pay for urgently

Desperate times call for desperate measures and we have to stretch our limited resources and prioritise, focusing on people who are in the most critical state

CORINNE FLEISCHER
WFP director

needed aid, but just \$1.7 billion was offered at a virtual pledging conference co-hosted by Sweden and Switzerland.

Shrinking humanitarian budgets last year forced the closure of many programmes, including health services and food distribution, heaping hardship on a country the UN has said is already witnessing the world’s worst humanitarian crisis. — AFP

Lebanon paralysis hampers international support: UN

BEIRUT: The international community will not show up for Lebanon if political paralysis continues to hamper the implementation of desperately needed reforms, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Tuesday.

“The international community will probably not — independently of support that has already been provided — respond the way it needs to respond if they see the country is paralysed,” Guterres told a press conference at the end of a three-day visit to the crisis-hit country.

“We need the support of the international community to be much larger than it is today and the Lebanese people deserve it but

there is homework that needs to be done in Lebanon,” he said, referring to reforms.

Lebanon is grappling with an unprecedented economic crisis branded by the World

Bank as one the planet’s worst in modern times.

More than 80 per cent of the population lives in poverty and the local currency has lost more than 90 per cent of its value on the black market.

However, international donors have only funded 11 per cent of the \$383 million UN response plan for the country, Guterres said.

He urged Lebanese leaders to take steps to revive confidence, including by restarting talks with the International Monetary Fund.

“It is so important to restart negotiations with (the) IMF and to reestablish a credible plan for economic recovery... to mobilise the support of (the) international community but that requires political will,” he said.

Political squabbling has repeatedly hampered financial recovery efforts, including talks with the IMF which were launched last year but soon hit a wall. — AFP

Libya delays election seen as key to peace

TRIPOLI: Authorities over-seeing war-torn Libya’s first presidential election have confirmed that holding it on Friday as scheduled is “impossible” and suggested a month-long delay.

The vote was intended to mark a fresh start for war-torn Libya, a year after a landmark ceasefire and more than a decade after its 2011 revolt that toppled and killed dictator Moamer Kadhafi.

But speculation of a delay had been mounting for weeks, amid bitter disputes over the vote’s legal basis, the powers of the winner and the candidacies of several deeply divisive figures.

On Wednesday, the chairman of the parliamentary committee overseeing the vote wrote to the assembly’s speaker saying that “after consulting the technical, judicial and security reports, we inform you of the impossibility of holding the elections on the date of December 24, 2021”.

It did not propose an alternative to Friday, a date set last year during UN-led peace talks in Tunis.

The election, intended to go hand-in-hand with parliamentary polls, was part of a United Nations-led peace process overshadowed by corruption allegations and the resignation of special envoy Jan Kubis just weeks before the elections.

The process was also mired by rancorous divisions over whether controversial figures should be allowed to stand.

Seif al Islam Kadhafi, a son of Moamer, and eastern military chief Khalifa Haftar were both in the running despite accusations of war crimes.

Interim Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah’s candidacy also sparked controversy as he had pledged not to run as part of his original leadership bid.

“Every single faction in Libya has an issue with one of these three candidates,” said Claudia Gazzini, a Libya expert at the International Crisis Group.

“So they tried to stop these candidates from running using legal means, but failing that there seems to have been an informal agreement between some factions not to let the elections go forward.” — AFP

Ancient sites shelter Syria’s displaced

IDLIB: Mohamad Othman remembers going on school trips to ancient archaeological sites in Syria, never imagining one of them would become his home.

Othman and his family have been living in a tent amidst ancient ruins at Sarjableh near the Turkish border since fleeing for their lives some 2-1/2 years ago during a government offensive in northwestern Syria.

Rocks gathered from the site anchor down their tent, one of several dozen that are sheltering families who have fled their homes during the decade-long Syrian war.

Their clothes hang to dry on two lines strung between the tent and an ancient stone portico. Their children clamber over the rocks and balance on walls in this unusual if dangerous playground.

“In the summer, we face scorpions, snakes and dust, and all the pressures of life, and in winter the cold. The situation is desperate. There are no health services,” Othman, 30, said.

He said shelling forced them to flee their village near Maarat al Numan, an area close to the frontline between government and rebel forces that has been pummelled in various bouts of conflict during Syria’s decade-long conflict.



Mahmoud Abu Khalifa stands inside an ancient cave he uses to store his belongings and raise his sheep, at the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Babisqa, Syria. — Reuters

A father of four, he struggles to make an income, depending on seasonal work such as olive picking and any other jobs he can pick up. When there is no work, he is forced to go into debt to provide the basics. His children do not go to school.

“When the last bombardment and attack began, we left to come to here,” Othman said. “We did not find a place to take shelter, so

we lived here among the ruins.”

The site, an early Christian settlement with ruins dating to the 5th century, has been popular with the displaced because they do not have to pay to stay there, unlike other areas where landowners charge rent.

“Everyone here used to have land that we would farm and we had livelihoods in our villages and did not need anyone. But our

fate was to be displaced,” Othman said.

“We did not leave our land by our own free will to come to an area that has been uninhabited for thousands of years.”

There are some 2.8 million displaced people in northwestern Syria, with 1.7 million of them in sites for the internally displaced, the United Nations says.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

DAMASCUS

Syria war killed 3,700 in 2021

The conflict in Syria killed 3,746 people in 2021, a monitor said on Wednesday, significantly fewer than in 2020, which had already seen the decade-old war’s lowest death toll. According to figures compiled by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 1,505 of them were civilians and among those 360 were children. The figure is by far the lowest tally since the start of the war in Syria and confirms a downward trend that saw 6,800 people killed last year and just over 10,000 in 2019.



The Landmine Monitor said in November that Syria had overtaken Afghanistan as the country with the highest number of recorded casualties from landmines and explosive remnants of war.

JERUSALEM

‘US and Israel need joint strategy on Iran’

The United States and Israel are at a “critical juncture” on various security issues and should develop a joint strategy, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan (pictured) told Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in Jerusalem on Wednesday.

Sullivan’s 30-hour visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories, days before Christmas, amid new global worries about the coronavirus pandemic, suggested urgency in Washington’s desire to strengthen a long-standing



alliance.

Bennett tweeted that the “productive” talks had included the “growing threat posed by Iran and its negotiations with the world powers”.

ISTANBUL

Turkey authorises use of own Turkovac vaccine

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Wednesday announced the emergency use approval of Turkey’s first domestically-developed coronavirus vaccine.

Turkovac in June entered Phase III trials involving 40,800 participants in Turkey. No official data about its efficacy have been released. But the health ministry’s coronavirus advisory board member Ates Kara told Turkish media that it was “very successful” and could be “a little better in comparison with other



inactivated vaccines”.

“No individuals vaccinated with Turkovac have had a severe form of Covid-19 requiring hospitalisation or intensive care so far,” Kara was quoted as saying last weekend.

In brief

■ YANGON



ONE DEAD, DOZENS MISSING AFTER LANDSLIDE AT MINE

Myanmar rescuers scoured a lake for dozens of people missing after a landslide near a jade mine killed at least one person on Wednesday, authorities said.

The disaster struck at a mine in the country's northern Hpakant township close to the Chinese border, where billions of dollars of the precious mineral are believed to be scraped from bare hillsides each year.

Rescuers initially said at least 70 were missing after the landslide, but later added only 20 were unaccounted for.

Hundreds of diggers had returned to Hpakant during the rainy season to prospect in the treacherous open-cast mines, according to a local activist, despite a junta ban on digging until March 2022.

■ NUKU'ALOFA



ACID RAIN WARNING AFTER VOLCANIC ERUPTION

A toxic cloud spewing from an erupting volcano in Tonga could dump acid rainfall across the Pacific kingdom, potentially poisoning drinking water and damaging people's skin and eyes, emergency services have warned.

The remote Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcano erupted on Monday, sending plumes 18 kilometres into the air, Tonga Geological Services (TGS) said.

Police reported no injuries from the eruption but TGS said late on Tuesday that the dust and gas could result in acidic rainfall if mixed with water in the atmosphere.

It advised residents to remove guttering systems from their rainwater storage systems until the all-clear was given.

■ TOKYO



MCDONALD'S RATIONS FRIES DUE TO POTATO SHORTAGE

A new kind of chip shortage has hit Japanese supply chains, with McDonald's forced to ration fries in the country as Covid-19 and floods in Canada squeeze potato imports. McDonald's Japan said it will only sell small-sized French fries for a week from Friday to avoid shortages.

"Due to large-scale flooding near the Port of Vancouver... and the global supply chain crunch caused by the coronavirus pandemic, there are delays in the supply of potatoes," it said in a statement. The company said it has taken the measure to ensure that customers can still order fries, even though the "stable procurement of resource materials" is proving difficult.

Duterte declares state of calamity in typhoon-devastated areas

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has declared a state of calamity to ramp up relief operations for more than 2 million people affected by the strongest typhoon to hit the country this year, officials said on Wednesday.

Foreign donations also poured in to boost local efforts to deliver help ahead of Christmas to the central and southern provinces battered by Typhoon Rai, presidential spokesperson Karlo Nograles said.

Duterte announced the declaration of a state of calamity during a televised talk this week, Nograles said.

"The declaration of a state of calamity will hasten the rescue and relief and rehabilitation efforts of the government and the private sector," Duterte said.

"This will also be an effective mechanism to control the prices of goods and commodities in the areas," he added.

At least 375 people were killed in floods, landslides and other accidents caused by the typhoon, police said.

About 2.4 million people were affected by Rai's onslaught, including some 684,000 people who were displaced, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Local officials and residents have continued to appeal for more food, water, blankets, temporary shelter, construction materials and other supplies on television, radio and social media.

Mark Timbal, spokesperson for the national disaster agency,



A resident looks at a vehicle swept away in Loboc town. — AFP

assured the affected residents that help was on the way.

"We are seeing the appeals and that is one of the reasons why we are utilising the usual assets of the armed forces of the Philippines, private organisations and private airline companies," he said.

"We have enough supplies from the national government," he added. "Relief will come to them soon."

China on Wednesday announced it was donating \$1 million to relief efforts, while the European Union said it was allocating an initial amount of

1.7 million euros (\$1.9 million) in humanitarian assistance.

The United States, France, Canada, Australia, Japan, Britain and other countries have also sent and pledged assistance, Nograles said.

Typhoon Rai, which slammed into the country's eastern coast on December 16, flattened thousands of houses, ripped off rooftops, damaged buildings, uprooted trees and knocked out power and communication lines.

The weather bureau said a new low pressure area has been monitored east of the southern

region of Mindanao, and it was closely watching it.

"This low pressure area has a 60-70 per cent chance to develop into a tropical depression," the weather bureau said in a statement.

It urged the public to remain on alert for possible changes in the weather forecast, to take precautionary measures, and to be vigilant against false and inaccurate information being circulated by unverified sources.

The Philippine archipelago is hit by an average of 20 tropical cyclones every year. — dpa

Marcos Jr takes clear lead in Philippine election: Poll

MANILA: The son of late Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos has emerged as the clear favourite for next year's presidential election, taking more than a 20-point lead over his closest rival in a poll published on Wednesday.

Ferdinand Marcos Jr topped the Pulse Asia Survey of 2,400 respondents with 53 per cent of votes, while his running mate, Sara Duterte-Carpio, the daughter



of President Rodrigo Duterte, topped a separate poll for vice president with 45 per cent.

Respondents to the December 1-6 poll were asked to pick their first choice for president and vice president if the vote were held during the survey period. In the Philippines, the president and vice president are elected separately.

The election to choose a successor to Duterte, who is barred by the constitution from seeking re-election, is on May 9.

The Marcos family is among the

country's most famous dynasties and despite its fall from grace, it has retained powerful political connections and steadfast support in its stronghold of Ilocos Norte province.

Working to the advantage of Marcos, analysts say, is his strong social media presence aimed at the youth, who make up half of eligible voters who were not born when Marcos senior was in power.

— Reuters

Tanker captain found guilty for oil spill in Mauritius

PORT LOUIS: The captain and first mate of a bulk carrier that crashed into a coral reef off Mauritius, causing the Indian Ocean archipelago's worst-ever environmental disaster, have been convicted of endangering safe navigation.

The *MV Wakashio*, a Japanese-owned but Panamanian-flagged vessel, ran aground in July 2020, spilling more than 1,000 tonnes of toxic fuel into the pristine waters of Mauritius, coating mangroves, corals and other fragile ecosystems.

The vessel's Indian captain, Sunil Kumar Nandeshwar, who was convicted by a court in the capital Port Louis on Tuesday, admitted drinking during an onboard party.

He and first officer, Sri Lankan



The *MV Wakashio* ran aground in July 2020, spilling more than 1,000 tonnes of toxic fuel into the pristine waters of Mauritius.

national Hitihanillage Subhoda Janendra Tilakaratna, were found guilty of "endangering safe navigation" and are due to be sentenced on December 27.

The *MV Wakashio* was sailing from Singapore to Brazil with 3,800 tonnes of fuel oil and 200

tonnes of diesel onboard when it ran into the reef off the southeast coast of Mauritius, a paradise island nation that heavily relies on tourism for its revenue.

"A birthday party had been held on board and I had consumed alcohol in moderation," the

58-year-old captain said.

He added that he had given instructions to approach Mauritian waters to get a network so crew members could phone their families as they had not been in contact because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Myanmar rebel group calls for no-fly zone to protect civilians

MAE SOT: Myanmar's oldest rebel force wants international help to establish a "no-fly zone" near the Thai border, after warning there was a danger of clashes with the army resulting in civilians being targeted by air strikes.

There has been an escalation in fighting recently between the army and the Karen National Union (KNU), prompting thousands of people to seek refuge in Thailand.

About 3,400 people have taken shelter in Thailand over recent days, Thai authorities said. Thousands more are stranded on the Myanmar side of the border, waiting to cross.

In a statement released this week, the KNU warned of a "high possibility" of military air strikes on civilians.

"These air strikes won't target military bases but civilian bases as in schools, hospitals, houses and villages," the head of the KNU's foreign affairs department, Saw Taw Nee, said, citing his experience from previous bouts of fighting.

The KNU urged the international community to identify a no-fly zone by seeking an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council.

Last month, the UN Security Council in a rare statement that was agreed by its 15 members, expressed concern over violence across Myanmar and urged the military to exercise utmost restraint. International efforts to end the conflict in Myanmar since a February coup have been limited to diplomatic initiatives and attempts to exert economic pressure through Western sanctions.

Since the military overthrew the civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) has said that more than 1,300 people have been killed by the security forces.

The military has said the figures from AAPP, a monitoring group cited by the United Nations, are exaggerated. — Reuters

"The sea was bad, but the visibility was clear and it was safe to navigate... At one point, the ship could not move and had touched the sea floor," Nandeshwar said.

"Since I had had a few drinks, it did not seem worthwhile to intervene and it did not occur to me that we were sailing that close."

Both men have apologised over the incident.

More than 1,000 tonnes of oil seeped into waters full of marine life from a gash in the vessel's hull before salvage crews were able to remove all the remaining fuel.

The accident occurred near two ecologically critical sites: Blue Bay, known for its coral gardens, and Pointe D'Esny, which hosts a fragile mangrove forest critical in the fight against global warming.

— AFP

NATIONS MAKE URGENT PLEAS
FOR CITIZENS TO VACCINATE

Omicron forces new restrictions

SYDNEY: Singapore suspended quarantine-free travel bookings and Australia renewed its vaccination push on Wednesday as surging Omicron infections just days before Christmas forced authorities to impose new curbs and expedite booster shots.

Governments globally have tightened social mobility restrictions and made urgent pleas for citizens to vaccinate as Omicron emerges as the dominant strain of the coronavirus, upending reopening plans that many hoped would herald the start of a post-pandemic era in 2022.

Singapore will freeze all new ticket sales for flights and buses under its programme for quarantine-free travel into the city-state from Thursday to January 20, the government said on Wednesday, citing risk from the fast-spreading Omicron.

“Our border measures will help to buy us time to study and understand the Omicron

variant, and to strengthen our defences, including enhancing our healthcare capacity, and getting more people vaccinated and boosted,” the health ministry said in a statement.

In Hong Kong, Cathay Pacific Airways Ltd said it would cancel some passenger flights in January after the Asian financial centre tightened quarantine rules.

Japan reported its first suspected case of community transmission of Omicron on Wednesday while India has urged its states to prepare for surges and allowed them to impose restrictions on crowds and gatherings.

India’s Omicron cases have nearly doubled over the past week. US President Joe Biden on Tuesday promised half a billion free rapid Covid-19 tests and warned the quarter of American adults who are unvaccinated that their choices could spell the “difference between life and death”. — Reuters



People queue to pick up coronavirus disease (COVID-19) antigen test kits, as the latest Omicron variant emerges as a threat, in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, on Wednesday. — Reuters

■ WELCOMING FIRST DAY OF WINTER



Revellers sing and dance at the Stonehenge stone circle as they welcome in the winter solstice, as the sun rises in Amesbury, Britain, on Wednesday. — Reuters

Minister swims 12 hours to shore after copter crash

ANTANANARIVO: A Madagascan minister was one of two survivors to have swum some 12 hours to shore on Tuesday after their helicopter crashed off the island’s northeastern coast, authorities said.

A search was still ongoing for two other passengers after the crash on Monday, whose cause was not immediately clear, police and port authorities said.

Serge Gelle, the country’s secretary of state for police, and a fellow policeman reached land in the seaside town of Mahambo separately on Tuesday morning, apparently after ejecting themselves from the aircraft, port authority chief Jean-Edmond Randrianantenaina said.

In a video shared on social

media, 57-year-old Gelle appears lying exhausted on a deck chair, still in his camouflage uniform.

“My time to die hasn’t come yet,” says the general, adding he is cold but not injured.

The helicopter was flying him and the others to inspect the site of a shipwreck off the northeastern coast on Monday morning.

At least 39 people died in that disaster, police chief Zafisambatra Ravoavy said on Tuesday, in an increase from a previous toll after rescue workers retrieved 18 more bodies.

Ravoavy earlier said that Gelle had used one of the helicopter’s seats as a flotation device.

“He has always had great stamina in sport, and he’s kept up this rhythm as minister, just

Madagascar shipwreck death toll rises to 64

ANTANANARIVO: The death toll from a shipwreck off Madagascar’s northeastern coast has risen to at least 64 after 25 more bodies were discovered, maritime authorities said on Wednesday.

A wooden vessel, believed to be a cargo ship carrying passengers illegally, sank in the Indian Ocean on Monday with 130 people on board. Five children were among the dead.

Fifty passengers have since been rescued and around 15 remain missing. The search for survivors continues.

“Twenty-five bodies were found

this morning near Sainte-Marie islands, probably due to sea currents, which brings the death total to 64,” gendarmerie general Zafisambatra Ravoavy said.

Maritime authorities said initial investigations suggested the vessel’s engine had a “technical problem”, leaving the boat vulnerable to tidal forces and causing it to run aground on a reef.

A Malagasy government minister who travelled to the disaster scene swam 12 hours to shore on Tuesday after his helicopter crashed off the island nation’s northeastern coast. — AFP

like a thirty-year-old,” he said. “He has nerves of steel.” Gella became minister as part

of a cabinet reshuffle in August after serving in the police for three decades. — AFP

Teenager pilot inches closer to circumnavigating globe

JAKARTA: Teenager Zara Rutherford, bidding to become the youngest woman to fly solo around the globe, recalled the challenges involved in crossing a deserted and icebound Siberia on Wednesday after landing in Jakarta.

The 19-year-old Belgian-British pilot, who left Belgium in August, hopes to complete her 51,000-kilometre (32,000 mile) trip across five continents and 52 countries by mid-January 2022.

The toughest leg so far was flying across northern Russia, she told reporters in the Indonesian

capital, because if anything went wrong, help in sub-zero temperatures would likely be hours away.

“If for any reason the engine stops, I think I could survive. I could either land on the land or (use) the parachute or ditch in the water. I’ll be ok,” she said.

“The problem is if I’m in minus 35 degrees Celsius, once I’m on the ground and I’m three hours away from the closest human, ...I actually don’t know how long I can survive.”

To meet the criteria for a round-the-world flight,



Zara Rutherford, the 19-year-old Belgian-British pilot, who left Belgium in August, hopes to complete her 51,000-kilometre (32,000 mile) trip across five continents and 52 countries by mid-January 2022.

Rutherford has designated two points on opposite each other on the globe, Jambi in Indonesia and the Colombian town of Tumaco.

Describing every solo flight as an “adventure” and a challenge of wits, the daughter of two pilots said she hoped her journey would inspire other young women into the fields of aviation, science, technology, mathematics and engineering.

The record she is bidding to break is held by Shaesta Waiz, who was 30 when she flew solo around the world in 2017.

— Reuters

SHORT TAKES

ROME

Draghi signals he’s willing to become president

Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi signalled on Wednesday he would be willing to become head of state when the position falls free next year, saying his unity government had already completed much of its agenda.

Parliament will convene to choose a new president in January, and the former European Central Bank chief is the book-makers’ favourite to replace Sergio Mattarella, who has ruled out another seven-year term.



Draghi said his 10-month-old administration had laid the foundations for key work to continue, including implementation of a multi-billion-euro EU recovery fund.

AMSTERDAM

Life terms sought in flight MH17 trial

Dutch prosecutors on Wednesday demanded life sentences for three Russians and a Ukrainian charged with murder over the shooting down of a passenger jet over Ukraine in 2014.

They said the defendants, who are all at large, helped supply a missile system that Russian-backed separatists used to fire a rocket at Malaysia Airlines flight MH17. All 298 people on board were killed. Prosecutor Manon Ridderbeks demanded life terms for all four, named as Igor Girkin,



Sergey Dubinsky, Oleg Pulatov and Leonid Kharchenko. Most of the victims were Dutch nationals. The Dutch government holds Russia responsible. Authorities in Moscow deny involvement.

LONDON

Abramovich settles libel claim over Putin book

Chelsea football club owner Roman Abramovich said on Wednesday he had accepted an apology and rewrites after suing the author and publisher of a book about Russian President Vladimir Putin’s inner circle.

Abramovich sued publisher HarperCollins and Catherine Belton in the High Court over passages about the billionaire’s acquisition of the English club and business dealings in Russia in her bestselling book *Putin’s People*. A judge in November



had ruled that claims in the book were defamatory against Abramovich, opening up the possibility of a full libel trial, which *The Guardian* reported could have cost some £10 million.

Cyber experts race to fix ‘flaw of the decade’

GOPAL RATNAM

Criminals, cyberspies, and hackers around the world are launching thousands of attempts every hour to exploit a flaw in a widely used logging software as cybersecurity experts are scrambling to close the loophole and prevent catastrophic attacks.

In early December, a security researcher at Chinese online retailer Alibaba discovered and reported the software flaw in a widely used tool called log4j. The open-source tool is a Java-based library developed by Apache that software developers use to track activity within an application.

Every time anyone on the Internet connects to a site, a cloud-service provider, or others, the company managing the site or the service captures data about the activity and stores it in a log. Hackers are now attempting to break into such logs and launch attacks.

Steve Povolny, principal engineer and head of advanced threat research at McAfee Enterprise said, “The simplicity of the attack, the ubiquity of vulnerable installed base, and the wide availability of exploit code really combine to make this ... maybe the vulnerability of the decade.”

Although Apache has offered a patch to fix the flaw, companies and government agencies use many versions of the log4j tool and are trying to figure out which fix works with what version, Povolny said. But as of late last week, security researchers have identified that a fix known as version 2.16 “effectively solves the problem,” he said.

Nevertheless, as companies and government agencies around the world attempt to fix the problem there’s “no question that this has been and is going to continue to be further weaponised,” Povolny said. The widespread vulnerability marks a bookend to a year notable for significant cyber- and ransomware attacks. At the start of 2021 the world began to grapple with the consequences of a sophisticated Russian attack on Solar Winds, a software management company, which was discovered in December 2019. The attack exposed dozens of US agencies and thousands of companies to potential exploitation by Russian intelligence services.

— dpa



The simplicity of the attack, the ubiquity of vulnerable installed base, and the wide availability of exploit code really combine to make this ... maybe the vulnerability of the decade

STEVE POVOLNY
McAfee Enterprise



ART OF ICE

A woman stands next to three stalactites in a long natural ice cave created by melted water accumulated during the summer and by a siphon effect leaves in the autumn giving way to an ice cathedral, at the Glacier 3000 ski resort in Les Diablerets, Switzerland, on Wednesday.
— Reuters

Appraisal to improve govt services



Ali Al Matani
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WE HAVE SEEN IMPROVEMENTS EVERYWHERE IN OUR LIVES DUE TO THE MOST PRAGMATIC POLICIES OF THE GOVERNMENT AND, WE HOPE FOR MORE ADVANCEMENT WHICH CAN BE ACHIEVED BY THE APPRAISALS

There is an established fact, of which we all should be aware, that for the improvement of the services of the government organisations appraisal is required. This is not just a requirement in our own country, but everywhere in the world. This improves the performance of a government organisation as well as their employees. This is a very important element of working in such agencies.

Nobody anywhere in the world expects any progress in the working and performance of any government organisation without appraisals. Wherever such measures are in place, the services improve. Assessment of performance of every individual employee and the organisation is the ultimate path towards progress and development. There is no loser in this way of working. The only thing it requires is innovation to bring quality in the work.

If the Minister of Labour starts appraisal of the performance of the employees of the state from January 2022, it will be real work for improvement of the services of the government organisations and agencies. It would ultimately lead to a better standard of their work.

If done so, there would be less complaint of non-accomplishment of tasks, delays and uncertainty about the time required for the work. These are the basic issues faced by the people who

contact these organisations for their work.

Furthermore, it would also make the working of employees easier and simpler as they would have deadlines to meet and a sense of responsibility towards those who come to them for their issues. If this starts, it will require everybody to cooperate and make efforts to improve the working and performance everywhere. The Vision 2040 of the Sultanate of Oman also shows the vision for improvement in performance everywhere. This is the guarantee towards the modern style of function in every office.

There is no doubt that evaluation of 175,000 employees of the state is a herculean task. But it would be beneficial for the government organisations as well as the people. This will ignite the competition between various agencies and individuals working for the state. This is the best way to get rid of any weakness in performance in these organisations.

This is the most positive and progressive way of correcting things. The appraisal is the method which not only diagnoses the disease, but also treats them during the process. In most cases no extra effort would be required to make the employees, and those who contact them, equally satisfied.

The appraisal will also show the directions in which training, skill developments and improvements would

be required for all individuals and organisations. This will lead to a complete change in the working in various sectors. This is what we have always looked for. The appraisals lead to liberating the work from the bureaucratic bottlenecks. This is how everybody’s rights are served in a more accurate manner. The objectives of the efforts of all sides are achieved in a smooth manner. We all know that the employees are the cornerstone of any work. If they were allowed to perform their job more seriously, ultimately the country as well as its people get the benefit.

We hope that the Ministry of Labour would take care of this aspect of working of government employees. The ministry is well capable of this and knows how to implement the idea as this will guarantee the prosperity of the entire country. These are the appraisals, evaluations and assessments which are required in all aspects of our lives then why not in the functioning of an organisation and an employee.

This will serve the objective of Oman’s Vision 2040 of which we the people are the ultimate beneficiary. We have seen improvements everywhere in our lives due to the most pragmatic policies of the government and, we hope for more advancement which can be achieved by the appraisals.

The United States must not make empty threats



Jeffrey Frankel

THIS HAS IMPOSED MASSIVE COSTS NOT ONLY IN BLOOD AND TREASURE, BUT ALSO IN TERMS OF AMERICA’S CREDIBILITY

As Russia masses troops along its border with Ukraine, fears of an invasion are mounting. The United States has warned that Russia would pay a heavy price, exacted first and foremost through economic sanctions. But President Joe Biden has also declared that he would not send military personnel to defend Ukraine. It is the right approach.

On one hand, the threat of economic sanctions — in particular, exclusion of Russia from the SWIFT international payments system and cancellation of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline to Germany — might be enough to deter Russian President Vladimir Putin. On the other hand, any threat that the US and its allies would intervene with troops

would not be believable — inviting Putin to call the West’s bluff.

But if Americans and Europeans are unprepared to send troops to Ukraine, why did Western leaders in 2008 promise eventual Nato membership to Ukraine, as well as to Georgia? After all, Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty declares that an armed attack against one Nato ally is effectively an attack against all of them. And yet nobody was prepared to come to Georgia’s defence when Russia invaded in 2008, or to Ukraine’s defence when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. Nor has the West done anything to stop Russia from occupying Ukraine’s eastern Donbas region. Against this background, talk about Ukraine

joining Nato has merely provoked Putin, while undermining the West’s credibility.

This reflects a broader problem with US foreign policy since the end of World War II: a poor match between the signals it sends and what it is subsequently able to carry out.

For starters, the US has often overstated its resolve in military engagements. For example, in Vietnam and Afghanistan, it failed to achieve its goals and eventually decided to cut its losses. The speedy collapse of the US-backed governments in Saigon and Kabul showed just how little progress had been made — and dealt heavy blows to America’s global reputation. America’s intervention in Lebanon was

blighted by a similar mistake. A multinational force, including hundreds of US soldiers, arrived in August 1982, in order to oversee the Palestine Liberation Organization’s withdrawal from the country. By early September, that mission was complete, and US troops left.

But a massacre of Palestinian refugees by a Christian militia brought Western troops back to Lebanon, where they remained with a far hazier mission. In October 1983, Lebanese terrorists drove a truck full of explosives into the US Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 241 American military personnel. (Meanwhile, a separate attack killed 58 French paratroopers.) The US and its allies withdrew their troops in a

matter of months.

Some have argued that the withdrawal was a mistake in that it sent a message to America’s enemies, such as Osama bin Laden, that the US was a “paper tiger.” This is the wrong lesson. In fact, US president Ronald Reagan should have quietly disengaged once the original mission was complete. The lesson is clear: the US should ensure that any declaration of a willingness to use military force corresponds with what a leader can actually deliver. And this means more than not overstating one’s commitment. Understating it is also a strategic blunder. After all, a credible threat from a military power like the US can act as a powerful deterrent.

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sport



AL MUSANNAH STUN DHOFAR; AL RUSTAQ EDGE NIZWA

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, DEC 22

Dhofar tasted the first defeat in the league as Al Musannah defeated Salalah giants 3-0 on Wednesday for the sixth week of Omantel League.

At Al Rustaq Sports Complex, Bersini Luko put Al Musannah team ahead in the 44th minute while Naseeb al Ghilani added the second goal in the following minute.

The hosts ended the first half leading with 2-0. In the second half, Hamood al Saadi confirmed the southern Batinah team's triumph as he netted the third goal in the 72nd minute.



With the victory, Al Musannah crossed Dhofar and reached the 13th points while Salalah giant freezed at 11th point.

Al Rustaq stunned Nizwa 3-0 at the latter's home in Nizwa Sports Complex. Abdulrahman al Ghassani, Yousef al Mamari and Khalil al

Alawi netted the goals for the guests.

The hosts Nizwa still did not register any victory in the league and the team players did not score any goals. Rustaq's win took them to 10 points while Nizwa are still struggling in the below table order with two points only.

Sohar snatched a crucial 2-0 win over Al Ittihad at Al Saada Sports Complex. Mubarak al Maqbali was the star of the match as he scored the winners in the 31st and 82nd minutes.

The triumph raised Northern Batinah team to seven points while Al Ittihad remained at the danger zone

with three points only.

Al Nahdha and Bahla ended their match in a goalless draw at Al Buraimi Sports Complex. The Al Buraimi representative missed a golden opportunity as Al Nasr was held to a draw.

Al Nahdha's draw raised them to 11 points while Bahla possesses nine points.

Saham registered their fourth draw in the league as they held Al Nasr to a goalless draw at Sohar Sports Complex.

Both teams did not manage to score in the match and the draw kept Al Nasr in the 13th position while Saham at 4th position.



Muscat FC player Mukhaled al Raqadi passes away

SPORTS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 22

Muscat's player Mukhaled al Raqadi passed away on Wednesday ahead of the Muscat and Suwaiq match in the Omantel league.

The player collapsed during the warm-up session prior to kick off. Later, the player was taken in an ambulance to the nearest hospital.

According to the medical reports, the reason of the death was a heart attack. The sports family in the Sultanate of Oman mourned the sudden death of the young player.



OTE
Oman Trading Establishment LLC



Sultanate of Oman
Consumer Protection Authority

RECALL CAMPAIGN
For i30 FD



Date of Campaign : 23 / 12 / 2021

Campaign Type : Recall

Recall Segment : Electrical

Product Description : Hyundai i30

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle VIN Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2006-2010	Hyundai	i30 FD	KMHDC51DP7U000001 to KMHDC51EBBU319420	287

Description:

Some vehicles might experience the electrical short on the ABS/ESC module power.

Procedure:

Install the PCB relay kit according to the procedure

For More information:

Customers of affected vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment for further details/booking Appointment etc from Date - 23/12/2021

Contact Details:

Toll free No 80050003 on all working days between 8.00 AM to 1.00 PM & 2.00 PM to 5.30 PM with effect from Date 23/12/2021

Fans will enjoy Qatar World Cup: Flick



FRANKFURT: Germany coach Hansi Flick thinks fans will still enjoy the Qatar World Cup even though it is being played in November and December for the first time.

It is not however the first winter World Cup, with Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina and South Africa all having hosted the tournament during the southern

hemisphere winter.

"First of all, it's about beating the pandemic so that it will be possible to watch football together," he told *Sport Bild* on Wednesday.

"But I am convinced the team can enthuse the fans again. If we play passionately, play offensively, then we can emotionally grab people even in the winter."

The euphoria at a tournament grows with every round, he said.

"Of course, that's also possible in December. Then maybe after scoring a goal, mulled wine splashes into the air instead of beer — even if that might be a little harder to get out of your clothes," Flick joked.

The World Cup begins on November 21 with the final

on December 18.

Flick said he has no problem with the minimum goal of reaching the semifinals, which has been set by German Football Federation sporting director Oliver Bierhoff.

"But I also say very clearly: we want to get to the final. And we want to be world champions."

— dpa

SEVILLA DRAW WITH BARCELONA

BARCELONA: Second-placed Sevilla were held to a 1-1 draw by Barcelona on Tuesday, a result that helped Real Madrid to open a five-point lead at the top of LaLiga.

Playing under heavy rain, a much-improved Barcelona desperately tried to score a second goal after Ronald Araujo drew them level with a header in the 45th minute but they were thwarted by an equally determined Sevilla, who were reduced to 10 men after Jules Kounde was shown a straight red card in the 64th.

Sevilla went ahead after Papu Gomez latched on to a Ivan Rakitic corner kick and fired home a low strike.

Barca are seventh in standings with 28 points from 18 games, 15 points behind leaders Real Madrid.

"I honestly think that today we lost two points. We played better and deserved to win. I feel that is evident in our improvement," Barcelona manager Xavi Hernandez told reporters.

"We were unlucky. They score in a set piece play but we had many more

opportunities. The result, a draw away against a great team like Sevilla, is not bad. But it is a point that is not enough for us as we are trying to move up in contention. We let this win slip away from our hands."

Barcelona dominated the first half, had more ball control and could have scored at least twice in the first 30 minutes.

But Sevilla made the most of the single opportunity that came their way in the first half, with Gomez firing home a powerful strike.

Sevilla improved in the second half but then had to switch to damage-limitation mode after Kounde was sent off for a petulant display following a clash with Jordi Alba in the touchline. After being pushed by the Barca defender, Kounde hurled the ball straight into Alba's face.

"It was a very complicated game and the red card caught us when we were playing our best. Kounde knows that he made a mistake," Sevilla manager Julen Lopetegui told reporters.

— Reuters



Scottish, Welsh sport events to be 'spectator-free' to combat Omicron

LONDON: Scottish sports events will become "effectively spectator-free" as part of a drive to slow the spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said on Tuesday.

Sturgeon told the Scottish Parliament that crowds at outdoor public events would be capped at 500 from December 26 for "up to three weeks".

The announcement follows even tougher measures announced in Wales, where all sports events must be held behind closed doors from the same day.

The new rules in Scotland would impact football fixtures over the Christmas and New Year period including the Old Firm derby between Celtic and Rangers on January 2.

Indoor standing events will be limited to 100 spectators, indoor seated events to 200, and outdoor events to 500 people.

"This will of course make sports matches, including football, effectively spectator-free over this three-week period," Sturgeon said.

"And it will also mean that large-scale Hogmanay (New Year) celebrations, including that planned here in our capital city (Edinburgh), will not proceed.

"I know how disappointing this will be for those looking forward to these events, and for the organisers of them."

However, a scheduled winter break for the Scottish Premiership between January 2 and 26 could be brought forward to minimise the economic cost to clubs.

Celtic, Hibernian and Motherwell are among the clubs calling for the winter break to run alongside the three weeks of restrictions.

"In light of today's announcement regarding supporters attending matches,

Celtic can confirm that it has today requested that the SPFL (Scottish Professional Football Leagues) bring forward the scheduled winter break and reschedule the fixtures affected by the regulations announced," the Glasgow giants said in a statement.

"The game owes it to supporters to explore all opportunities to maximise the prospect of all supporters being able to attend matches and support the game they love."

There was also confusion as to why three Scottish Premiership matches due to take place on Wednesday can proceed without crowd limits.

"Why would you say this rule is really important in four days time but not tomorrow night? I don't see the reasoning at all or sense in it," said Aberdeen manager Stephen Glass, whose side travel to Hibernian. — AFP



RECALL CAMPAIGN FOR CADILLAC ESCALADE / CHEVROLET TAHOE, SUBURBAN / GMC YUKON MODEL VEHICLES



Date of Recall: 23/12/2021

Campaign Type: Safety Recall

Recall Segment: Fuel

Product Description: Cadillac Escalade 2021 / Chevrolet Tahoe 2021 / Chevrolet Suburban 2021 / GMC Yukon 2021 / GMC Yukon XL 2021

Model Year	Division	Vehicle Model	Affected Vehicle Vin Range	No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman
2021	Cadillac	Escalade	1GYS47KL2MR189193 to 1GYS48KL2MR189023	0
2021	Chevrolet	Suburban	1GNSC9ED0MR193047 to 1GNSK9KD7MR184935	0
2021	Chevrolet	Tahoe	1GNSC8ED0MR181149 to 1GNSK8KDXMR177648	3
2021	GMC	Yukon	1GKS17ED0MR160847 to 1GKS27KLXMR249320	11
2021	GMC	Yukon XL	1GKS18ED3MR252895 to 1GKS28KL8MR163736	1

DESCRIPTION:

These vehicles may contain a supplier manufacturing defect that can cause the fuel pump to fail or operate intermittently, interrupting the flow of fuel to the engine. If the engine does not receive adequate fuel, the vehicle may unexpectedly stall. The driver may see a check engine light or experience a rough running engine. The vehicle may also be placed into a reduced power mode.

PROCEDURE:

Dealers will replace fuel pump power control module.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Customers of the above mentioned vehicles may please call Oman Trading Establishment LLC for Chevrolet & Cadillac and Moosa Abdul Rahman Hassan & Co LLC for GMC.

CONTACT DETAILS:

For OTE, Call Toll free no. 80050002 on all working days between 8.00am to 1.00pm and 2.00pm to 5.30pm.

For MARH, Call Toll free no. 80076200 on all working days between 8.30am to 1.00pm and 4.00pm to 6.30pm.

Suns roll over Lakers as LeBron injures ankle



LOS ANGELES: Devin Booker and Deandre Ayton powered the NBA-leading Phoenix Suns to a 108-90 victory on Tuesday over the Los Angeles Lakers, whose superstar LeBron James suffered a left ankle injury.

Booker delivered 24 points, nine rebounds and seven assists while Bahamas big man Ayton contributed 19 points and 11 rebounds as the Suns won their fourth game in a row and sixth in seven starts.

The Suns, who lost to Milwaukee in last season's NBA Finals, improved the NBA's best record to 25-5, just ahead of the Golden State Warriors (26-6). It marks the team's second-best 30-game start in team history.

Phoenix started 0-for-9 from 3-point range and finished 12-for-41 with Booker, just back from a hamstring injury that had him miss seven games, going 6-for-11 from beyond the arc.

"Just trust your work," Booker said. "We spend countless hours in the gym. There are four quarters in the game so we try to keep going and stick it out."

The Suns led only 54-52 at halftime but stretched the margin to 85-73 entering the fourth quarter and pulled away from there.

Four-time NBA Most Valuable Player James led the Lakers with 34 points on 13-of-19 shooting and added seven rebounds, two assists and two steals while Russell Westbrook added 22 points and 10 rebounds for the hosts, whose losing streak hit three games.

James, who turns 37 next week, drove to the hoop near the midpoint of the third quarter and his left foot landed on the foot of Phoenix forward Jae Crowder.

James collapsed to the court, grabbed the ankle, rolled over and pounded the court three times with his left fist.

He stayed in the game but wasn't around for the finish, and the Lakers have to be concerned about the status of his ankle with big man Anthony Davis sidelined for four weeks by a knee injury.

The Lakers fell to 16-16 to share seventh in the Western Conference.

— AFP



Cup of Nations in Cameroon from Jan 9 to Feb 6, confirms CAF chief

YAOUNDE: Confederation of African Football (CAF) President Patrice Motsepe confirmed on Tuesday the Africa Cup of Nations would go ahead as planned in Cameroon from January 9 to February 6, ending concerns that the already delayed finals could be postponed again.

The announcement followed a meeting between Motsepe and Cameroon President Paul Biya after concerns had been expressed over a lack of organisation for the 24-team tournament, incomplete building work and the threat of coronavirus outbreaks due to the fast-spreading Omicron variant.

"I'm going to be here on January 7 and I'm coming to watch football," Motsepe told reporters. "I'm coming to watch on January 9 (the opening match between) Cameroon against Burkina Faso. I'll also be around



to see when the trophy is handed over."

Clubs in Europe, where most of the players in the tournament play regularly, are concerned over the healthcare arrangements due to the rising number of Covid-19 cases.

Motsepe previously confirmed

strict testing measures for players and staff, and added on Tuesday that spectators would need to show proof of negative PCR tests.

"We must always identify problems and challenges, and not shy away from them. We must have the confidence and the belief that we can overcome them," he

said.

"Nobody will be allowed into the stadium without a (negative) PCR test. We will have to protect the fans that are there. Of course, there will be concerns about fake tests going around, but we are dealing with those issues."

"We have to have confidence and belief in ourselves as Africans. And we have to have confidence and belief that we can host a very successful Nations Cup in Cameroon."

Cameroon was originally awarded the hosting of the 2019 finals but the tournament was switched to Egypt when CAF found the central African country was not ready.

They were then handed the 2021 tournament, which has since been delayed by 12 months due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

— Reuters

Zverev predicts Djokovic, Medvedev and himself to form big three in 2022

BERLIN: Olympic champion Alexander Zverev is confident a changing of the guard is almost complete in men's tennis with next year's big silverware likely to be shared between Novak Djokovic, Daniil Medvedev and himself.

Germany's Zverev beat Djokovic en route to gold at the Tokyo Olympics and then ended the year by winning the ATP Finals title for the second time.

Djokovic won three of the year's Grand Slam titles but his old rivals Rafa Nadal and Roger Federer failed to add to their collections with the trio tied on 20 majors each.

World number two Medvedev beat Djokovic in the US Open final while Zverev also reached two Grand Slam semis this year.

Heading into the new season, Federer, 40, is still recovering from knee surgery while Nadal, 35, is in the early stages of his comeback from a foot injury.

"I think next year could be very similar to the last six months from this year," Zverev, named German



Sportsman of the Year this week, told Eurosport Germany's Das Gelbe vom Ball podcast.

"Before, there used to be always talk about Nadal, Federer and Djokovic — now the big titles were the Olympics, US Open, Turin (ATP Finals) and Wimbledon, and they were all won by Medvedev, Djokovic and me. I don't expect it to be any different next year."

Zverev ended the year ranked three and believes the number one spot is a viable target.

"I know I'm not far away from it, but for that I also have to win tournaments and Grand Slams," he said.



Theoretically, the 24-year-old Zverev could become number one if he wins the Australian Open and Djokovic misses the tournament because of its Covid-19 vaccine stance.

"The situation with Novak and Australia is still a big question mark," he said. "Of course, I hope that he will be allowed to play, that's very clear."

"There are thousands of mathematical calculations, if he doesn't play Australia and I win the Australian Open, then I'm number one in the world and so on and so forth."

"At the end of the day, now is not the time to think about (being



number one), not is the time to prepare as best as you can so you're physically able to play for it."

Zverev's failure to capture a Grand Slam has surprised some, but he is now a consistent threat at the biggest events after initially struggling to show his best at them.

"I've become much calmer. I'm also getting older. I'm not 18 or 19 anymore. I understand maybe a bit more things about life and understand that you just have to keep calm in important situations," he said. "That has had its effect on me this year."

— Reuters

Nigeria's Osimhen available for AFCON despite injury

ABUJA: Nigeria forward Victor Osimhen said he will be fit for the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) after returning to training ahead of schedule following a serious head injury.

Napoli's Osimhen suffered facial fractures after a clash of heads with Inter Milan's Milan Skriniar on November 21 and required titanium plates and screws to be affixed to his cheekbone and eye socket.

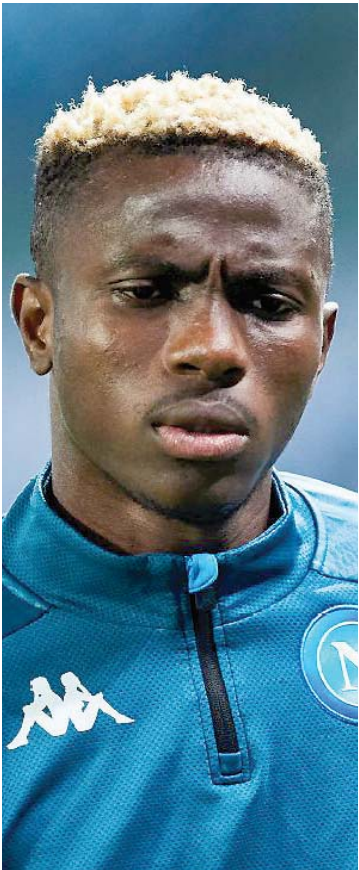
Napoli's initial assessment was that Osimhen would be out for three months but the forward returned to training on Tuesday wearing a protective mask, giving him a chance of making the January 9 to February 6 Cup of Nations in Cameroon.

"I will be available for AFCON unless if (I) am not among the players picked to represent NIGERIA," Osimhen tweeted.

Osimhen was in a good run of form prior to his injury, with nine goals and two assists for Napoli as well as four goals for Nigeria in World Cup qualifying.

Nigeria have been drawn in Group D along with Egypt, Sudan and Guinea-Bissau.

Confederation of African



Football (CAF) President Patrice Motsepe said on Tuesday the tournament would go ahead as planned despite concerns about a lack of organisation, incomplete building work and the threat of coronavirus outbreaks.

— Reuters



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TotalEnergies’ all-electric solar powered LNG bunker project gets boost

SUSTAINABILITY GOALS:
Seeking to strengthen its credentials as a low-carbon energy producer, TotalEnergies has decided to operate Marsa LNG as a carbon-neutral project

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

Agreements signed on Tuesday by Omani and international energy players to unlock the natural gas potential of Block 10 in the central part of the Sultanate of Oman will help advance the development of an all-electric, solar-powered LNG bunker project planned by energy major TotalEnergies at Sohar Port.

Those agreements included the establishment of Marsa LNG, a partnership between TotalEnergies (80 per cent) and OQ (20 per cent), the global integrated energy group of the Sultanate of Oman.

Marsa LNG, as a 33.19 per cent shareholder in a consortium that will develop Block 10, will be entitled to a share of natural gas of about 24,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day (boepd) – output that it can channel as feedstock for the proposed LNG plant at Sohar Port.

In a statement following the signing on Tuesday, TotalEnergies said that Marsa LNG would sell its share of natural gas from Block 10 to



the Omani government for a “duration of 18 years or until the start-up of the Marsa LNG plant”.

Other players with an interest in Block 10 are Shell Integrated Gas Oman BV (53.45 per cent) and OQ (13.36 per cent).

Along with Marsa LNG, they signed a concession agreement with the Omani Ministry of Energy and Minerals to develop Block 10 with Shell as the operator.

“We are pleased to sign these agreements with the Sultanate of Oman and further develop our activities in the country

while contributing to develop its energy sector in a more sustainable manner,” said Laurent Vivier, Senior Vice-President Middle East and North Africa, Exploration and Production, at TotalEnergies.

TotalEnergies’ plans for an LNG plant in Sohar Port, dedicated to the production of low-carbon liquefied natural gas (LNG) as bunker for maritime vessels, was first unveiled in 2019.

While the global economic downturn compounded by the pandemic has somewhat

slowed progress in the delivery of the project, three leading international engineering firms — McDermott, JGC and TechnipFMC — are still competing for a contract to provide the front-end engineering design (FEED) for the LNG plant.

Marsa LNG, with a proposed capacity of 1 million tonnes per annum of LNG, will seek to capitalise on new fuel regulations issued by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) obliging ship-owners to use low sulphur bunker fuel with a

“We are pleased to sign these agreements with the Sultanate of Oman and further develop our activities in the country while contributing to develop its energy sector in a more sustainable manner

LAURENT VIVIER
Senior Vice-President,
TotalEnergies

sulphur content of no more than 0.5 per cent — specs that came into effect from 2020.

When fully operational, Marsa LNG is also set to be the first LNG bunkering facility of its kind in the Middle East.

But seeking to strengthen its credentials as a low-carbon energy producer, TotalEnergies has decided to operate Marsa LNG as a carbon-neutral project.

To this end, the company plans to invest in a solar farm, with battery storage capacity as well, to power the plant with ‘green’ electricity generated solely from the sun’s energy.

In effect, output from Marsa LNG will not only be ‘clean’ — relative to other fossil fuels — but the liquefaction process itself will be essentially carbon-free as well.

Oil prices climb on weaker dollar, China



Flames come out of a chimney at the French oil giant Total Refinery in Donges, France. — Reuters

MELBOURNE: Oil prices rose again on Wednesday as the dollar slipped, with risk appetite returning as some governments resist imposing lockdowns to curb the spread of the Omicron Covid-19 variant and as China said it would be able to sustain economic growth.

US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures rose 50 cents, or 0.7 per cent, to \$71.62 a barrel at 02:35 GMT after jumping 3.7 per cent on Tuesday. Brent crude futures rose 44 cents, or 0.6 per cent, to \$74.42 a barrel after gaining 3.4 per cent.

Oil prices typically move inversely to the US dollar, with a weaker greenback making commodities cheaper for those holding other currencies.

Meanwhile, a senior Chinese state planning official said on Wednesday Beijing would work to aid economic growth, including stepping up government spending, strengthening support to manufacturers and stabilising industry supply chains.

The country, the world’s biggest oil importer, would “strive to stabilise economic operations in the first quarter, the first half and even the whole year,” the official said.

— Reuters

CMA launches app for appeals on decisions

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 22

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has rolled out an app that makes it possible for investors and other market stakeholders to submit appeals against any decisions by the Authority.



Appeals can be filed electronically through the app or personally or through a representative or legal attorney to the Appeals Committee comprising two judges nominated by the Council of the Administrative Affairs of the Judiciary and a member nominated by the Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

“CMA is keen to update its electronic systems for the benefit of individuals and institutions seeking to avail themselves of the services it provides in keeping with the digital transformation goals set out in Oman Vision 2040. The CMA aims to increase efficiency at an annual average of 10 per cent,” it stated.

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 22

The Board of Directors of the Public Authority for Special Economic Zones and Free Zones (OPAZ) held its fourth meeting of the year on Wednesday, under the chairmanship of Dr Ali bin Masoud al Sunaidy, Chairman of OPAZ.

During the meeting, the Board of Directors discussed the digital portal covering the services provided to investors in the special economic zones and free zones.

The portal has been established in line with the digital transformation plan of OPAZ.

This portal aims to facilitate the licensing processes through the special economic zones and



free zones supervised by OPAZ. In a bid to attract more investments, the Board approved a proposal to amend the fees for the different services provided by OPAZ. The proposal included merging and cancelling some fees,

in addition to reviewing the delay penalties.

During the meeting, the Board reviewed the executive status of the usufruct agreements in the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (SEZAD) and the legal actions

taken by OPAZ against the uncompliant companies during the past years. Further, the Board of Directors also approved the fees of the usufruct for one of the green hydrogen projects in Duqm.

OCEC awarded ‘Country Winner’ title in Living Business Programme 2021

MUSCAT: Following Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre’s ongoing commitment to environmental sustainability and awareness, the premier events venue in the Sultanate of Oman was recently awarded the “Country Winner” title by the prestigious HSBC Middle East Living Business Programme for 2021.

Out of a total 71 applicants registered in this cost-free, open-access competition; followed by a shortlisting of 46 companies, Oman Convention and Exhibition Centre (OCEC) was selected as one of five overall winners.

The “Country Winner” award reflects OCEC’s firm commitment to carrying out operations that contribute towards a progressively sustainable planet, accelerated environmental awareness and consistent reduction of carbon



footprint activities associated with the OCEC complex.

Throughout 2021, the programme collected data on participating companies with operations in Bahrain, Egypt, the Sultanate of Oman, Qatar and the UAE. Winners were selected based on jury votes using an Environment, Social and

Governance (ESG) framework.

In terms of the Environment framework, participants were evaluated according to overall sustainability and environmental footprint reduction.

“It’s great doing business together when you have a plan for the planet,” the Living Business Programme tagline reads.

Leading up to and including 2021, OCEC has actively implemented practices to uplift the centre’s associated Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) framework.

Furthermore, the venue remains committed to meeting prescribed sustainability targets, while transitioning into a more environmentally sustainable future.

According to Said al Shanfari, CEO – OCEC: “Environmental care and awareness form part of OCEC’s core values. Every year, OCEC’s Green Team carries out various programmes in line with environmental sustainability, and in line with reducing consumption of energy – whether in terms of utilisation or cost. We have continued this visionary approach, and this latest Living Business Programme 2021 Country

Winner award — which we are exceptionally proud of — is a reflection of our ‘green’ projects making a greater positive impact on the environment.”

One of OCEC’s recent environmental sustainability initiatives has been to significantly reduce water consumption required by the venue’s landscaped gardens. This is achieved by carefully managing water usage to coincide with low evaporation periods throughout the day.

Another initiative is their utilisation of specific floral species in OCEC’s gardens that require less water usage and maintenance, and that naturally have a higher tolerance to growing in environments like the Sultanate of Oman — while still maintaining their aesthetic appeal for OCEC’s visitors.

ahli Islamic Qitaf Scheme 2021 to conclude with grand draw on January 2022



MUSCAT: ahli Islamic is all set to end 2021 on a captivating note with its fourth quarter Qitaf Prize Scheme 2021 draw, which is scheduled to be held in January, 2022.

It will award one lucky winner a whopping grand prize of RO 100,000.

As per the scheme, this last quarterly draw of the year will mark a new chapter in the history of ahli Islamic, having rewarded more than 4,200 customers — with prizes totalling over RO 1,250,000 across all its branches in the country — over the course of the year.

Noting that the scheme was designed meticulously to cover a wider customer base and include diverse prize categories, Yousuf al Rawahi, DGM, Head of ahli Islamic, said, “Through Qitaf, we have endeavoured to actively engage with various segments of our customers, spread across our extensive network of branches.

“This has boosted our growth trajectory, with a substantial increase in demand to not just open new accounts, but also to maintain the minimum average balance to qualify for the draws.

“It is a clear reflection of our success in inspiring a culture of savings among our customers, and the community in which we operate.

“While our Sharia-compliant Qitaf savings account itself is based on the principle of Mudaraba, what endears it to our growing line of customers is the ease with which it provides opportunities to earn cash prizes through a draw system.

“It demonstrates our commitment to improve their financial status and our larger objective to recognise and reward their loyalty.

“Verily, this has strengthened our market position and helped us forge ahead, even in the wake of economic slowdown brought about by the pandemic.”

Structured to provide investment opportunities that suit customers’ needs, while promoting a culture of prudent savings through cash rewards that are dispensed through weekly, monthly, quarterly and special event draws, the Qitaf account has fast gained popularity to enhance ahli Islamic status.

The 2021 edition of the scheme, our different categories like weekly draws for all account holders and special weekly draws for children, have helped customers achieving their aspirations.

One of the unique features of the scheme is the criteria for eligibility, which makes it easy and attainable for everyone.

Khedmah offers Awasr, Omantel subscriptions

MUSCAT: Attesting to its vision of meeting clients’ needs and exceeding their expectations, Oman Investment and Finance Company (Khedmah) constantly seeks to expand its wide portfolio of services to target all segments of the community.

The popular app strives to offer a plethora of unique and seamless solutions, that also include broadband subscriptions from Awasr and Omantel.

Along with Khedmah’s wide array of solutions, customers can now apply for Omantel or Awasr broadband subscription through a selected number of branches across the Sultanate of Oman including but not limited to MBD, Al Amerat, Barka, Mawaleh, Nakhl, Al Awabi, Jabal Al Akhdhar, Suhar, Ibri and many more.

Consumers can also subscribe to Awasr Internet through Khedmah app and avail themselves plenty of other services at the same time. For further information regarding these services, please contact Khedmah call centre on 24727272.

Through Khedmah branches and electronic platforms, customers can easily pay their



electricity, water and telephone bills, recharge their phone, and also pay their electricity prepaid meter bills.

In addition, customers can make payments to the Public Authority for Social Insurance (PASI) and recharge entertainment subscriptions. Khedmah recently added a new service in the field of collecting vehicle insurance premiums.

Through the direct integration between Khedmah and the systems of Dhofar Insurance Company, customers of Dhofar insurance can now pay the insurance premiums for renewal of their vehicle insurance through the app and website.

Customers can also now benefit from a gamut of Oman Post and ASYAD Express services outside their working hours through a selected number of Khedmah branches.

Bank Muscat’s QR Code makes accepting e-payments easy

MUSCAT: In line with the directives of the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to promote financial inclusion and digital payments across the Sultanate of Oman by ensuring e-payment options at businesses, Bank Muscat has urged all its customers to use its e-channels for their various banking transactions.

As the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate of Oman and in line with its vision “To serve you better, everyday”, the bank has been continuously expanding the number of e-payment options available to its customers including Debit, Prepaid and Credit Cards, wearables, Mobile Wallet and the Mobile Banking app.

Amjad bin Iqbal al Lawati (pictured), Assistant General Manager, Cards and eBanking, Bank Muscat, said: “Bank Muscat aims to serve its tech-savvy customers in the best possible manner and is encouraged by the rapid



shift to digital and contactless payments. Using the e-payment option improves financial inclusion and offers new, convenient and highly secure e-payment options for the benefit of our valued customers.

“We are happy to welcome all merchants to use our world-class e-payment options to accept payments from their customers securely in real time. We are sure that this will greatly benefit the Sultanate of Oman in achieving the landmark goals of Oman Vision 2040.”

The bank had earlier upgraded its BM Wallet and mBanking app in 2019 to make it easy for customers to transfer

money to or request funds from others using the Central Bank of Oman’s Mobile Payment Clearing and Switching System (MPCSS).

Funds can be transferred instantaneously using one of the following modes. For person to person transfers, money can be sent or collected from the recipient’s default account or wallet.

‘Send money’ can be initiated by using mobile number, Alias or by QR code scanning and ‘collect money’ can be initiated using recipient Alias/Mobile Number if both the sender and recipient are registered on MPCSS. Bank Muscat customers have the facility to register on the MPCSS via both its BM Wallet and the mBanking app.

Funds can be transferred instantly and at zero cost to both Bank Muscat and non-Bank Muscat accounts or wallets by using their MPCSS-registered mobile number/alias/QR code. There is no need to enter an account number.

Last few days to scratch & win your dream Kia

MUSCAT: Kia’s most exciting campaign that has created so many winners will be coming to an end on December 28, 2021. Now is still time to make the most of your luck and scratch and win with Kia.

As part of the campaign, customers owning their dream Kia can look forward to a chance to win your Kia car back through scratch & win offer, or chance to win 50 per cent value of your car back through scratch & win offer, or chance to double your cash gift, or win periodic services up to 100,000 kms and yes VAT is on us which can be used as part of down payment. (Conditions apply. Please visit Kia showroom for details.)



People looking forward to owning a Kia can choose from a range of exciting models. They include the stunning K5. The K5’s powerful and angular design language represents another chapter of boldness and passion for the brand.

In terms of performance, the K5 makes a fine mark with a 2.5L GDI engine dishing out 191 HP and 25.1 KG.M. Torque.

This is paired to an 8-speed Automatic Transmission. Creating an inviting and comfortable interior are a range of features that include Tinted Glass, Tilt & Telescopic Steering, Radio with USB, Audio Remote Control, Driver’s Seat Height Adjuster, Rear AC Vents, Leather AT Knob,

Power Driver Seat, Smart Key with Button Start, Panoramic Sunroof, Auto A/C, 8” Audio Display, Android Auto & Car Play, Driver Seat Memory Seating System, Navigation with 10.25” Display, Mood Lamp, Premium Music System, Red Leather Seats and more.

The Kia Seltos combines forward-looking technical features, class-leading space and a suite of world-class safety features, and is powered by a highly-efficient Smartstream petrol engine.

Reliable International Automotive (RIA), the distributor for Kia in the Sultanate of Oman provides a rewarding ownership experience for customers.



MEDC completes rehabilitation of Muttrah power network



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 22

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC) has completed the rehabilitation of its low-voltage electrical network in some villages of the Wilayat of Muttrah.

Eng Mazin bin Ali al Salmani (pictured), Senior Manager of Operation and Maintenance of the company, stated that this step comes within the framework of continuous improvement of the electrical network and the provision of safety standards for public, since it was an old network system and was not in compliance with the safety requirements.

Al Salmani added that MEDC continues to evaluate the electrical network on a regular basis, confirming its continuous endeavour to develop the electrical distribution networks for the purpose of enhancing the service reliability, and delivering it to all customers in a safe manner, in accordance with Omani Electrical Standards.

New oceanfront hotel debuts in Mirbat

NEW PROPERTY: 237-room Wyndham Garden Salalah Mirbat hotel set to open before month-end

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 22

Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, the world's largest hotel franchising company with approximately 9,000 hotels across nearly 95 countries, continues to cement its presence across the Middle East with the opening of the 237-room Wyndham Garden Salalah Mirbat hotel in Mirbat, Sultanate of Oman. The hotel marks Wyndham's continued growth in the leisure segment, as well as the first in collaboration with Dhofar Tourism Company – one of the largest and most diversified developers of sustainable towns in the Sultanate of Oman.

Expected to open later this month, Wyndham Garden Salalah Mirbat is located oceanfront in Mirbat, and a short drive away from Salalah, the third largest



city in the Sultanate of Oman and the capital city of the Dhofar Governorate.

Mirbat is a culturally rich up-and-coming tourist destination, known for its white sand beaches and natural beauty. Guests of the hotel can enjoy oceanic views and leisure activities including water sports, a spa and kids club.

The opening of Wyndham Garden Salalah Mirbat marks Wyndham's fourth hotel in the Sultanate of Oman and second under the Wyndham Garden brand. These openings are part of the Company's strategic growth plans for the Middle East and Africa region, which include the addition of 23 new properties

by 2023. Panos Loupasis, Vice President Development, Middle East, Eurasia & Africa, Wyndham Hotels & Resorts, said: "Wyndham Garden Salalah Mirbat, offers fantastic accommodations for both regional and international travellers who wish to experience the picturesque beauty of Mirbat. With the opening of this hotel,

we look forward to further supporting the city's development as a global holiday destination — as well as continuing to support the country's ambitious 2040 tourism plans to revitalise travel in the country and double the number of tourists.

We are excited to open our first hotel in this unique city, an important milestone that will see us further bolster our presence in the Sultanate of Oman."

Ahmed Yousuf Alawi Abdullah al Ibrahim, Chairman, Dhofar Tourism Company said: "We are thrilled to be collaborating with Wyndham Hotels & Resorts on the opening of the Wyndham Garden Salalah Mirbat.

This opening is a reflection of our unique and sustainable development plans to foster tourism across the Sultanate of Oman. Wyndham Garden Salalah Mirbat supports our mission to create further long-term value for the tourism, real estate and leisure sectors and we look forward to delivering an engaging and positive experience for all our guests."

SOHAR Port and Freezone conducts emergency response drill

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, DEC 22

SOHAR Port and Freezone in coordination with the Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA) conducted its annual emergency response field exercise. Held in collaboration with Safety Region Rotterdam, the Port's strategic partner for safety management, and SOHAR's Health, Safety, Security and Environment (HSSE), the teams simulated a life-like emergency scenario at the Hutchison Ports terminal.

Emergency response teams from companies in the Port including OQ, Vale, SIUCI, OMC



and Jindal Shadeed participated to ensure that they know how to respond quickly and effectively to any crisis or incident and are able

to work together using the mutual aid system.

The various scenarios comprised of a fire combined with

a release of hazardous materials.

Both were successfully handled by the specialised teams and in fact demonstrated a high level of readiness. Mark Geilenkirchen, CEO of SOHAR Port, said, "Several of the tenants within SOHAR Port and Freezone provide their own emergency response fire and ambulance team to manage crisis and incidents.

By engaging them with all along with PACDA in regular training exercises, we know that the same comprehensive protocols are followed throughout the site."

He added, "We are confident knowing that the teams have been trained, understand the science

behind our actions, have the skills to prevent injury and damage to assets in addition to protect the environment.

The guidance received and lessons learned during these exercises allows us to update our safety protocols in accordance with best international HSSE practices and prepare teams to respond when called upon."

Continuing to prioritise and promote a culture of safe and socially responsible business practices, SOHAR Port and Freezone's Emergency Response strategy outlines procedures that are designed to provide the immediate prepared response for multiple scenarios.

US set to become world's biggest liquefied natural gas exporter in 2022

WASHINGTON: The United States is set to become the world's biggest liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporter in 2022, surpassing Qatar and Australia, and may hold that title for years to come.

In a year when China and other large economies in Europe and Asia scrambled to source enough supply for heating and power generation, the United States was sitting on a bevy of supply — one that will grow in coming years.

Global LNG demand has hit record highs each year since 2015, due mostly to surging demand in China and the rest of Asia. Much of that global appetite has been met by steadily rising US LNG exports, which have reached new records every year since 2016 and is poised to continue in 2022.

The US Energy Information Administration projects US LNG exports will reach 11.5 billion cubic feet per day (bcfd) in 2022.

That would account for roughly 22 per cent of expected world LNG demand of 53.3 bcfd next year, according to analysts



A liquefied natural gas (LNG) tanker is tugged towards a thermal power station in Futtsu, east of Tokyo, Japan. — Reuters

at Goldman Sachs and would outpace both Australia and Qatar, the two largest exporters at present.

One billion cubic feet is enough gas for about 5 million US homes for a day.

The United States should remain the biggest LNG exporter by capacity until around 2025, when Qatar could regain the lead as its North Field expansion starts

to enter service.

But if some US developers start building new LNG export plants, the United States may not give up the crown.

Major US developers like Cheniere Energy, the largest US exporter, have signed numerous long-term deals to sell LNG in recent months that should enable them to secure the financing needed to go forward with

additional multibillion-dollar projects.

Many of those long-term contracts came from Chinese buyers.

"After years of avoiding a commitment to buy US LNG, Chinese companies have finally made their move," said Nikos Tsafos at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). — Reuters

Turkish lira holds gains from volatile rally

ANKARA: Turkey's lira steadied on Wednesday and held gains from what is so far its best week two decades, after the currency charged back from record lows due to President Tayyip Erdogan's new steps to guard Turks' savings against such volatility.

The lira stood at 12.25 to the dollar at 05:39 GMT, from a close of 12.4 on Tuesday when it rose 6 per cent in a roller-coaster session.

On Monday, the lira first crashed 10 per cent then rallied to its largest daily gain ever, in record volatility.

The currency is still down some 40 per cent this year following a meltdown prompted by an aggressive monetary easing cycle engineered by Erdogan.

At its low on Monday, the currency was down some 60 per cent on the year.

More than half of locals' savings are in foreign currencies and gold, according to central bank data, with confidence in the lira eroding after years of depreciation and bruised central bank credibility.



A money changer holds Turkish lira banknotes at a currency exchange office in Ankara. — Reuters

Erdogan introduced a series of measures on Monday that would shift the burden of a weakened currency to the Treasury and encourage Turks to hold lira rather than dollars.

Analysts and bankers warned that if the nascent lira rally reverses and forces the government to cover depositors' losses, it could further stoke inflation and weigh heavily on the deficit.

Wall Street bank JPMorgan estimated that any extra 12 per cent lira depreciation over the deposit interest rate could increase the budget deficit by around 1 per cent of GDP over a six month horizon.

— Reuters

Riyadh will flip from No-Go to FOMO for business

Riyadh may be about to pivot from global no-go to FOMO. The Saudi Arabian capital has long been seen by international bankers and executives as a place to visit for work, before weekending in the UAE's more western-friendly hub, Dubai. That crowd may develop a nagging fear of missing out.

Economically, Saudi dwarfs regional Gulf peers. Its \$700 billion GDP in 2020 was double the UAE's, with three times the population. Its domestic stock market's \$2.6 trillion market capitalisation is over four times those of Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Qatar combined.

There's also loads of work. In the next four years, Saudi wants to raise \$55 billion via privatisations, and that doesn't include further asset or equity sales by \$1.9 trillion oil giant Aramco.

Nor does it encompass disposals by the \$450 billion Public Investment Fund, which recently sold down a big chunk of its 70 per cent stake in \$61 billion Saudi Telecom Company.

Big western banks are keeping quiet about whether they will follow the 44 multinationals, including Novartis, Unilever and Deloitte, and establish regional headquarters in Riyadh.

One basic reason why JPMorgan, Goldman Sachs may overcome their reluctance is that the Saudi government has made it clear those who don't move by end-2023 will struggle to win the kingdom's business.

But fading overseas scepticism is another pull factor. The number of foreign investors registered at the Tadawul has more than doubled from 6 per cent in 2019, and Saudi's foreign direct investment inflows rose during the pandemic.

Riyadh may also become less of a social desert. Gigs by Miami rapper Pitbull, World Wrestling Entertainment matches, and Saudi ownership of the Newcastle United football club reduce the cultural distance with the west. More importantly, cafes and restaurants where men and women can mix are now commonplace.

If so, Dubai's pre-eminence will be sorely tested. — Reuters

Big western banks are keeping quiet about whether they will follow the 44 multinationals, including Novartis, Unilever and Deloitte, and establish regional headquarters in Riyadh



PICKLED INFLATION

A woman shops for pickled foods at a supermarket in Moscow. People are making sacrifices across the country, with soaring inflation pushing up costs and forcing cash-strapped Russians to make difficult decisions around the holidays. This month, inflation in Russia reached its highest since 2016, with rising everyday costs hitting hard a population whose average monthly income is 40,402 rubles (\$545). — AFP

Doha stadiums reflect Qatari identity and heritage



HAIDER AL LAWATI haiderdawood@hotmail.com

THE MODERN INTERNATIONAL STADIUMS HAVE ATTRACTED WIDESPREAD ATTENTION

There's no denying the efforts made by the Qatari government in establishing modern and distinctive sports landmarks in recent years, including the large football stadiums that hosted thousands of fans during the Arab Cup 2021 Championship.

Doha is also on the verge of hosting the Fifa World Cup 2022 next year.

The modern international stadiums, with their aesthetic touches featuring elements of Qatari identity, heritage and culture, have attracted widespread attention.

The success of Doha's experience in the field of sports is the subject of praise not only regionally but also globally. Many Arab and international delegations have visited the headquarters for a first-hand look at the work of skilled designers and engineers of Qatar, along with expatriate expertise, in bringing Qatar culture and heritage to life in these landmarks.

For example, the 'Al Thumama' stadium, which was built in the form of 'Qahfiya' or

what we call it in the Sultanate of Oman, 'Al Kumma', is a wonderful masterpiece, while other stadiums bear important imprints of Qatari heritage as well.

From this standpoint, the World Cup in Qatar in 2022 will not only be a unique sporting event for Qatar, but also a cultural and urban spectacle that will put the spotlight on the nation's economic developments as well.

This also proves to the world that Qatar is capable of facing challenges and difficulties. Qatar's development is the result of planning and investment in infrastructure projects and quality sports institutions while using modern technologies for the success of the next global event.

In past decades, Qatar through its diplomatic, political, economic and cultural relations, has been able to create a large economic, industrial, cultural and tourist infrastructure, in addition to its success in employing its national competencies and the latest technologies in the construction of these beautiful sports edifices, to become

today a major competitor to countries that hosted such events in the past.

As we have said, these institutions embody many of the national heritage components that Qatar is proud of, as well as the Gulf region, where you find sports models that resemble castles, ships, seas and others in order to remain sustainable projects.

The World Cup 2022 championship will not only be as an event for the youth, but also an opportunity for Qatar to tell the world of its great architectural and sporting achievements.

The message going out to the world is that Qatar has proven itself capable of hosting world-scale events with efficiency and competence.

In addition, Qatar has welcomed large delegations of sports contingents and media and tourism delegations during international matches. It also has commercial and entertainment centres that enable visitors to spend their spare time leisurely.

Latin America's new lost decade



JOSE ANTONIO OCAMPO

The author is a professor at Columbia University, Chair of the UN Committee for Development Policy

In any other year but this one, economic growth in Latin America would give the region's governments reason to boast.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) estimates that GDP growth in 2021 will be around 6 per cent, while the International Monetary Fund forecasts 6.3 per cent growth.

Unfortunately, even the more optimistic projection is insufficient to compensate for the -6.8 per cent contraction the region suffered in 2020.

Latin America will be the worst-performing region of the developing world as it emerges from the pandemic. Due to the very weak growth in the five years prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the region experienced a 'lost half-decade.'

Now, with the economic collapse

of 2020, the limited recovery of 2021, and expected moderate growth for 2022 (2.9 per cent according to ECLAC), it's clear the region is in the midst of another lost decade of development.

If 2023 is similar to 2022, average annual growth for the 2014-23 period could be just 0.7 per cent a year — worse than the 1.4 per cent annual rate during the lost decade of the 1980s.

The region's economic recovery from the Covid-19 crisis also has been very uneven. When 2020 and 2021 are considered together, Chile and Colombia are the two best-performing larger countries; both are expected to exceed their pre-pandemic levels of economic activity.

Brazil and Peru also may do so, but Brazil's GDP contracted in the second and third quarters.

Argentina and Mexico will have a lower level of economic

activity than in 2019, and the economic collapse in Venezuela has continued.

Among the smaller economies, only the Dominican Republic, Guatemala and Paraguay will show higher economic activity in 2021 than in 2019.

The social effects on the region have been devastating. ECLAC and the International Labour Organization estimate that 25 million jobs were lost in Latin America in 2020.

Just 17 million jobs had been recovered by the second quarter of this year, so employment is still about 3 per cent below its pre-crisis level. There are no estimates of the poverty rate for 2021, but it reached 33.7 per cent in 2020 according to ECLAC, so the region has lost more than a decade in terms of poverty reduction.

The domestic effects of the pandemic have been much more

significant than the international economic shocks in Latin America.

In fact, despite the problems with maritime transportation and global value chains, international trade has recovered much faster than after the 2008-09 crisis. Commodity prices also have shown a strong recovery since the middle of last year.

Overall, Latin American exports are expected to grow 25 per cent in 2021, thanks to an 8 per cent increase in volumes and positive trends in export prices.

The major exception is tourism, which has experienced a very incomplete recovery. Capital flows have been a bright spot for those countries that have market access. For the first nine months of 2021,

Latin American bond issues in global capital markets reached \$124 billion, up 5.6 per cent from the same period in 2020, when issuance also showed a positive

trend. The cost of such financing has been very low by historical standards.

And, contrary to the expectation that the pandemic would undermine remittances from migrants, remittances grew in both 2020 and 2021, particularly from migrants in the United States.

But the slowdown of most major economies and rising inflation worldwide indicate that global conditions may be less positive in the next few months. The US Federal Reserve has signalled that it will hike interest rates in 2022, and the European Central Bank will also tighten its monetary policies.

China, a major market for Latin America, faces difficulties caused by the debt problems of its construction sector and some large firms. And commodity prices, including for oil, seem to have peaked, but they remain high.

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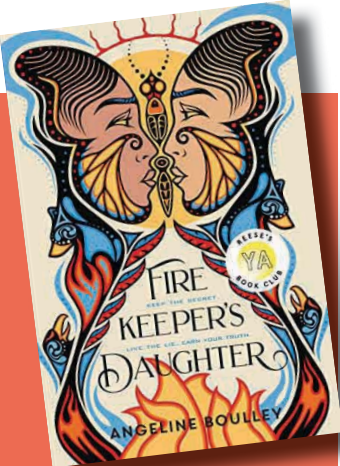


A memorable first trip to a Bedu's home

Have you ever wondered what a Bedouin's home is like? This writer visited a Bedu camp for the first time discovering a room filled with trinkets and mementoes, all documenting what life is like for the nomadic people of the desert... **P20**

DISCOVERY

READ



FIRE KEEPER'S DAUGHTER
BY ANGELINE BOULLEY

Daunis investigates a deadly new drug being distributed in her tribal community.

Millipedes as big as cars roamed England, fluke fossil find shows

GIANT MILLIPEDES AS LONG as a car and weighing 50 kilogrammes once hunted across Northern England, experts have revealed, following the discovery of a 326 million-year-old fossil.

The largest ever fossil of a giant millipede was found by a "fluke" on a Northumberland beach at the village of Howick, after a section of cliff fell onto the shore.

In order to get so big, the creature, known as Arthropleura, must

have found a nutrient-rich plant diet and may even have been predators, feasting on other invertebrates or small amphibians.

The specimen is made up of multiple articulated exoskeleton segments, broadly similar in form to modern millipedes.

It is just the third such fossil ever found and is also the oldest and largest. Experts believe the fossil represents just a section of the creature's exoskeleton that it shed near a river



bed, which was then preserved by sand.

The segment is about 75 centimetres long, leading scientists to believe its entire body could have measured around 2.7 metres long and weighed 50kg.

The remains of the creature date from the Carboniferous Period, more than 100 million years before the Age of Dinosaurs.

At the time, Great Britain lay near the equator and enjoyed warm tem-



peratures.

A former PhD student who was walking along the coast in January 2018 spotted it in a large block of sandstone that had fallen from the cliff.

Dr Neil Davies, from Cambridge University's Department of Earth Sciences and lead author of a paper on the fossil, said: "It was a complete fluke of a discovery."

"The way the boulder had fallen, it had cracked open and perfectly

exposed the fossil, which one of our former PhD students happened to spot when walking by."

The fossil was removed with permission of Natural England and the landowners, the Howick Estate, and was taken to Cambridge for analysis.

It was so big it required four people to carry it.

Davies said: "While we can't know for sure what they ate, there were plenty of nutritious nuts and seeds available in the leaf litter at the time, and they may even have been predators that fed off other invertebrates and even small vertebrates such as amphibians."

The creatures crawled around the equatorial region for around 45 million years, before going extinct, possibly due to global warming that made the climate too dry for them, or due to the rise of reptiles, who out-competed them for food.

The fossil will go on public display at Cambridge's Sedgwick Museum in the New Year.

The results are reported in the Journal of the Geological Society.

— PA Media/dpa



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AROUND THE WORLD

DISCOVERY

Chimes from Crusader times: Recreating Nativity Church's Mediaeval music



RESEARCHERS FROM the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem are inspiring researchers' efforts to re-create music as it may have been known in the birthplace of Jesus through almost 800 years ago.

On the eve of a Muslim offensive, mid-13th-century Crusaders buried 13 bronze bells near the church on the eve of a Muslim offensive near the church, slathering them in animal fat to protect them from rust, according to David Catalunya, who is planning a project to make facsimiles of them.

"It's a very long process, not only in terms of constructing the materiality of the instruments but also its cultural context and intellectual context," explained Catalunya, a researcher from the universities of Oxford and Wuerzburg, Germany.

After the exploratory research phase finished, he predicts it will take up to five years to make completely functioning copies.

a knock of the knuckles may even be enough for a clear, high-pitched chime from the originals, whose clappers have long since drew away, as demonstrated by Reuters in the Custody of the Holy Land for the Roman Catholic church, which holds the outstanding collection.

"It's half of the original sound, (which) was much richer and louder and a little less), says Catalunya.

Franciscan friar Father Stephane, the Custody's liturgist, declared, "The bells were part of a carillon that provided chants inside the church."

The latter, along with 222 Mediaeval copper pipes from the Church of the Nativity's organ, were discovered during construction at the church's Franciscan structure in the early 20th century, according to Father Stephane.

The collection also includes the sceptre of Bethlehem and candlesticks from the 12th century that, according to Catalunya, were made in France, implying a mixed reputation with the bells and organ pipes, which Father Stephane claims are the oldest in Christendom.

Father Stephane stated that the collection's exhibit and play is planned to be shown and played at a Jerusalem museum by 2024.

"These bells are so important for us that they are Bethlehem's bells (and a) symbol of Nativity in the Christian realm," he noted. — Reuters

CULTURE



Beneath La Palma volcano, scientists collect lava 'to learn'

AS SOON AS HE heard that La Palma's volcano had erupted, Australian geologist Matt Pankhurst loaded his microscope into his car and raced to catch a ferry to the Spanish island.

Like other scientists around the world, he was eager to get a first-hand look at the rare and valuable data spilling out of the Cumbre Vieja volcano off Africa's northwest coast.

"It's a huge opportunity to learn," said the scientist with Involcano, the Canary Islands Volcanology Institute.

"The more observations we make closer to the time that material has come out of the volcano, the more chance we have of making a scientific impact."

A few kilometres (miles) from where the volcano shot up from flat ground on September 19, he and other scientists have set up an improvised lab in a house provided by the local authorities.

Neatly lined up on tables inside are obscure volcanic rocks collected from the ash-covered ground around the volcano, all of them labelled ahead of further analysis.

"At the moment, this is by far the most closely watched volcanic episode that has ever happened in the Canaries," Pankhurst said.

The eruption, the first in La Palma since 1971, is the longest on record on the island of around 83,000 people.

No injuries or deaths have been directly linked to the eruption, but the lava flow has destroyed 1,345 homes, mainly in the island's west, and forced more than 7,000 people to evacuate.

- 'COLLABORATIVE EFFORT' -

At the foot of the fuming volcano, in an area closed to the public, scientists have been collecting lava samples, using metal sticks when it is still hot and hammers when it has cooled.

They then cut down the rocks into small samples that can be sent off to colleagues for analysis around the world.

"It's a collaborative effort," said Pankhurst.

The volcano fell silent on Monday evening and scientists are cautiously optimistic that after three months of explosions and earthquakes, the eruption may be ending.

But at a lookout providing a clear view of the volcano, Maria Jose Blanco, the director of the National Geographic Institute in the Canary Islands, warned the area was still under observation.

"To be able to say that the eruption is definitely over, these parameters need to stay at similar levels for at least 10 days," she said, standing in the square near a small church in the municipality of El Paso that has drawn scores of scientists, journalists and bystanders to watch the eruption.

Further down the slope at her institute's control centre, some 70 experts have worked away since the start of the eruption.

They will have to keep monitoring the volcano even after it ends as the mountain will continue to spew toxic gases for a long spell, complicating life on the island.

- 'CAN'T IGNORE NATURE' -

Governments must prepare better to face future

volcanic crises, because population density is only increasing, said Blanco, whose frequent media appearances in recent weeks have made her a familiar face in Spain.

"We can't live with our backs to nature and forget that this is a volcanic archipelago, that eruptions have occurred in the past and will continue to occur," she said.

Since the autumn, the slow-moving lava has covered over 1,200 hectares (about 3,000 acres) of land on its way to the Atlantic, dealing a blow to the island's two key industries — tourism and banana farming.

Also standing in the church square, Vicente Soler, a volcanologist with Spain's National Research Council, said the eruption had hit the island where it most hurt.

"The most populated and richest area economically for agriculture is this one," he said of the land affected.

"The first month was very hard, because you saw houses burning and collapsing everyday," he added.

But the scientist, also a regular commentator on Spanish television, said he was proud to have monitored the eruption and hoped that attempting to explain the event could "to a small extent, help the local population."

As Soler spoke, a young man recognised him and his trademark white hair from the news, and asked to take a selfie with him.

"Thanks for your work," the young man said, before heading off. — AFP

COOK LIKE A CHEF



Quinoa Avocado with mix Bell Pepper

LOOKING FOR A recipe that is fast and easy to prepare without sacrificing the nutritional content? Today's recipe is just that.

"Quinoa is not very popular in the Sultanate of Oman and you would just mostly find it served in restaurants but this superfood will be a great addition to your kitchen and something to diversify your daily nutritional needs," Chef Jakhir said.

While guests visiting The View in Al Hamra is far from the capital, he said it is their vision to offer amazing food even at a very remote location. Make sure to try this out over the weekend.

SALAD FOR 2 PAX

INGREDIENTS

50 gms Organic Quinoa
100 gms Avocado
100 gms Mix Bell Pepper
50 gms Cucumber
15 gms Olive oil
1 pc Fresh lemon
30 gms Dijon mustard
1 Tbs Parsley chopped p
Saffron half pinch
Salt & Pepper to taste

RECIPE

Chop all vegetables separately. Steam quinoa with saffron. To prepare dressing, add olive oil, salt, pepper, mustard, chopped parsley and lime juice and stir slowly to make a thick dressing. Mix all vegetables in the dressing and add quinoa. Dish out in a mould and place on the plate to serve.

ABOUT THE CHEF:

CHEF JAKHIR SHA is currently the Executive Chef of The View Eco-Resort in Al Hamra. Now in the Sultanate of Oman for more than a decade, Chef Jakhir started out his career as a Commis 1 in Tripura International Hotel in India in 1997. Specialising in Indian cuisine, he would later move on as a demi-chef at Taj Gateway Hotel in 1999 and to the GRT Temple Bay in India a year later picking up some skills and expertise in Chinese Cuisines as an addition to his growing resume. He moved to Muscat as Senior Chef in Marina Bandar Rowdha in 2002 and served as multi-cuisine head chef at Oman Sail from 2010 onwards. Today, Chef Jakhir is enjoying the beauty of the mountains where he utilises local produce in many of his dishes passionate and dedicated to adding diversity to the food scene in the Al Hamra area.





A memorable first trip to a Bedu's home

By Yeru Ebuon

It was one of the biggest barastis I've seen and under the afternoon sun, the inside looked like a comfy cave filled with wild treasures and curiosities.

"You will have an opportunity today to interact with an authentic Bedouin family. The great thing about it is that they are already accustomed to having visitors so you are definitely most welcome to go inside their home and check whatever you like," said Nasser al Jaabri, an Omani guide who had been exploring the Sultanate of Oman since he was young but had started as a formal guide in 2016.

We drove nearly 30 minutes away from the popular dunes bashing site of Al Wasil towards a village still surrounded by Rimal Al Sharqiyah's golden sands.

Constructed from aged palm fronds, the barasti, a wooden shelter typically set up on a temporary basis, was nearly 8m x 8m in size. The door, made of ornately carved wood, was already partially opened. The hot sunlight streamed through the holes on the roof.

Inside, it was comfortably warm despite the dropping temperature outside. Three kids rushed towards us, one nearly 9 and the others between 3 and 5.

On the floor, different ornately decorated traditional clothes, mats, blankets and trinkets were neatly stacked against each other occupying nearly a quarter of the carpeted floor.

"You will have the chance to dress up as a Bedu today," Nasser said towards Charry, one of our female companions.

There were a lot of peculiar things hanging on the ceiling and on the different posts all over the barasti. There were large shelves on the other half end of the room and on these shelves, were numerous antique plates, jars, glasses, and

other earthenware. It felt like a traditional museum more than a home with almost everything on display meaning something to the owners.

At the centre of the barasti is a long treasure chest. On top of it were a collection of metal vessels, traditional silver Arabic water pots, silver incense burners and a few more giant clay pots.

Exploring the whole room was like taking a walk through an educational maze. The skulls of goats and camels dotted some of the posts while camel spines hung with metal kerosene lamps.

The whole room was also predominantly red and black and my yellow sweater was significantly noticeable in the sea drowning in red Arabic splendour.

The boy moved towards me handing me a knitted armband which I said no to.

"These are for sale?" I asked Nasser of which he replied that most of the items on display are for sale.

When the matriarch finally came, the room came to a halt. Her green hijab and black mask were unable to contain the power of her presence.

The corners of her eyes were lined with kohl and while she didn't say anything as she moved towards her corner in the room, everyone could feel that she was assessing the three of us foreigners in her home.

"You must try this," she told our female companion, handing her a yellow hijab. They put on her a mask. Everything was a slow procession of layering her with different clothes. The last touch was the pink garment that covered her head and shoulder with the rest of the clothing covering her back flowing daintily towards her ankle.

"You are now a Bedu," said Nasser with a chuckle.

Charry played a little with the kids. The kids had their own little dance and song so unfamiliar it must have been passed

down to them by their grandmother.

I checked out every corner of the barasti. The men of the family were away, tending to camels, goats and their farms. There was another door that opened to the opposite end of the room of which we were not allowed as it led to the private quarters of the family.

The camels were making loud noises outside while the children started to invite us for more games. They bring out empty plastic water bottles inside of which were scorpions they caught days before.

"Not a lot of people know about this place. Only guides with permission from the ministry usually know and we are trying our best to showcase what a Bedu life is like by allowing them to interact with the families," Nasser said.

The old Bedu woman was seated humming by her corner in the room. Her daughter in law came all covered, whispered something in her ear and eventually settled in a seat not far from her.

"They live simple lives but just like every Omani, they are very welcoming," Nasser said.

My eyes were overwhelmed by everything that I saw and there was barely a moment to process what was inside that room. While we were busy looking around, a new batch of visitors came. The children rushed towards them with their gleeful laughter while the grandma waited for them to approach her. I'd been in the Sultanate of Oman for six years but it was the first time for me to visit a Bedu's home.

It was days later on another trip when I learned a few more things about them.

"I've travelled the Sultanate of Oman extensively too and always, whenever I meet a Bedu on the road, they always wave me by. Before I didn't stop at all but one time, out of curiosity I stopped, and he asked me if I needed anything. This old man in the middle of nowhere, offered me if I needed water or

food. In their culture, especially in the past, whenever they see a stranger, they wave at them in case they need help. They feel obligated towards you. When you are in their domain, they feel like you are their responsibility," my friend shared.

"Sometimes, when we go around and see them in their old garments or their very simplistic lifestyle, a lot of us judge them. Primarily because they are different. But there are lessons to be learned from the Bedus and it only takes listening and studying to understand that they are a society of respect that needs appreciation," he said. I agree. There are lessons to be learned from the Bedus.

It is my hope that one day, I will be honoured to be invited to their bonfire, to partake in their food and understand their many secrets, especially that of the desert. It is my hope to help preserve and propagate the beauty of what they have.

When we left their simple abode, my curiosity has grown even deeper. But I find it amazing how visiting someone's home provides a lot of insight regarding who they are as a people.

