

Covid in-patients surge

The number of Covid cases in the new wave hit another landmark as the Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday reported 232 new cases and zero deaths in the last 24 hours. The campaign to administer booster vaccines at the Old Airport building, stopped on Tuesday due to rains, will resume on Wednesday. The total number of in-patients went up to 15, including five in Intensive Care Units (ICUs). **SEE P5**



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HIS MAJESTY
GAVE DIRECTIVES
FOR COLLABORATIVE
ACTION BETWEEN
THE GOVERNMENT
AND CITIZENS
FOR FULFILLING
ASPIRATIONS

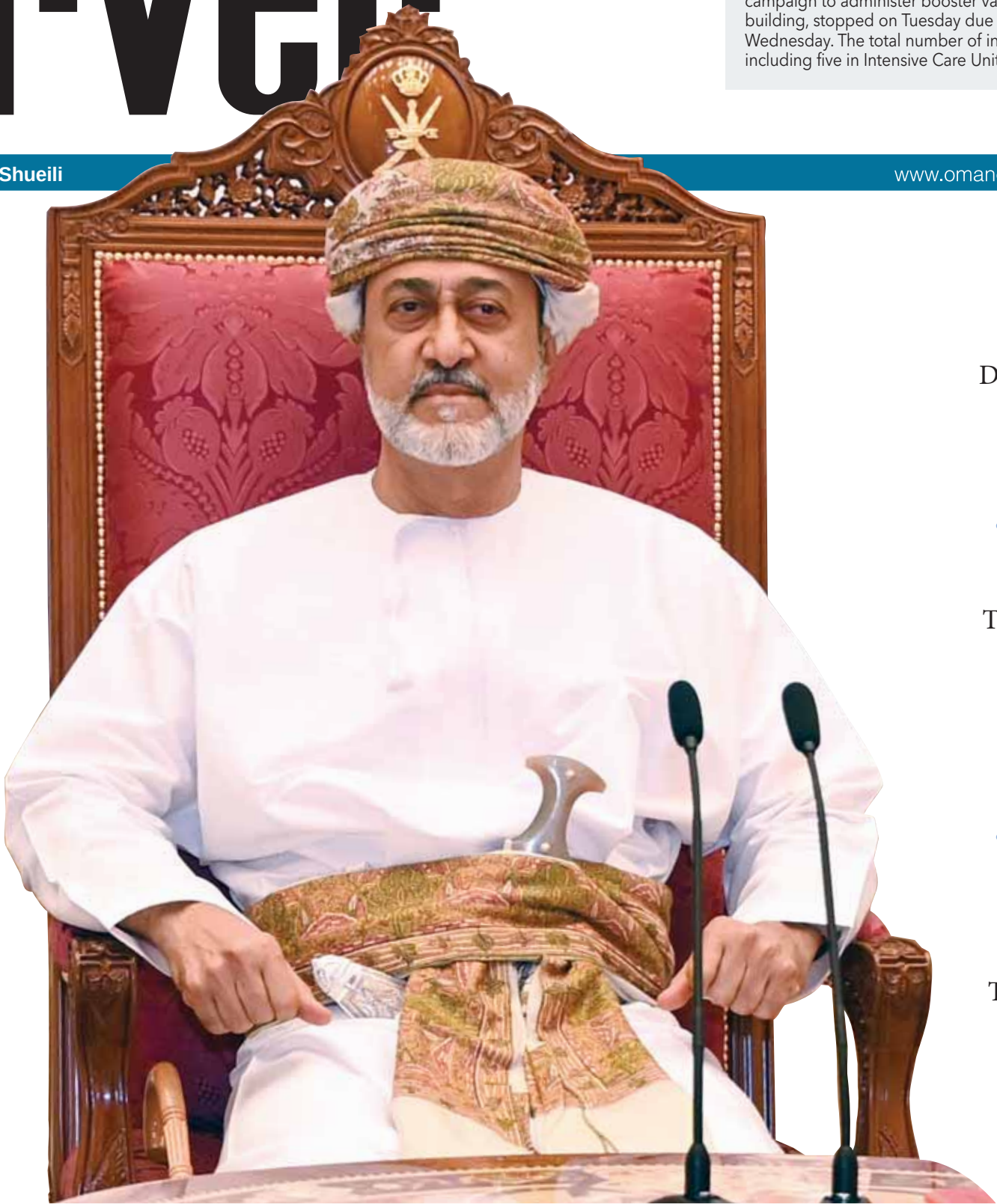
GOVERNORS
MUST CARRY OUT
RESPONSIBILITIES AND
COMPLETE PROJECTS
IN LINE WITH OMAN
VISION 2040

PROVIDE FINANCIAL
SUPPORT TO OMANI
WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS
AND REHABILITATION
CENTRES CATERING
TO PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES

HIS MAJESTY MEETS
SHAIKHS OF AL
DAKHILIYAH, AL WUSTA
GOVERNORATES IN
THE PRESENCE OF
MINISTERS, WALIS

MEETING IS PART OF
THE ROYAL ATTENTION
ON OMANIS TO
STUDY THEIR NEEDS
FOR BASIC PROJECTS
AND DEVELOPMENT
SERVICES

GOVERNORS MUST
PRESENT ANNUAL
EXECUTIVE PLANS
TO THE DEPARTMENTS
CONCERNED ABOUT
WAYS TO EXPEND
THE SUMS



RO 20M EACH FOR GOVERNORATES

MANAH: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik held a meeting with shaikhs of the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah and Al Wusta at Hisn Al Shumookh castle in the Wilayat of Manah on Tuesday.

This was announced in a statement issued by the Diwan of Royal Court reading as follows:

“Within the context of the Royal attention of His Majesty

the Sultan to confer with Omani people in all governorates, study their needs for basic projects and development services, converse with them face to face about all that benefits this noble country and its loyal people and facilitate all the difficulties that might come in the way of the country’s march of comprehensive growth, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik

today held a meeting with shaikhs of Al Dakhiliyah and Al Wusta at Hisn Al Shumookh castle in the Wilayat of Manah.

“At the outset of the meeting, His Majesty the Sultan gave thanks and praise to the Almighty Allah for the prosperity He has bestowed on Oman. His Majesty the Sultan prayed to the Almighty to perpetuate these bounties so that

the blessed Omani renaissance would attain wider horizons of progress.

“Then, His Majesty the Sultan spoke about a number of developmental, economic and social projects that respond to the aspirations of the country and its citizens. He gave directives for collaborative action between the government and citizens to

help realize these aspirations. The desired action stems from the wise Royal vision for the governorates to play their roles and practice their responsibilities in terms with the provisions of the system (statute) attached to Royal Decree No 101/2020 promulgating the Governorates and Municipal Affairs System (law), so that they could deliver their missions in a

manner that conforms with the requirements of the current period and aligns with Oman Vision 2040.

“His Majesty the Sultan also issued directives to increase the sums accorded to Governorates Development Programme from RO 10 million to RO 20 million for each governorate during the current Five-Year Plan, with effect from 2022.

POLICE DAY TODAY

His Majesty receives ROP chief’s greetings

MUSCAT: His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received greetings from Lt Gen Hasan bin Mohsin al Shraiqi, Inspector General of Police and Customs, on the occasion of Police Day, which falls on January 5.

“Your Majesty, Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, the Supreme Commander, May the Almighty Allah protect you! Peace be upon you. On the anniversary of the 5th of January, Police Day, I am honoured, and so are the personnel of the Royal Oman Police (ROP), to express our heartfelt greetings and wishes, praying to the Almighty Allah to bring back this occasion and similar occasions, with Your Majesty relishing abundant bliss and Oman and its people enjoying full security and prosperity.

“Your Majesty’s sons and daughters, the personnel of Your Majesty’s police force, take pride in their association with the establishment of the country’s greatest academic police institution, which is the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences.

“The edifice embodies the importance of science and knowledge that keeps pace with the Omani people’s living style. Training constitutes one of the top priorities of Oman’s Renewed Renaissance.”

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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Traffic was thrown out of gear and many low lying areas were flooded on Tuesday as heavy thundershowers pounded many governorates in the northern part of the Sultanate of Oman due to Al Azm low pressure. Some were left stranded and rescued.

Weather Forecaster at Oman Met Office, Bushara al Saadi, said Muscat received over 46mm of rainfall in Muscat, Liwa 17mm, Mahdha 19mm, Suhar 15mm and Al Amerat over 13mm in the last 24 hours. We are expecting 30 to 50mm in the governorates of North and South Al Batinah, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Muscat and Al Buraimi. What is expected is thundershowers with the fresh downward wind with flash floods.”

The Royal Oman Police had



A view of completely flooded cars in a parking lot outside a shop in Muscat. – AFP

to close a number of roads in the Governorate of Muscat to ensure the safety of people during the heavy rains. They urged commuters going to Al Amerat via the Wadi Adrian route to be aware of the rocks on the road brought down by rainwater.

The road from Al Athaiba to the Wilayat of Muscat had been blocked due to the downpour, and motorists were urged to use alternative routes.

There was the suspension of bus service on all routes within the Muscat Governorate as well

as all intercity bus routes in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman except Dhofar

CMA ALERT

Meanwhile, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) called on citizens, residents, property owners and owners of industrial establishments and shops to adhere to instructions during rains to ensure the safety of their properties.

CMA stated, “Not following the instructions of the Royal Oman Police may lead to the loss of the right of the policyholder from compensation in the event it is proven that the damage to the vehicle resulted from a deliberate act committed by the driver.”

Many hotspots came into being with calls rushing out to Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority.



RO 20M EACH FOR GOVERNORATES



FROM PAGE 1

The Royal directives require the respective governors to present annual executive plans to the departments concerned about ways to expend the sums.

His Majesty the Sultan also tasked the governors with the responsibility of following up the execution of social and service projects in their respective governorates.

“Then, His Majesty the Sultan issued directives to provide appropriate financial support to Omani Women’s Associations and to public and private rehabilitation centres catering to people with disabilities, in all governorates of the Sultanate of Oman, so that these organisations could better perform the significant roles in serving society and developing its potentials.

The meeting was attended by HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth; HH Sayyid Belarab bin Haitham al Said; Sayyid Khalid bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of the Diwan of Royal Court; Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior; Sultan bin Salim al Habsi, Minister of Finance; Dr Hamad bin Said al Aufi, Head of the Private Office; Shaikh Hilal bin Said al Hajri, Governor of Al Dakhiliyah; Shaikh Me’athad bin Mohammed al Yaaqoubi, Governor of Al Wusta; and walis of the governorates of Al Dakhiliyah and Al Wusta.

“May the Almighty Allah protect His Majesty the Sultan and assist him with power to pursue the path of bounties. May He eternalise the Sultanate of Oman’s riches and endow the country and its people with further peace and security.” — ONA





His Majesty receives ROP chief's greetings

FROM P1

It was with full faith and hard work that all contributed to accomplishments made in all spheres, including human resources, which have always been the cornerstone of development and its prime objective. Praise be to the Almighty Allah that this academy has, since its establishment, pursued the beaten track till it attained this advanced position and kept pace with the modern age.

"Your Majesty, While celebrating their annual day and

the associated accomplishments that honed their skills and enriched their experience in serving this blessed country, the ROP personnel highly appreciate Your Majesty's care and keenness to accord enabling powers to the ROP. They take pride in utilising these capacities to serve the noble people of the Sultanate of Oman and safeguard the achievements of the country. They also pledge to remain loyal to Your Majesty. May the Almighty Allah perpetuate His divine support for Your Majesty and Omani people all the time."

— ONA



ROP celebrates annual day today

MUSCAT: The Royal Oman Police (ROP) on Wednesday marks its annual day which falls on January 5 each year. January 5 is considered an exceptional date for the ROP as it marks the opening of the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Science.

The ROP continues to perform its national duties with high efficiency and competence which has been clear in its handling of all events and eventualities such as the adverse weather conditions, the Covid-19 pandemic and the utilisation of modern technologies to improve its services in addition to the many achievements made in the criminology, traffic and customs fields.

The ROP pays great attention to the grooming of its affiliates according to the nature of the tasks entrusted to each of its formations and in line with the emerging security challenges through the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences and the training departments and sections of the various formations of the Royal Oman Police. The ROP utilises the latest training and educational programmes and the practical application that provides the police personnel with the necessary skills to deal with various security issues and events.

The ROP is keen on providing security coverage and police presence at all sites through the police stations that are distributed across the country as well as the provision of the passport and residence, civil status and traffic services at the service centres in various wilayats.

The Special Task Police, a well-trained and competent formation of the ROP, is always in a state of preparedness to provide support in the handling of emergencies.

As a result of modernisation and development achieved in the criminology aspect, the Crime Index 2020 recorded a decrease in crimes against society such as theft, digital extortion, arson and money laundering.

The Directorate-General for Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances carried out qualitative operations and crackdowns on several drug smuggling and trafficking networks.

The Coast Guard Police (CGP) vessels roam the Omani regional seas performing their security and humanitarian duty in cooperation with other military and security



authorities. Besides its tasks in confronting smuggling, piracy and infiltration, CGP coordinates

with the competent authorities in combating marine pollution and providing assistance to sea-goers



through permanent work teams ready to intervene in cases of drowning and marine accidents.

The ROP has reinforced the role of Directorate-General of Police Aviation which provides

The ROP continues to perform its national duties with high efficiency and competence which has been clear in its handling of all events and eventualities such as the adverse weather conditions, the Covid-19 pandemic and the utilisation of modern technologies to improve its services

support to various police formations by conducting patrols to monitor the coastline and detecting suspicious boats on the regional sea of the Sultanate of Oman. The ROP aviation also pitches in with the transportation of police personnel to remote locations and areas of rugged terrain as well, transporting food supplies to mountainous areas.

The ROP's enhanced efforts to reduce road accidents have yielded good results as the road accidents dropped to 70 per cent and death fell to 67 per cent between 2012 and 2020 according to the official data despite a 57 per cent increase in vehicle number registered during the same period. — ONA





ROP urges caution while driving on wet roads

KABEER YOUSUF
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The Royal Oman Police has sounded a general warning about the dangers of driving during and after the rain and asked for sufficient care while driving in these conditions.

“Avoid driving as much as possible during the rains as there are chances of wheel slip-offs and road visibility turning poor to zero”, an official from the traffic department said.

Chances of accidents and casualties during or post rains are high as wet roads decrease vehicles’ proper performance, leading to vehicles going out of driver’s control.

Rainy conditions are directly associated with higher accident rates as spilt oils, water clogs, lower visibility, and soil or mud accumulation on the roads are some of the reasons that lead to accidents during the adverse weather conditions.

“Such instances on the road can decrease the tyre traction, and applying sudden brakes even during a drizzle is dangerous.”

Drivers should keep six important things in mind while driving in the rains

1) Always opt for a slow pace even if the maximum speed signage shows higher

2) Use hazard lights and headlights to let other drivers know your presence as visibility may be less during the rains

3) Maintain a safe distance between other vehicles

4) Watch out for potholes hidden by the gushing water

5) Avoid heavy braking as chances of vehicle skidding in water are high

6) Temperature inside the vehicle should be regulated

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
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A frost/freeze warning is out in the wake of Al Azm trough that has affected most parts of the Sultanate of Oman.

According to experts, frost indicates ‘the layer of ice crystals formed when the water vapour on the plant matter freezes before becoming dew’. The feature of the current trough experienced in the northern parts of the country is that it’s movement is associated with the northwesterly wind.

Explaining the technicality Bushra al Sadi, weather forecaster from Oman Met Office, said, “The fresh northwesterly wind is what the trough is connected with and this wind is linked with bringing down the temperature in the northern part of the country.”

According to her, during this weather condition, the maximum temperature ranges between 16 and 23 degrees Celcius and the minimum temperature can go down to even 3.5, which is experienced over Jabal Shams.

This weather condition is expected to be experienced currently anywhere from January



5 to 7. Meanwhile, residents of Jabal Al Akhdhar have already reported cold weather conditions.

The mountains are drenched in rain, mist and enveloped by low lying clouds that flow through the range.

Malik al Hussaini from Oman Met Office explained how the temperature would drop by

January 5.

However, this weather condition emerges as photographers’ delight as they wait to capture the frost moment.

“It will be freezing in the mountain tops such as Jabal Shams, Jabal Al Akhdhar and maybe some mountains in Musandam. But we are expecting freezing

point on Jabal Shams during the early morning on Thursday and maybe Friday early morning. It is visible when the available water in Jabal Shams freezes. So maybe photographers who are keen on this feature should reach these destinations — Jabal Al Akhdhar or Jabal Shams on Thursday or Friday morning.”

■ FROM P1

Rains hit life, throws traffic out of gear



“Calls have been received by the operations centre of Royal Oman Police. One person who was stranded was rescued at Al Mawaleh. Another person was rescued from November 18th road and yet another person was stranded in Ghubra, and Royal Oman Police handled the situation successfully.

We also had a situation to handle in Al Dakhiliyah where a truck had overturned. However,

there were no severe injuries. There was also a mountainside collapse in Wadi Adawi, and thankfully there was no injury. We had also received a call from Al Buraimi. “We request citizens and residents to take full precautions during these weather conditions. People should be home unless there is an urgency to go out”, said First Lieutenant Said al Mehrzi of Royal Oman Police. Rescue teams

in the Governorate of Muscat had also managed to rescue five people after they were stranded in water in the Al Ghubra area in the Wilayat of Bausher, and they are in good health.

FOLLOW THE BULLETINS
The Authority urged people to avoid walking across any watercourse if the water is above the knee. Furthermore, it called on everyone to follow the

bulletins on the weather situation from its official sources and not pay attention to rumours. If one is caught in a running wadi, get out of the car and move on to the roof until help arrives, the authority advised. CDAA also advised people not to cross wadis even if the water is low. The Authority also called on parents to monitor children and protect them from drowning.



Covid in-patients surge as 232 cases reported

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The number of Covid cases in the new wave hit another landmark as the Ministry of Health (MoH) on Tuesday reported 232 new cases and zero deaths in the last 24 hours.

The campaign to administer booster vaccines at the Old Airport building, stopped on Tuesday due to rains, will resume on Wednesday.

The total number of in-patients went up to 15, including five in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

With the total death toll rising to 4,117, the recovery rate has now dropped to 98.1 per cent.

Meanwhile, health experts around the world, including in the Sultanate of Oman, have affirmed that current vaccines will protect against, hospitalisations

The campaign to administer booster vaccines at the Old Airport building, stopped on Tuesday due to rains, will resume on Wednesday

and deaths due to the Omicron variant.

Vaccines have remained effective at preventing severe illness, hospitalisations and death.

As the recent emergence of Omicron further emphasises the importance of vaccination and boosters, which is now being administered to both residents and citizens across the country.

Authorities have confirmed the requirements for entering the country through land borders, which include receiving at least two doses of an approved vaccine for those aged 18 years and above — for residents or non-Omanis.

The requirement includes presenting a negative certificate of PCR tests upon arrival, provided that the examination was conducted within a period not exceeding 72 hours prior to arrival.

Meanwhile, citizens of the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates will have to present a certificate of receiving two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine.

It also includes the PCR negative result, with a period not exceeding 14 days between the date of taking the test sample and arriving in the Sultanate of Oman.

Nation improves ranking in ICAO Global Reporting Format

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), scored 100 per cent and achieved an advanced rank at an international level after the successful implementation of the ICAO Global Reporting Format (GRF) for Runway Surface Condition Assessment and Reporting.

A new Global Reporting Format (GRF) for runway surface condition assessment and reporting became applicable as of November 4, 2021 for all ICAO contracting countries.

The GRF is a globally harmonised methodology that is intended to be the only reporting format for international aviation, with the objective of reducing runway excursions, which continues to be the most common form of



aviation accidents.

The harmonisation of the assessment and reporting of runway surface conditions will not only benefit runway safety, but also efficiency and environmental impact through improved decision-making, fewer runway closures and better air traffic management.

In alignment with ICAO new requirements, the CAA started

the process to implement the GRF as of early 2021, in close coordination with ICAO Middle East office at Cairo.

The CAA established a national implementation plan, updating the Sultanate of Oman's regulatory framework, and conducting appropriate training for involved stakeholders and safety risk assessment. — ONA

Trade ties with Pakistan to get a boost

KARACHI: An Omani trade delegation headed by Eng Ridha bin Juma al Saleh, Chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), visited Pakistan.

The delegation, comprising representatives from the private sector, sought boosting trade and investment cooperation between private sector institutions and ways to increase the volume of trade between both countries.

On the sidelines of the visit, Eng Ridha met with Eng Syed Murad Ali Shah, Sindh Chief



Minister in Karachi.

The meeting reviewed the investment opportunities in the Sultanate of Oman as well as the facilities and incentives provided to investors.

The meeting was attended by members of OCCI and the Omani trade delegation. It was also attended by Pakistani businessmen representing several commercial sectors.

Omani imports from Pakistan stood at RO 62.3 million in 2019, while the value of Omani exports to Pakistan amounted to RO 56.1 million. — ONA

RNO Commander receives Pakistani counterpart



MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), received in his office at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed, Commander of the Navy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

The two sides reviewed fields of the existing maritime cooperation between the two navies and exchanged views on several matters of common interest.

The meeting was attended by Commodore Tarik bin Issa al Raisi, RNO Senior Staff Officer, RNO officers and the Military Attaché at the Pakistani Embassy in Muscat.

Also on Tuesday, Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed visited the Maritime Security Centre (MSC), accompanied by Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi.

Upon the guest's arrival, he was received by Commodore Mohammed bin Hamoud al Zadjali, Head of the MSC.

The guest toured the centre's facilities and viewed its latest equipment and technologies. He was also briefed on the tactical roles and tasks carried out by the centre within its national duties, as it coordinates with relevant authorities in search and rescue missions and the safety of the maritime environment. — ONA



Tender of Government Treasury Bills worth RO 216 million issued

MUSCAT: A tender of Government Treasury Bills, issue number 131, worth RO 216 million was issued this week.

Treasury Bills are short-term highly secured financial instruments issued by the Ministry of Finance and they provide licensed commercial banks the opportunity to invest their surplus funds.

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) acts as the Issue Manager and provides the added advantage



of ready liquidity through discounting and repurchase facilities (Repo).

The results of the said issue are

as follows: the total value of the allotted Treasury Bills amounted to RO 216 million, for a maturity period of 28 days, from January 5, 2022 until February 2, 2022. The average accepted price reached 99.951 for every RO 100 and the minimum accepted price arrived at 99.950 per RO 100.

The average discount rate and the average yield reached 0.63972 per cent and 0.64003 per cent, respectively.

It may be noted that the interest

rate on the Repo operations with CBO is 0.5 per cent while the discount rate on the Treasury Bills Discounting Facility with CBO is 0.75 per cent.

Furthermore, Treasury Bills promote the local money market by creating a benchmark yield curve for short-term interest rates. Additionally, the Government may also resort to this instrument whenever felt necessary for financing its recurrent expenditures. — ONA

Saudi Chief of General Staff leaves

MUSCAT: Air Chief Marshal Fayyadh Hamed al Ruwaili, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and his accompanying delegation left here on Tuesday after an official several-day visit to the Sultanate of Oman.

The guest and his accompanying delegation were seen off by Vice Admiral Abdullah bin Khamis al Raisi, Chief of Staff of the Sultan's Armed Forces (SAF), officers and the Military Attaché at the Saudi Embassy in Muscat.



Hundreds rally in Sudan against military rule

KHARTOUM: Hundreds of Sudanese anti-coup protesters rallied on Tuesday chanting slogans against the military as security forces deployed in Khartoum and neighbouring cities, witnesses said, days after the resignation of the country's civilian premier.

Protesters shouted "No, no to military rule" and called for the fall of Sudan's ruling council headed by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who led a military coup on October 25 that derailed a transition to civilian rule.

Streets leading to the presidential palace and army headquarters in central Khartoum were sealed off amid a heavy presence of riot police, paramilitary forces and army personnel, the witnesses said.

Dozens also gathered in the neighbouring city of Omdurman and barricaded streets using rocks and bricks.

Pro-democracy activists have stepped up calls for demonstrations since the October coup which saw then-

prime minister Abdalla Hamdok and cabinet ministers detained.

The coup has triggered mass demonstrations and a violent crackdown that has so far left at least 57 dead and hundreds wounded, an independent union of medics has said.

At least 13 women have allegedly been raped during the unrest, according to the United Nations.

On November 21, Burhan reinstated Hamdok in an agreement promising elections in mid-2023, but the protest movement slammed the deal as "betrayal" and has kept up street pressure.

Late on Sunday, Hamdok announced that he was stepping down, saying he had tried to prevent the country "from sliding toward disaster" but that it was now at a "dangerous crossroads threatening its very survival".

Arab League chief Ahmed Aboul Gheit said on Tuesday that he "respects" Hamdok's decision and called for "urgent



A demonstrator looks on from behind a flaming tire at a make-shift barricade erected during a protest demanding civilian rule in the "Street 40" of the Sudanese capital's twin city of Omdurman on Tuesday. — AFP

action" to resolve the crisis.

The United Nations' secretary-general "regrets that a political

understanding on the way forward is not in place despite the gravity of the situation in

Sudan", UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric said on Monday.

Sudan has been navigating

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

Activists online have urged demonstrators to head to the presidential palace in Khartoum "until victory is achieved", according to the Sudanese Professionals Association, an umbrella of unions that were instrumental during the anti-Bashir protests.

General Burhan last month issued a decree allowing security forces to arrest individuals "over crimes related to the state of emergency", effectively banning street protests.

Security forces are allowed to enter and search "any building or individual" and impose "surveillance of any property and facility".

Since the coup, authorities have often disrupted Internet services and communication lines to prevent mass gatherings.

— AFP

Delhi imposes weekend Covid curfew, CM tests positive

NEW DELHI: Authorities in Delhi on Tuesday ordered people to stay home over coming weekends having seen Covid-19 cases quadruple in a week, with its chief minister saying he had caught the virus just a day after he addressed an election rally without a mask.

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the most senior elected official of the Indian capital's administration, was one of the 37,379 new Covid-19 cases reported in India in the past 24 hours. Deaths in the past day totaled 124.

The daily case load was the highest since early September and experts suspect the highly transmissible Omicron variant has begun to overtake the Delta variant as the latest wave of coronavirus infection builds in places like Delhi, though authorities say hospitalisations have not spiked yet.

Delhi is reporting more than 4,000 new cases a day, and Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia said though most patients were showing mild or no symptoms and recovering fast, people will have to stay indoors on Saturday and Sundays to rein in the virus.

On weekdays, most offices



A youth leaves with her parent after receiving a dose of the Covaxin vaccine during a vaccination drive for youths in the 15-18 age group in New Delhi on Tuesday. — AFP

will have ensure that half their employees work from home, he told a media briefing, adding that when possible infected people should stay home so that hospitals are able to handle the most serious cases.

Kejriwal, who addressed an election rally in the state of Uttarakhhand, said on Twitter he had isolated at home with mild symptoms and urged anyone he had been in contact with during recent days to do likewise and get tested for Covid-19.

Neither the chief minister or any of the people seen sharing the dais with him during the rally wore masks.

Facebook user Abhishekh Singh posted a message on Kejriwal's official page telling the chief minister he should reflect on his behaviour.

"Try spending some time in isolation to watch your own videos/advertisements on how to be careful, wear masks, and not overcrowd public places," he wrote. — Reuters

China locks down city of 1.2 million after three virus cases

BEIJING: More than one million people in a city in central China were being confined to their homes on Tuesday after three asymptomatic coronavirus cases were recorded in the country's latest mass lockdown.

Beijing has pursued a "zero Covid" approach with tight border restrictions and targeted lockdowns since the virus first emerged.

But the strategy has come under pressure with a series of recent local outbreaks and with just a month to go until the Winter Olympics.

Yuzhou, a city with a population of around 1.17 million people in Henan province, announced that from Monday night all citizens were required to stay home to control the spread of the virus.

The announcement was triggered by the discovery of three cases in the last couple of days.

People in the central area "must not go out", according to a statement posted on Monday, while all communities will set up "sentinels and gates to strictly implement epidemic prevention and control measures".

The city had already announced that it was halting bus and taxi services and closing shopping malls, museums and tourist attractions.



China reported another 175 new Covid-19 cases on Tuesday, including five in Henan province and eight more in a separate cluster linked to a garment factory in the eastern city of Ningbo.

Although the reported cases are low compared with elsewhere in the world, new coronavirus infections in recent weeks have reached a high not seen in the country since March 2020.

There were 95 fresh cases recorded in Xi'an on Tuesday — a historic city of 13 million people in neighbouring Shaanxi province — which has been under lockdown for nearly two weeks.

Xi'an has reported more than 1,600 cases since December 9, although numbers in the last few days have started to slide compared to last week's figures.

Local authorities deemed to have failed in preventing virus outbreaks in China are often fired or punished, prompting a series of ever-stricter responses from provincial governments as they try to stamp out any cases quickly.

In Xi'an, two senior Communist Party officials in the northern city were removed from their posts over their "insufficient rigour in preventing and controlling the outbreak". — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TUNIS

Detained ex-minister suspected of 'terrorism'

Detained Tunisian ex-justice minister Nouredine Bhiri of the Ennahdha party, who is refusing food or medication after his transfer to hospital, is suspected of "terrorism", Interior Minister Taoufik Charfeddine said on Monday. Bhiri, deputy president of Ennahdha — viewed by President Kais Saied as an enemy — was arrested by plainclothes officers on Friday and his whereabouts were initially unknown.

Ennahdha had played a central role in Tunisian politics until



a power grab by President Kais Saied last year. "There were fears of acts of terrorism targeting the country's security and we had to act," Charfeddine said late on Monday of the arrest.

CAIRO

Egyptian-Palestinian to be freed from prison

Egypt's prosecution ordered the release of Egyptian-Palestinian activist Ramy Shaath on Monday after almost two and a half years in detention, a judiciary source said.

The source said that Shaath, the son of veteran Palestinian politician Nabil Shaath, "has been released by the prosecution". There were no further details.

His wife, French national Celine Lebrun, said: "I heard about the decision but according to



what I know he is not yet out."

She added that she would release a statement once he is confirmed to be free. Lebrun was deported from Egypt shortly after her husband's arrest.

TELAVIV

Fourth dose boosts antibodies five-fold: Study

A fourth dose of Covid-19 vaccine boosts antibodies five-fold a week after the shot is administered, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said on Tuesday, citing preliminary findings of an Israeli study.

"A week into the fourth dose we know to a higher degree of certainty that the fourth dose is safe," Bennett said at Sheba Medical Center, which is giving second booster shots in a trial among its staff.

"The second piece of news:



We know that a week after administration of a fourth dose, we see a five-fold increase in the number of antibodies in the vaccinated person," he told reporters.



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In brief

■ STOCKHOLM



SWEDISH KING AND QUEEN TEST COVID POSITIVE

Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia have tested positive for Covid-19, the palace said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The King and Queen, who are fully vaccinated with three injections, have mild symptoms and are feeling well, given the circumstances", the palace said in a statement.

The palace said the King, 75, and the Queen, 78, were self-isolating and that work to trace those that they had been in contact with was under way.

The news came as Sweden set a new daily record for Covid-19 cases amid a surge caused by the highly-infectious Omicron variant.

■ SAO PAULO



BOLSONARO WILL NOT UNDERGO SURGERY

President Jair Bolsonaro will not need surgery, but there is no date set yet for his discharge, doctors said on Tuesday, after the Brazilian leader was rushed to the hospital with a partially blocked intestine.

Bolsonaro, 66, developed abdominal pain during a New Year's beach vacation in the southern state of Santa Catarina, and was taken to a Sao Paulo hospital early on Monday aboard the presidential jet. Doctors said his partial intestinal blockage "has been eliminated", and that he was making "satisfactory progress" — but would be placed on a liquid diet and remain in hospital for now.

■ NEW YORK



PRINCE ANDREW ABUSE HEARING STARTS IN NEW YORK

A key court hearing in which Prince Andrew's lawyers will urge a New York judge to dismiss a sexual assault lawsuit brought against the British royal got under way on Tuesday.

Oral arguments in the civil action filed by Virginia Giuffre, a longtime accuser of Jeffrey Epstein and convicted sex trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell, began shortly after 10:00 am (1500 GMT).

Andrew's attorneys are expected to argue that a once-confidential settlement between accuser Giuffre and late disgraced financier Epstein unveiled on Monday protects the prince from litigation.

New Covid variant found in France

PARIS: As the world grapples with the highly mutated Omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2, scientists have identified a new strain of the Covid-19 causing virus in Southern France.

Known as 'IHU', the B.1.640.2 variant has been reported by researchers at institute IHU Mediterranee Infection in at least 12 cases, and has been linked to travel to African country Cameroon.

However, the researchers noted that it is too early to speculate on how this variant behaves as far as infection and protection from vaccines is concerned.

The yet-to-be peer-reviewed study, posted on the preprint repository MedRxiv on December 29, revealed that IHU has 46 mutations and 37 deletions resulting in 30 amino acid substitutions and 12 deletions.

Amino acids are molecules that combine to form proteins, and both are the building blocks of life.

Fourteen amino acid substitutions, including N501Y and E484K, and nine deletions are located in the spike protein.

Most currently used vaccines are targeted at the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2, which the virus uses to enter and infect the cells.

N501Y and E484K mutations



Volunteers hand out boxes of Covid-19 rapid antigen Lateral Flow Tests (LFT), in north east London on Wednesday. — AFP

were earlier also found in Beta, Gamma, Theta and Omicron variants.

"The mutation set and phylogenetic position of the genomes obtained here indicate based on our previous definition a new variant we named IHU", the authors of the study said.

"These data are another

example of the unpredictability of the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 variants, and of their introduction in a given geographical area from abroad", they added.

The B.1.640.2 has not been identified in other countries so far or labelled a variant under investigation by the World Health Organization (WHO).

According to the researchers, the index (first) case was an adult diagnosed positive by RTPCR performed in a laboratory on a nasopharyngeal sample collected in mid-November last year.

Epidemiologist Eric Feigl-Ding posted a long Twitter thread in which he said that new variants keep emerging but it does not

Known as 'IHU', the B.1.640.2 variant has been reported by researchers at institute IHU Mediterranee Infection in at least 12 cases, and has been linked to travel to Cameroon

necessarily mean they will be more dangerous.

"What makes a variant more well-known and dangerous is its ability to multiply because of the number of mutations it has in relation to the original virus", Feigl-Ding tweeted on Tuesday.

"This is when it becomes a "variant of concern" — like Omicron, which is more contagious and more past immunity evasive. It remains to be seen in which category this new variant will fall", he said.

Many countries are currently experiencing a spike in Covid-19 cases driven by the Omicron variant which was first identified in South Africa and Botswana in November last year.

Since then, the variant of concern has spread to over 100 countries.

— Agencies

US SNOWSTORM STRANDS DRIVERS FOR HOURS AND HOURS



People sled down a hill in Rock Creek Park following a snowstorm in Washington on Tuesday. — Reuters

Nato schedules special meet with Russia amid Ukraine crisis

BRUSSELS: Nato Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg has scheduled a special meeting of allied ambassadors and top Russian officials for next week as both sides seek dialogue to prevent open conflict over Ukraine, a Nato official said on Tuesday.

Alarmed by Russia's military build-up along Ukraine's border, the Western military alliance has been seeking a meeting of the Nato-Russia Council for months but the forum seemed in jeopardy after an espionage dispute in October.

The meeting of the council, a format used for dialogue since 2002, will take place in Brussels on January 12 after US and Russian officials hold security talks on January 10 in Geneva.

The European Union's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, flew to Ukraine on Tuesday for a two-day trip to show support for Kyiv, which aspires to join the bloc and Nato. Nato foreign ministers will hold a video conference on Friday.

— AFP

EU bans cancer threat chemicals in tattoo ink

BRUSSELS: An EU ban on tattoo ink and permanent make-up containing chemicals feared to cause cancers or other health risks went into effect on Tuesday, officials said.

The prohibition covers hazardous substances such as certain azo dyes, carcinogenic aromatic amines, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), metals and methanol.

"The restriction covers carcinogenic, mutagenic and reprotoxic substances, chemicals prohibited in cosmetics, skin sensitisers, skin and eye irritants, metal impurities, aromatic amines and some pigments", the European Commission said.

"The protection of public health of European citizens is our primary concern, and



A tattoo artist attends to a customer in her shop, as new EU restrictions on coloured tattoo come into force, in Rixensart, Belgium on Tuesday. — Reuters

hazardous chemicals in tattoo ink can represent such a concern", a commission spokeswoman, Sonya Gospodinova, told journalists.

Seven EU countries already

apply the ban at national level.

The directive — agreed by all EU member states a year-and-a-half ago — now makes it applicable across the 27-nation

bloc, including for imports coming from outside the European Union.

A commission spokesman, Eric Mamer, said that safer substitute chemicals existed for use in most pigments and colourations.

"Where there are currently no substitutes there is a grace period so the industry has time to find alternative solutions", he said.

The European Chemicals Agency (ECA) said tattoo inks and permanent make-up contain chemical mixes that can be hazardous, causing "skin allergies and other more serious health impacts, such as genetic mutations and cancer".

It noted that ink pigments can seep into the body from the skin, affecting organs such as lymph nodes and the liver — and that laser-treatment to erase tattoos can

break the substances into smaller particles that circulate in the body.

"As chemicals used in tattoo inks and permanent make-up may stay in the body for life, there is also the possibility for long-term exposure to the potentially harmful ingredients", it said.

The two main substances for which no substitutes are currently unavailable are synthetic beta-copper phthalocyanine dyes commonly used in tattoos: Pigment Blue 15:3 and Pigment Green 7.

German health authorities say both of those are feared to cause bladder cancer, although data is inconclusive.

The ECA said retailers and consumers would be unlikely to see price rises as a result of the EU ban. — AFP

Timing of communication is crucial



Bader Al Kiyumi
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In the digital world, public and private entities ensure that communication strategies are simple and strong to reach the target audience.

But when it comes to government decisions and achievements, often the twitterti or social media influencers subject it to unqualified comments and harsher criticisms. They comment on anything under the sun without the qualifications to do so and make it muddy. The result is good deeds drown in a barrage of negativities.

Each organisation needs to reinforce the corporate identity and build a trust with its beneficiaries. When we talk about identity, we do not mean security and safety, because Omanis have

passed this stage and become a main contributor in preserving the country's resources and they are familiar with the country's facilitators and challenges as well. Organisations whether public or private must ensure effective communication with the society.

Unfortunately, some organisations do not react faster to the public's demands or answer queries. They take time until they come out with their response in detail. But this delay in response is enough to generate bad press or frustration and leaves no space in the mind of the target audience even for a satisfactory response.

For example, lots of parents raised a hashtag on social media platforms against the delay in

THE RECENT MEDIA GATHERING WHICH WAS ORGANISED BY THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE ON THE BUDGET IN THE PRESENCE OF OFFICIALS IS ONE OF THE SUCCESSFUL MODELS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION. IT CLARIFIED ALL THE QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUDGET 2022

getting school books for their kids. The Ministry of Education issued a statement explaining the reasons behind the delay. The statement came after the

parents raised an issue.

Had the MoE explained the reasons for the delay before the parents raised it, it would have cooled the temper of parents.

Another trend I noticed is that the majority of the entities attribute their routine work to Oman Vision 2040.

I think that we should move away from such unnecessary philosophical statements. For instance, an official representative stated: "Based on the vision plan, the citizen's income would be RO 26,000 per annum."

What is the connection between vision and income? There is no clarity in the statement. Is it worth announcing all the plans when they are still in preparatory stages?

Should we tag everything to Oman Vision 2040?

The recent media gathering which was organised by the Ministry of Finance on the budget in the presence of officials is one of the successful models of government communication. It clarified all the questions relating to the Budget 2022. Agencies must hold meetings to review the work of the past year and present their plans for the upcoming period. Last year, the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning held meetings reviewing their work. We are eagerly waiting to see whether the promises they made have turned into realities.

We have to focus on promoting our achievements.

Italy readies for new president

Italy's parliament will start voting on January 24 for a new president, with Prime Minister Mario Draghi widely expected to take over despite the risk of destabilising the country's post-pandemic recovery.

Sergio Mattarella is stepping down on February 3 after completing a seven-year term as president, a largely ceremonial post except in times of political crisis, when he plays a crucial arbitrating role.

It was Mattarella who brought in Draghi, a former European Central Bank chief, to lead a national unity government in February 2021 when the previous coalition collapsed — and he may now step into his benefactor's shoes.

The new job would last seven years, whereas Draghi's premiership risks ending with elections scheduled for 2023, allowing him to continue to exert considerable influence.

But the 74-year-old's move to the Quirinale presidential palace would upset the balance of power in the government just as Italy is emerging from the devastation wrought by the coronavirus pandemic.

THE WINNER IS CHOSEN BY SECRET BALLOT OF AROUND 1,000 ELECTORS COMPRISING SENATORS, MPS AND REPRESENTATIVES OF ITALY'S 20 REGIONS, AND MUST SECURE AT LEAST TWO-THIRDS OF VOTES IN THE FIRST THREE ROUNDS, OR MORE THAN HALF THEREAFTER

MPs and representatives of Italy's 20 regions, and must secure at least two-thirds of votes in the first three rounds, or more than half thereafter.

Draghi is credited with helping save the euro as ECB chief during the debt crisis a decade ago, by pledging to do "whatever it takes", and has received plaudits during his year-long premiership.

The eurozone's third-largest economy is powering out of the recession sparked by a lengthy lockdown in early 2020.

But Italy is relying on almost 200 billion euros (\$226 billion) in grants and loans from the EU's recovery plan — money that is conditional on major reforms, including to the justice system and public administration, which Draghi has only begun to implement.

There is the risk that the rainbow coalition Draghi has kept together for a year, which includes all the main political parties barring the far-right Brothers of Italy, could lose focus if he leaves.

It might even collapse, risking early elections.

— AFP



Daniel Gros

Daniel Gros is a member of the board and a distinguished fellow at the Centre for European Policy Studies

FROM AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE, THE COVID-19 CRISIS HAS SO FAR PLAYED OUT MUCH BETTER THAN FEARED FOR MORE VULNERABLE SEGMENTS OF SOCIETY

During the acute phase of the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, when a large part of the population was locked down at home, the economy fell into a deep recession that hit the unskilled and minorities particularly hard. Moreover, in contrast to previous downturns, the job losses were concentrated in sectors with a high proportion of female workers, justifying the term "shecession."

The first indications, therefore, were that the fallout from the pandemic would exacerbate inequality. But the subsequent two years have provided signs that this is not necessarily the case.

For starters, the direct impact of actual or potential job losses on people's income was offset in most developed countries by unprecedented government support. In the United States, this assistance took the form of checks mailed directly to millions of households. In Europe, most governments financed massive short-term schemes, under which the state footed the bill for firms to retain furloughed workers. These measures meant that initial pandemic-induced job losses did not lead to lower incomes. And those most likely to lose their jobs were also the most likely to receive generous government support.

As a result, inequality indicators that are based on disposable income — that

is, total income after accounting for taxes and government transfers — did not deteriorate, and even improved slightly in some cases. The most widely accepted gauge of income inequality is the so-called Gini coefficient, which measures how far the observed income distribution diverges from perfect egalitarianism. In the US, the coefficient remained very high in 2020, but it did not increase further.

The pattern is similar in Europe, with one study even finding that income inequality fell from January 2020 to January 2021 in the European Union's four largest economies — Germany, France, Italy and Spain. According to another study, although inequality would have increased considerably without government action, both the Gini index and the official EU risk of poverty indicator show that targeted state support programmes neutralised this initial impact.

This outcome highlights how the state can perform its role of insurer of last resort by protecting vulnerable groups from an unexpected economic shock of unprecedented magnitude. But governments are now winding down Covid-19 support schemes as the recovery proceeds, albeit somewhat more gradually in Europe than in the US, where the rebound is more complete. Does this mean that the pre-

pandemic trend towards increasing inequality will resume?

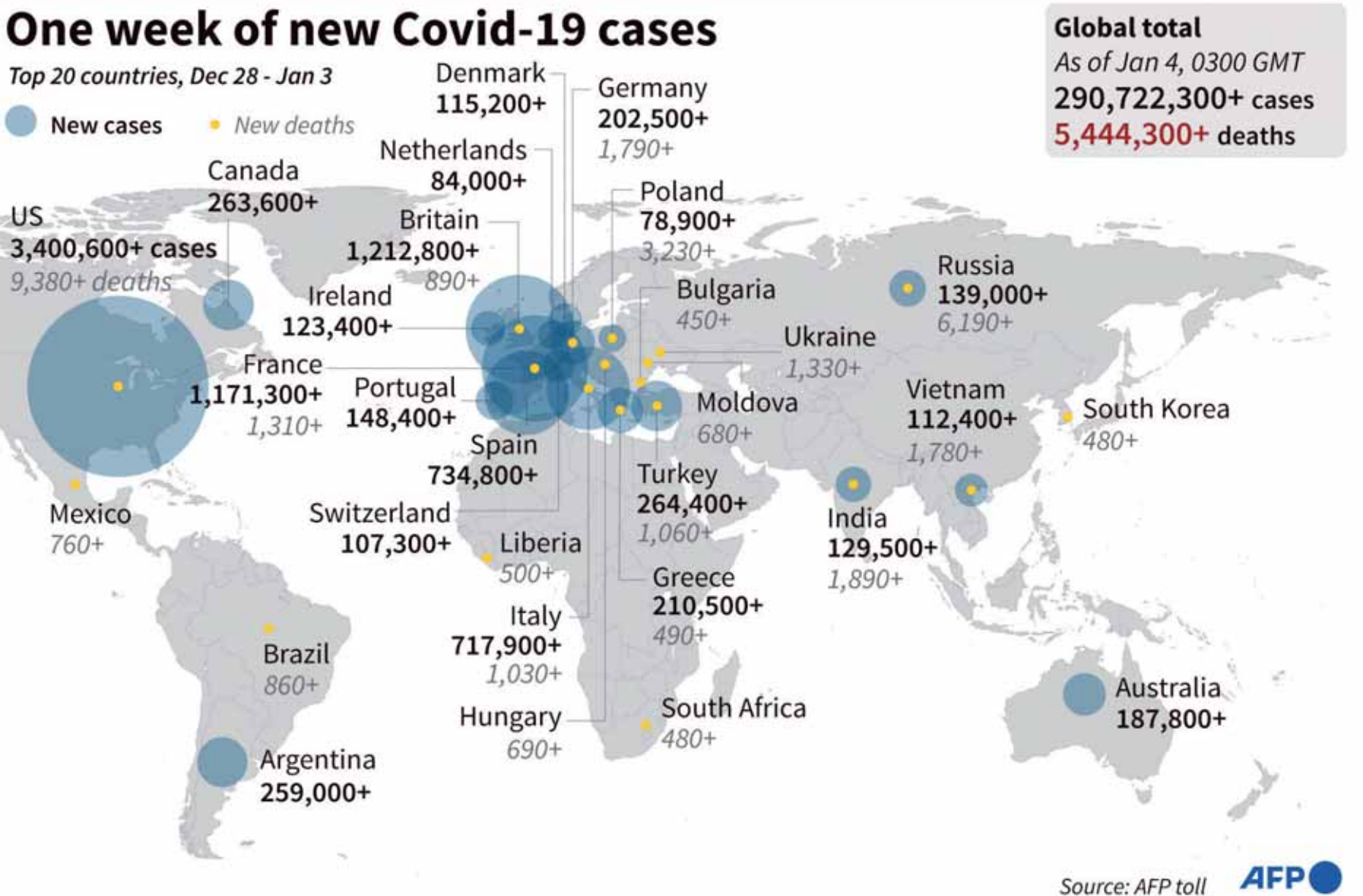
Again, initial indications are that the opposite may be true, and that previous inequality patterns might be reversed in the post-pandemic world. The "shecession" turned out to be a short-lived phenomenon, with most job losses that affected women lasting only a quarter or two. Another encouraging sign is that the wage share — the share of total output that is paid to employees — increased in 2020 and in 2021.

The wage share had been falling for a long time, fostering a raft of explanations. But the recent recovery seems natural: There are currently too few workers to operate the existing capital stock. "Build back better" is a misnomer. Covid-19 lockdowns did not destroy any capital, but merely rendered it idle for a short period.

The recovery thus does not require new capital, only a redeployment of what was already available.

But there is now less labour available than before because of what US commentators have called the "Great Resignation", which has effectively reduced the workforce, or rather the share of the adult population willing to work at previous wage levels. Firms must offer higher wages to attract the workers they need to increase production.

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Ahli Sidab aim to retain glory, Sohar eye maiden title

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, JAN 4

Hockey heavyweights Ahli Sidab will take on Sohar in the summit clash of the 51st edition of the coveted His Majesty's Cup Hockey Championship crown on Wednesday.

The match kicks off at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex (SQSC) at 7:00 pm. Dr Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Said al Saeedi, Minister of Justice and Legal Affairs, will be the chief guest in presence of top dignitaries and officials.

Defending champion and powerhouse, Sidab, will be chasing a record 13th title in history. Sidab is equal in number of titles with Muscat club as both of them possess 12 titles.

Today's triumph will give advantage for Sidab to lead in the record list. The experienced national coach Khalid al Riyami will bank on his experienced players and young faces including Abdullah al Alawi, Ali al Zadjali, Salah al Saadi and Rushid al Fazari. The selected players for the match will expect to deliver in a crunch fixture.

On the other hand, the opponent Sohar, is back to the finals after 20 years of absence and will eye on lifting the first historic title.

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY
Northern Batinah team, coached by Hamood al Wahaibi, will not miss the golden opportunity for snatching the prestigious cup as they lost the finals in 2001 against



Seeb. The Sohar team possesses many top performers including Sameer Halees, Amjad al Hasani, Qasim Moosa, Shabeeb al Shubli and Hussain al Qasmi.

Twelve times winner, Sidab, booked a slot in the final after a 7-6 win over Al Nasr in a shootout as both teams were locked in a 1-1 draw at the end of regulation time in semis round. Sohar advanced to the final as they defeated Muscat-based team, Seeb, 4-2 in a thriller in the semifinals.

HISTORIC TITLE
The head coach of Sidab team, Khalid al Riyami, affirmed that the team will manage the fixture in a systematic way in order to achieve the required output. "Sohar is a well organised team. They advanced to the final and

have all the factors to register the historic title. Also, our team is equipped properly and with all the players in good shape to show top performance and clinch new accomplishment", he said.

Coach Hamood al Wahaibi, head of coaching staff in Sohar team, said that the team worked hard during the past few months until reaching the final game. "We managed to show perfection in the initial stages which assisted the team to move to the final rounds. The team registered victory against Ahli Sidab in the final rounds but today's assignment is totally different as each team will plan for it separately. The international friendly tourney which concluded recently helped the team to prepare for the final encounter", he concluded.



RANGNICK SUFFERS FIRST DEFEAT AS WOLVES WIN AT UNITED



MANCHESTER: Manchester United suffered their first defeat under interim manager Ralf Rangnick, falling to a 1-0 loss at home to Wolverhampton Wanderers in the Premier League on Monday.

An 82nd minute strike from Joao Moutinho earned Wolves their first win at Old Trafford since 1980 and moved Bruno Lage's side up to eighth place.

United, who could have few complaints about the result after a

poor performance, remain seventh place on 31 points — four behind Arsenal who currently hold the fourth Champions League spot.

Wolves created a series of chances in the first half but it was not until eight minutes from the end that they made their superiority count when Moutinho pounced on a headed clearance from Phil Jones and fired past David De Gea.

German Rangnick, who is in charge of United until the end of

the season after taking over from the sacked Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, saw a disjointed display by his team with little sign of the high-energy pressing style he had initially attempted to introduce.

“We didn’t play well at all individually or collectively. In the first half, we had big problems to keep them away from our goal,” said Rangnick.

“The game showed we still have a lot of work to do. We had too many unforced errors. I don’t

want to speak about individual performances of players. It’s an issue of the whole team. It doesn’t make sense,” he added.

The injury-plagued Jones made his first Premier League appearance in almost two years with Rangnick turning to the former England central defender in the absence of Harry Maguire, Victor Lindelof and Eric Bailly.

The 29-year-old had delivered a solid performance on his return before his ill-judged header out

towards Moutinho which led to the goal.

Wolves could easily have had a comfortable lead by halftime with the excellent Daniel Podence, Ruben Neves and Nelson Semedo all bringing United keeper De Gea into action early in the game.

United created little with their best opening of the first half ending with Edinson Cavani blasting a shot off target when he should have played in Mason Greenwood.

Greenwood had been the most creative player for United and there were rare boos from the home crowd when Rangnick chose him to make way for the introduction of Bruno Fernandes.

Fernandes should have put United ahead when he side-footed a low ball across the box from Nemanja Matic against the cross-bar and Ronaldo had the ball in the net, with a header from a Fernandes cross, but the effort was flagged for offside. — **Reuters**



Mbappe hits treble as PSG stroll into French Cup last 16

VANNES: Holders Paris St Germain eased into the French Cup last 16 after a second-half hat-trick from Kylian Mbappe following Presnel Kimpembe's opener gave them a 4-0 win at fourth-tier Vannes on Monday.

With several regular starters absent, PSG manager Mauricio Pochettino fielded a makeshift side which dominated throughout, although they played at walking pace for much of the contest. Home goalkeeper Clement Petrel denied Ander Herrera and Georginio Wijnaldum with fine saves before central defender Kimpembe fired the visitors ahead with a diving header from close range in the 28th minute.

Mbappe, who had a quiet first half, doubled the lead in the 59th after he raced clear of his markers from Kimpembe's pass and beat Petrel, with the keeper unlucky not to keep the ball out after getting his body to it. — **Reuters**

Ocampos strike sees Sevilla sink Cadiz

MADRID: A second half goal from Lucas Ocampos was enough for Sevilla to claim a 1-0 win at Cadiz on Monday and move five points behind La Liga leaders Real Madrid.

Oihan Sancet bagged a hat-trick in Athletic Bilbao's 3-1 win over Osasuna while Villarreal hammered bottom side Levante 5-0.

Sevilla struggled to break down

a Cadiz side that is second from bottom and facing a difficult battle against relegation.

The breakthrough came in the 58th minute with Ivan Rakitic providing the assist and the Argentinian Ocampos supplying the finish.

Sevilla remain second, five points behind Real Madrid but with a game in hand.

Villarreal leapfrogged Valencia

into eighth with a five-goal thrashing of Levante.

Boulaye Dia opened the scoring after just three minutes and further goals from Pau Torres and Gerard Moreno saw them leading 3-0 at the break.

Manuel Trigueros added a fourth in the 74th minute before Moreno rounded off the rout five minutes later with his second of the night.

Levante have now mustered just eight points from 19 matches and are eight points away from safety.

Bilbao also moved up a place to tenth after Sancet's hat-trick saw them past Osasuna.

Kike put the home side ahead after 10 minutes but 21-year-old Sancet stepped up to steal the show, scoring twice in the first half and completing his hat-trick in the 68th minute. — **AFP**



Cherundolo takes over as LAFC head coach

LOS ANGELES: Former US international Steve Cherundolo was named as the new head coach of Los Angeles FC on Monday, the Major League Soccer club announced.

Cherundolo, who has spent the past year as coach of LAFC's United Soccer League affiliate Las Vegas Lights, replaces Bob Bradley, who left the club in November after four years in charge.

The 42-year-old Cherundolo moved into coaching after a 15-year playing career with German club Hannover 96.

The former right-back won 87 caps for the United States, and appeared in World Cups in 2002, 2006 and 2010.

“We know what works for LAFC and also what works in MLS, and Steve has a unique blend of international and domestic experience at the highest levels that matches those needs,” LAFC general manager John Thorrington said. — **AFP**



Qurum, Ruwi win Super 4 games

SHAHZAD RAZA
MUSCAT, JAN 4

Khurram khan's superb 104 not out failed to save Darsait Titans from a crushing 7-wicket defeat by Qurum Thunders in a D20 Super 4 League game at Oman Cricket Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Monday.

Khurram's top knock included 9 fours and 5 sixes as Darsait reached 165 for 6 in 20 overs.

Qurum's brilliant form saw it overhaul the total in only 16.4 overs as it scored 166 for 3 thanks to brilliant batting by Shoaib Khan (55 off 35) and Ayaan Khan (40 off 26). Darsait leggie Khawar Ali bagged 2 for 44.

Brief Scores (D20): Darsait Titans 165 for 6 in 20 overs (Khurram Khan 104 – 9x4, 5x6) lost to Qurum Thunders 166 for 3 in 16.4 overs (Shoaib Khan 55 – 6x4, 2x6, Ayaan Khan 40 – 3x6, Khawar Ali 2-44) by 7 wickets.

Zohaib shines in big Ruwi win
In the day's other game, opener Zohaib Amanat's vital 66 off 44 and superbat Naseem Khushi's 47 off 16 powered Ruwi Rangers to a comfortable 54-run victory against Ghubrah Giants.

Brief Scores (D20): Ruwi Rangers 188 for 8 in 20 overs (Zohaib Amanat 66 – 5x4, 3x6, Mohammed Naseem 47 – 2x4, 5x6, Gustav Burger 31 – 3x4, 2x6.

Haroon Khan 3-22, Ghazanfar Iqbal 2-28) beat Ghubrah Giants 134 for 7 in 20 overs (Aqil Khan 27 – 1x4, 2x6, Azmat Ullah 26 – 2x4, Kaleemullah 3-35, Sanuth Ebrahim 2-15) by 54 runs.

Wasim helps Danmark to victory
Danmark rode on outstanding all-round show by Mohammed Wasim to beat Winner's Jotun in a D Division T20 League match at Muscat Municipality ground 3 in Amerat on Friday.

Brief Scores (D Division): Danmark CC 195 for 7 in 20 overs (Mohammed Wasim 87 – 12x4, 1x6, Joby Abraham 2-20, Prasad Nagesh 2-28) lost to Winner's Jotun 139 for 8 in 20 overs (Ekramul Mohammad 48 – 7x4, Raj Amal 46 – 3x4, Mohammed Wasim 5-28, Sankaral Sasidharan 2-23) by 56 runs.

Khan stars in KCA Deutag's win
Mohammed Khan was the hero of KCA Deutag's 18-run win over Royal Gulf in an F Division T20 League match at Muscat Municipality ground 3.

Brief Scores (F Division): KCA Deutag 146 all out in 19.4 overs (Muhammed Khan 26 – 3x6, Jebin James 4-31, Alif Hameed 2-16) beat Royal Gulf 128 for 7 in 20 overs (Avinash Sharma 43 – 1x4, Muhammed Khan 2-24, Syed Muhammed 2-26, Khalid Al Balushi 2-31) by 18 runs.

Djoko will defend Australian title after exemption from vaccination

MELBOURNE: World number one Novak Djokovic said on Tuesday he would defend his Australian Open title at Melbourne Park later this month after receiving a medical exemption from getting vaccinated against Covid-19.

Djokovic, who had declined to reveal his Covid-19 vaccination status, said previously that he was unsure whether he would compete at the Grand Slam due to concerns over Australia's quarantine rules.

"I've spent fantastic quality time with my loved ones over the break and today I'm heading Down Under with an exemption permission. Let's go 2022," the Serbian player said on Instagram.

Organisers of the Australian Open, which starts on Jan. 17, had stipulated that all participants must be vaccinated against the coronavirus or have a medical exemption granted by an independent panel of experts.

But Djokovic pulled out of the Serbia team for the ATP Cup in



Sydney to raise doubts over his participation in the year's first Grand Slam in Melbourne. "I am ready to live and breathe tennis in the next few weeks of competition.

Thanks everyone for the support," Djokovic added in his statement, which was accompanied by a picture of him in an airport.

Djokovic has won a record nine

Australian Open titles, including the last three, and is in a three-way tie on 20 majors with Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal in the all-time list. — Reuters

Germany and Italy bounce back at ATP Cup with first wins

BERLIN: Germany and Italy bounced back from opening defeats with victories at the ATP Cup in Sydney on Tuesday.

Alexander Zverev and Jan-Lennart Struff won their singles rubbers to help Germany beat the United States 2-1 while Italians Matteo Berrettini and Jannik Sinner crushed France 3-0.

Coming off a 2-1 defeat against Britain, Struff put Germany ahead when he survived 34 aces from John Isner to win 7-6 (9-7), 4-6, 7-5.

World number three Zverev then converted his sixth match point with an ace for a 6-4, 6-4 success over Taylor Fritz to give the Germans an unassailable 2-0 lead.

Fritz and Isner then beat Kevin Krawietz and Tim Pütz 6-0, 6-3 in the dead rubber doubles.



Alexander Zverev in action during his group stage match. – REUTERS

"Until the last game it was a good level for my second match of year," Olympic champion Zverev said. "It was very intense and hard hitting. The most important thing is that Team Germany won and we have given ourselves

the best chance of reaching the semis."

Germany and the US are at 1-1 in Group C and face Canada and Britain, respectively in their final group games. Canada (0-1) were playing Britain (1-0) in the other tie on Tuesday. Only the group winner advances to the semi-finals.

Like the Germans, Italy are now at 1-1 after their Group B win against the French who are out at 0-2. Australia and Russia, both at 1-0, were contesting the other tie.

World number 10 Sinner fought from a break down in the second set to beat Arthur Rinderknech 6-3, 7-6 (7-3), and Wimbledon finalist Berrettini clinched matters with his 18th ace for a 6-4, 7-6 (8-6) victory against Ugo Humbert. — dpa

Beijing seals off its Olympic 'bubble'

BEIJING: Beijing sealed up its Winter Olympic "bubble" on Tuesday, preparing the Games venues, transport and staff for the world's strictest mass sporting event since the global pandemic.

China, where the virus emerged toward the end of 2019, has pursued a zero-tolerance strategy on Covid-19 and is taking the same approach to limit the pandemic's potential impact on the February 4-20 Winter Olympics and subsequent Paralympics. Starting on Tuesday, thousands of Games-related staff, volunteers, cleaners, cooks and coach drivers will be cocooned for weeks in the so-called "closed loop" with no direct physical access to the outside world. That contrasts with the Covid-delayed Tokyo Summer Olympics, which allowed some movement in and out for volunteers and other personnel. The global media and roughly 3,000 athletes are expected to start arriving in the Chinese capital in the weeks ahead and will remain in the bubble from the moment they land until they leave the country. Anyone entering the bubble must be fully vaccinated or face a 21-day quarantine when they touch down, and everyone inside will be tested daily and must wear face masks at all times. — AFP

Trail Blazers outgun Hawks, Embiid records triple double

LOS ANGELES: Anfernee Simons scored a career-best 43 points as the Portland Trail Blazers snapped a four-game losing streak with a 136-131 win over the Atlanta Hawks on Monday.

Simons shot 13 of 21 from the floor, drained nine of 16 from the three-point line and sank all eight of his free throws in front of a crowd of 15,100 at the Moda Center arena.

Trae Young led the Hawks by scoring an NBA season-high 56 points.

"I don't care about nothing besides the fact we lost, so it sucks I had this type of night on a loss because at the end of the day that's all that matters to me," said Young. "I just wish we would have won."

Young shot 17 for 26 from the field and added 14 assists in the loss.

Young's 56-points surpassed Kevin Durant's 51-point performance for the Nets at Detroit

on December 12. Golden State's Stephen Curry and Boston's Jaylen Brown have also had 50-point games this season.

Young also became the first player with 50-plus points and 14-plus assists in an NBA game since James Harden did it with the Houston Rockets in 2016.

The game marked Young's second 50-point performance of his career, as he previously scored 50 against Miami on February 20, 2020.

Portland played without Damian Lillard, CJ McCollum and Cody Zeller.

Trail Blazers coach Chauncey Billups was back on the bench after missing three games due to Covid-19 measures.

Norman Powell scored 26 points and Nassir Little added 22 in the win for Portland.

Elsewhere, Joel Embiid posted his third career triple double with 31 points, 15 rebounds and 10



Portland Trail Blazers guard Anfernee Simons (1) shoots over Atlanta Hawks guard Trae Young (11) and Hawks' forward Danilo Gallinari (8) in the first half at Moda Center. – USA TODAY Sports

assists to power the Philadelphia 76ers past the struggling Houston Rockets 133-113.

"We can beat anybody on any given night," Embiid said.

Furkan Korkmaz added 24 points and a career-high 11 rebounds, Isaiah Joe scored 18 points, Seth Curry contributed 15 and Tobias Harris had 14 as the Sixers won their fourth-straight game.

Garrison Mathews scored a team-high 23 points, while Eric Gordon and JaeSean Tate each scored 14 and Josh Christopher had 13 for the Rockets, who have lost eight straight.

Jalen Green and David Nwaba chipped in with 12 apiece and Kenyon Martin Jr had 11 points.

Philadelphia played without Tyrese Maxey, Matisse Thybulle and head coach Doc Rivers as they were sidelined because of Covid-19 measures. Assistant coach Dan Burke served as the acting head

coach for the second consecutive game.

"He was not going to let us lose that game," Burke said of Embiid.

Philadelphia needed a 41-29 third quarter to put some distance between themselves and the Rockets, the worst team in the Western Conference.

"Whether it's me pushing the ball, attacking or finding guys, I thought it's been great," Embiid said.

In Washington, Bradley Beal and Kyle Kuzma led a late rally and combined for 71 points as the Washington Wizards beat the Charlotte Hornets 124-121.

Curry goes cold

Kuzma had 36 points and 14 rebounds and Beal posted 35 points, while Daniel Gafford finished with 15 points and 11 rebounds for the Wizards, who were coming off a one-point loss to the Chicago Bulls on Saturday night. — AFP

business

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Opec appoints Kuwait oil executive as secretary general



LONDON: Top oil producing countries picked Kuwaiti oil executive Haitham al Ghais (pictured) as the next secretary general of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec).

Al Ghais, who was Kuwait's Opec governor from 2017 to June 2021, serves as a deputy managing director of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation (KPC).

His decades of experience in the industry include stints in Beijing and London for the state oil corporation.

Opec said in a statement that Al Ghais was appointed by acclamation and will take up his three-year post on August 1.

He will replace Nigeria's Mohammed Barkindo, who took over the helm of the organisation in 2016 and led it for two terms.

It was during Barkindo's tenure that the grouping drastically slashed oil output in 2020 as the coronavirus pandemic hit global markets.

Last year, Opec and 10 allies including Russia began to gradually open the tabs again, and prices have bounced back.

The Vienna-based organisation comprises 13 members led by Saudi Arabia which fix output to control prices along with the 10 other countries in a grouping dubbed Opec+.

So far Opec+ has resisted pressure by top oil consuming nations, such as the United States, to more aggressively boost production. — AFP

Unified insurance cover for more than 50,000-strong Omani fisher community

INSURANCE PROTECTION: The initiative's eventual rollout, anticipated during the first half of 2022, is expected to impart new impetus to the growth of the traditional fishing sector, which contributes the bulk of fresh fish harvests annually.

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

The fisher community at the heart of one of the Sultanate of Oman's biggest economic sectors will soon benefit from insurance coverage to secure them, their equipment and assets, from an array of perils when operating out at sea.

A customised insurance policy, approved recently for implementation by the Capital Market Authority (CMA), now provides financial compensation to the owners and occupants of fishing boats against loss or damage to hull, machinery and equipment, third party liability, and personal accidents when engaged in fishing activities along the country's coastal waters.

It marks the first time in the history of the sector that fishermen — estimated to number over 50,000 presently — will now have protection from financial loss stemming from natural hazards and accidents.

When implemented, the customised insurance policy will bring an estimated 25,000 Omani-owned fishing boats (including traditional boats and dhows) within the protective ambit of Article 17 of the Law of the Protection of Living Aquatic Resources promulgated by Royal Decree 20/2019.

Its coverage encompasses 25 fisheries ports and jetties distributed across the country's coastline and in coastal waters



extending from Musandam in the north to Dhofar in the south.

The policy's impending rollout — 30 years since it was first mandated under the Sultanate of Oman's Maritime Law promulgated by Royal Decree 35/81 on April 15, 1981 — is the culmination of a concerted, multi-year effort involving multiple government agencies, regulatory bodies and other stakeholders, says Murtadha bin Mohammed bin Jawad bin Ibrahim al Jamalani, Chairman, Finance & Insurance Committee at Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and Head of the Working Team of the project responsible for implementing the Fishing Boats Insurance Protection Recommendations.

"When it was first contemplated soon after the promulgation of the Oman Maritime Law in 1981, interest from the insurance industry was limited, while the fisher community was also averse to the premium they would have to bear annually. The initiative languished thereafter," Al Jamalani explained.

Weather-related perils "Recently, however, it was revived because of the rising

number of deaths and assets lost due to sea perils and weather-related disasters.

At the same time, local banks, notably Oman Development Bank (ODB), have begun requiring fishermen and owners of fishing vessels to insure their crafts and equipment procured against banking finance.

Together with the Omani Fishermen's Association, they sought the good offices of the OCCI in arriving at an insurance protection solution acceptable to all parties."

Speaking to the *Observer*, Al Jamalani said a seminar hosted by the OCCI in December 2020 attracted representatives from all of the stakeholders, including manufacturers and suppliers of fishing equipment and outboard motors.

The forum discussed the implementation of the insurance protection strategy for fishing vessels, fishermen's welfare, and the mechanism to protect the profession and industry in accordance with the Law of the Protection of Living Aquatic Resources.

The seminar concluded with a number of recommendations, notably calling on the Omani

Fishermen's Association to oversee the rollout and operation of a Customised Insurance Policy for Fishing Boats and Vessels.

Separately, the OCCI's help was enlisted in facilitating the crafting of an insurance product that met the objectives of all stakeholders.

"We assembled a working team with representatives from the Capital Market Authority; Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources; Ministry of Transport, Communications & Information Technology; Royal Oman Police (Coast Guard), and Central Bank of Oman, among other agencies, to design a customised insurance policy and operational manuals for use by the Omani Fishermen Association."

As part of their deliberations, the working team looked at various examples of successful insurance policies and practices in force in leading countries around the world.

They also reviewed the procedures and practices followed by the Ministry of Transport, Communication & Information Technology in licensing yachts and pleasure boats, the operation of a shipping



Local banks, notably Oman Development Bank (ODB), have begun requiring fishermen and owners of fishing vessels to insure their crafts and equipment procured against banking finance

MURTADHA AL JAMALANI
Chairman, Finance & Insurance Committee at OCCI

register, and the role of Protection & Indemnity (P&I) Clubs.

Customised product With a view to shaping a market that is attractive to the insurance and reinsurance industry, the working team decided to add yachts and other vessels to the scope of the customised insurance policy, as well as procedures for registering such boats and vessels.

This integration contributed to competitively-priced premiums, thus meeting a key prerequisite for the overall initiative's success, Al Jamalani noted.

Additionally, to ensure that fishermen and fishing boat owners — the ultimate end-users of the insurance policy — were firmly on board, the working team adopted a unique approach for the policy's rollout.

TURN TO PAGE 15

OMIFCO signs agreements to support Omani SMEs

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, JAN 4

In line with the efforts undertaken by Sur Industrial City to explore business opportunities for the local SMEs with leading companies, the Oman India Fertiliser Company (OMIFCO) has signed three handling agreements with local companies under the supervision of the Public Establishment for

Industrial Estates (Madayn).

This step comes within OMIFCO's efforts to provide new opportunities for the local companies and enhance partnership and integration approaches.

Along the same lines, Sur Industrial City aims at providing effective growth enablers for the local companies by exploring collaboration opportunities with



These efforts will allow the local SMEs to deliver products and services with required specifications and standards to meet the needs of the leading companies operating in the industrial city

major companies.

These efforts will allow the local SMEs to deliver products and services with required specifications and standards to meet the needs of the leading companies operating in the industrial city, which will eventually contribute to the growth of these SMEs and create job opportunities for the Omani cadres.



NBO awarded by MoSD for supporting people with disabilities

MUSCAT: National Bank of Oman (NBO) was recently awarded by the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) for its continuous work supporting people with disabilities in the Sultanate of Oman.

The award was announced during an event organised by the Ministry to celebrate the International Day of Disabled Persons, held under the patronage of HH Sayyida Dr Mona bint Fahd al Said, the Assistant Vice-Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), and in the presence of HE Dr Laila bint

Ahmed al Najar, the Minister of Social Development.

Through its active corporate social responsibility programme, NBO continues to fulfil its commitment to giving back to the community, while fostering partnerships between the private and public sectors. Its activities, which are carried out throughout the year, include a range of educational and youth-led programmes, donations and sponsorships, all aimed at supporting the government's vision for social and economic development.

Test-drive the GAC Motor GA4 and win



MUSCAT: GAC Motor Oman is offering enthusiasts an opportunity to test-drive the spacious GA4 sedan and get a chance to win exciting prizes – 1 iPhone 13 Pro 128 GB and 4 Redmi Note 10 S 128 GB phones.

Besides this, customers owning any of the GAC Motor vehicle can benefit with 5 years / 150,000 kms manufacturer's warranty, comprehensive 1 year insurance (Oman coverage), assured service 10 years/100,000 kms on GA8 & GN8 models, 4 years /40,000 kms on GS3, GS4 & GA4 models and 3 years /30,000 kms on GS8 model and '3M' window tint (For 21 & 22 YM models).

The campaign is valid until

February 3, 2022 (Conditions apply).

The offer is presently valid only in Muscat Governorate and Nizwa. For more details, please visit any GAC Motor showroom).

In the Sultanate of Oman, GAC Motor vehicles are distributed by New World Autos and backed by Saud Bahwan Group. For more information, please visit www.gacmotoroman.com or www.youtube.com/GACMotorOman or www.facebook.com/GACMotorOman or instagram.com/GACMotorOman. For further details, & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit the GAC Motor showroom at Wattayah, Al Seeb, Nizwa, Sur and Suhar.

Malabar Gold and Diamonds to open 22 showrooms in January

MUSCAT: As part of its global expansion plans for 2022, Malabar Gold & Diamonds will open 22 new showrooms in GCC, Far East & India in January itself, pitching itself firmly on the path towards emerging as the largest retail jewellery chain in the world.

This is for first time a jewellery retailer is opening so many showrooms in a single month. Out of the 22 new showrooms, 12 will be in GCC and Far East and 10 in India where the brand already has presence.

The addition of these stores will also grow the brand's retail footprints into Tier 2 and 3 towns of India where the brand is rapidly gaining acceptance.



continue to strengthen our retail presence in the regions where we have established a robust presence and also enter new markets with our differentiated services and products.

With the launch of 22 showrooms in January, we are all set to make an impactful beginning to the New Year. We are confident that our customers will enjoy the world-class jewellery shopping experience at all our new showrooms and also appreciate our values based on transparency, trust, quality and service.

Our mission is to Make in India and Market to the world. Our commitment is to highlight further the brand value of Indian jewellery at the international level and create more job opportunities in the manufacturing sector domestically. This is our core policy," said MP Ahammed, Chairman, Malabar Group.

Abdul Salam KP, Vice-Chairman of Malabar Group, said, "We are excited about our future growth. On the one hand, the plan involves a large-format Artistry store in Bengaluru while on the other hand, we continue to focus on optimal store sizes internationally and in smaller cities across India. We are confident that this two-pronged strategy will yield positive results."

"Our retail expansion is a part of our strategy to further strengthen our retail footprint in the territories where we have strong presence as well as foray into new markets with our differentiated services and product offerings.

Having seen in our research that both rural and urban markets are rapidly emerging in terms of potential, we are all geared up to set new

standards of customer comfort and convenience in these new markets," said O Asher, Managing Director, India Operations of Malabar Gold and Diamonds.

"Malabar has played a vital role in making Indian jewellery more acceptable and trustworthy at the global level in the recent years. The current expansion plans will further consolidate its pole position both domestically and internationally," said Shamlal Ahamed, Managing Director, International Operations.

Well-known for its high standards of purity and quality, Malabar Gold and Diamonds offers a wide range of jewellery in gold, diamond and precious gemstones to cater to both traditional and contemporary sensibilities.

The brand also offers a variety of specially curated jewellery which represents the diverse traditions and cultural heritage of Indian design.

The popular jewellery sub-brands from Malabar Gold and Diamonds such as Mine in unique designs, Ethnix handcrafted jewellery, Precia Gemstone jewellery, Divine jewellery with classic touch, Era uncut jewellery, Viraaaz polki jewellery, Starlet collection for children etc offer a great variety of options to its customers.

Malabar Gold and Diamonds upholds its status of a responsible jewellery retail brand by maintaining optimum transparency at various stages of operations from sourcing gold to offering jewellery to its consumers.

The group sells responsibly sourced gold from authorised sources. Malabar Gold and Diamonds, one of the top five jewellers in the world dominate

MALABAR GOLD & DIAMONDS WILL OPEN A TOTAL OF 22 SHOWROOMS IN JANUARY 2022 — 12 SHOWROOMS IN GCC & FAR EAST AND 10 SHOWROOMS IN INDIA

TO INVEST \$107.5 MILLION IN JANUARY 2022

TO GENERATE MORE THAN 5000 JOBS THIS YEAR

the different market with transparency and credibility.

The brand reinforces its commitment to ensuring the best value for money for customers with the Fair Price Promise, which focuses on assigning reasonable making charges to a vast array of jewellery.

Taking transparency to the next level, the assurance of 10 promises by Malabar Gold and Diamonds include a transparent price tag indicating stone weight, net weight and stone charge of the jewellery, assured lifetime maintenance for the jewellery, best value for gold when reselling old gold jewellery, zero deduction on exchange, 100 per cent hallmarking certifying the purity of gold, IGI and GIA certified diamonds ensuring 28-point quality check of global standards, buyback guarantee, responsible sourcing and fair labour practices.

Malabar Gold and Diamonds has a robust retail presence in 10 countries.

In addition, the group has 14 wholesale units and 14 jewellery making units in India and abroad.

The company has an annual turnover of \$4.51 billion. Malabar Gold and Diamonds earmarks 5 per cent of the company's profits for various CSR initiatives focusing on education, health, women's empowerment, housing for the poor and environmental protection.

The organisation has also launched an initiative recently to rehabilitate and care for abandoned and orphaned mothers in Kerala, for which it has already conveyed its willingness to construct rehabilitation provided the Government allots a suitable location for the same.

Ooredoo celebrates fifth wave of Spring Forward programme

MUSCAT: As part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, Goodwill, Ooredoo recently celebrated the completion of the fifth wave of its popular Spring Forward programme, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour.

Held under the auspices of Sayyid Salim bin Musallam al Busaidy, the Ministry's Under-Secretary for Human Resources Development and Amaal al Lawati, Ooredoo's Chief People

Officer, the event recognised the 23 graduates and their projects, including the winner, SAYADTI for Car Care, which was created by Khola al Junaibi, Afrah al Junaibi, Najma al Maamari and Aida al Kiyumi. Starting in September 2021, the programme included four leadership workshops and self-development sessions.

Raed Mohammed Dawood, Director of Branding, Communications and Corporate Affairs at Ooredoo, said,



"Ooredoo always aims to support the advancement of the Omani people, while fostering sustainable economic and social growth. For almost five years, the Spring Forward programme has provided participants with a unique opportunity to learn how to manage a team and work on their confidence as leaders.

Benefiting women and men of all ages, interests, social status and career paths, we work closely with industry leaders and

licensed trainers to pursue their development and growth."

As part of a global career development programme, Spring Forward is a central pillar of Ooredoo's CSR strategy. Sitting alongside the award-winning Springboard programme, which is now in its 20th wave (having launched in 2014), the courses aim to help young Omanis reach their full potential, while addressing the current needs of the market with the long-term impact in mind.



Opec, allies set for another modest oil output hike

LONDON: Opec and its allies are expected to maintain their practice of modestly boosting oil output as the rapidly spreading Omicron variant has so far not heavily hit demand.

The Opec+ grouping, including top producers Saudi Arabia and Russia, has resisted pressure to more widely open the taps as high energy prices are fuelling a surge in inflation across the world.

The 13 members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec) and their 10 allies drastically slashed output in 2020 as the pandemic wreaked havoc with demand.

Last year they decided to step it up again gradually as prices recovered, while reviewing the situation every month. Analysts expect the group to step up production by 400,000 barrels per day in February, as they have done in past months.

They approved another increase at their December meeting despite the emergence of Omicron, which had caused prices to fall as markets fretted over its potential impact on the global economy.

"Since the last Opec+ meeting (in early December), oil prices



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

have recovered considerably, suggesting that also market participants seem to be less concerned about the Omicron variant weighing on oil demand", UBS energy strategist Giovanni Staunovo said.

The price of Brent, Europe's benchmark oil contract, hit \$79.66 on Tuesday — 15 per cent higher than before the group's December 2 meeting. Opec analysts told the group on Monday that Omicron would have a moderate impact on demand.

While the new Covid variant is spreading like wildfire around the world, it appears to be far less severe than initially feared, raising hopes that the pandemic could be overcome and life return to a little more normality.

In remarks on Monday, Opec Secretary General Mohammed Barkindo emphasised the need to "remain highly nimble and adaptable to the constantly changing situation".

He said the group's "flexible approach has helped provide

an added sense of stability, reassurance and continuity to the market and investors".

Opec on Monday named Kuwaiti oil executive Haitham al Ghais to succeed Barkindo once his second term as secretary general expires in July.

While Opec+ countries have been gradually increasing output again since last year, analysts note some countries, such as Nigeria and Angola, have been struggling to lift production.

"Important here is that Russia did not lift production in December which could be a sign that they are getting closer to their capacity", SEB chief commodities analyst Bjarne Schieldrop said.

Another heavyweight, Iran, has seen its exports limited by US sanctions. Talks to revive a deal, which curbed Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for sanctions relief, are underway in Vienna.

They have dragged on since last year but negotiators are pushing to conclude the talks to get the 2015 landmark agreement back on track. It was thrown into disarray in 2018 when the US withdrew from the accord. — Reuters

Oil prices steady ahead of Opec+ meeting

MELBOURNE: Oil prices were flat on Tuesday ahead of a meeting where major producers are expected to stick to plans to add supply in February, as soaring Covid-19 cases have yet to spark lockdowns in the biggest fuel-consuming countries.

Brent crude futures gained 1 cent to \$79.66 a barrel, while US West Texas Intermediate crude futures slipped 2 cents to \$76.74 a barrel.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (Opec), Russia and allies met on Tuesday. RBC Capital Markets analysts said Opec+ was unlikely to change course given the current price outlook, pressure from the administration of US President Joe Biden to boost supply, and no major new Covid-19



mobility curbs.

"Though Omicron cases continue to climb in key geographies, the absence of widespread lockdown restrictions will likely keep near-term demand concerns in check," RBC analysts said.

However they said Opec+ may have to change tack if tension between the West and Russia over Ukraine flares up and hits fuel supplies, or Iran's nuclear talks with major powers make progress, which would lead to an end to oil sanctions on Iran. — Reuters

Unified insurance cover for 50,000-strong Omani fisher community

FROM PAGE 13

"We opted for market segmentation rather than fragmentation", said Al Jamalani.

"Thus, instead of offering the product to the wider insurance industry — which we reckoned would not elicit the required interest — we proposed that the Omani Fishermen's Association would float a tender and then choose the best bid from among the insurers. The selected insurer, with exclusive access to the market, is expected to offer the most competitive pricing to the fisher community. This exclusive arrangement will be limited to the first three years, following which other insurers will be able to compete as well. We hope, by then, this new insurance segment will contribute to the stability and sustainability of the product in the market."

Significantly, the Capital Market Authority — the regulator of the insurance sector — has approved this innovative approach to the implementation of a standardised tailor-made Insurance Policy for Fishing Boats and Vessels in the Sultanate of Oman.

Its eventual roll is expected to impart new impetus to the growth of the traditional fishing sector, which contributes the bulk of fresh fish harvests annually. With insurance coverage, local banks will be more amenable to providing funding support to fishermen for their purchases of new boats and equipment.

Additionally, more young Omanis will be encouraged to consider fishing-based livelihoods once lending by banks is less cumbersome, Al Jamalani added.

Apple becomes first company to hit \$3 trillion market value

NEW YORK: Apple Inc on Monday became the first company to hit a \$3 trillion stock market value, before ending the day a hair below that milestone, as investors bet the iPhone maker will keep launching best-selling products as it explores new markets such as automated cars and virtual reality.

On the first day of trading in 2022, the Silicon Valley company's shares hit an intraday record high of \$182.88, putting Apple's market value just above \$3 trillion.

The stock ended the session up 2.5 per cent at \$182.01, with Apple's market capitalisation at



Apple CEO Tim Cook speaks during an event in Cupertino, California. — Reuters

\$2.99 trillion.

The world's most valuable company reached the milestone as investors bet that consumers will continue to shell out top dollar for iPhones, MacBooks and services such as Apple TV and Apple Music.

"It's a fantastic accomplishment and certainly worthy to be celebrated", said Jake Dollarhide, CEO of Asset Management in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "It just shows you how far Apple has come, and how dominant it is seen as in the majority of investors' eyes."

Apple shared the \$2 trillion

market value club with Microsoft Corp, which is now worth about \$2.5 trillion. Alphabet Inc, Amazon.com Inc and Tesla Inc have market values above \$1 trillion. Saudi Arabian Oil Co is valued at about \$1.9 trillion.

"The market is rewarding companies that have strong fundamentals and balance sheets, and the companies that are hitting these sort of huge market caps have proven they are strong businesses and not speculation", said Scott Wren, senior global market strategist at Wells Fargo Investment Institute. — Reuters

Asian factories take Omicron risks in stride

TOKYO: Asia's factory activity grew in December as companies took rising global cases of the new Omicron coronavirus variant in stride, though persistent supply constraints and rising input costs clouded the outlook for some economies.

The rising rate of global infections have raised eyebrows among policymakers, with outbreaks in China forcing some firms to suspend production and threatening to disrupt output for memory chip giants like Samsung Electronics. For now, however, the direct hit from Omicron on output appeared subdued, according to surveys released on Monday and Tuesday.

China's factory activity grew at its fastest pace in six months in December, the Caixin/Markit Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) showed earlier in the day.

The findings from the private survey, which focuses more on small firms in coastal regions, tally with those in China's official PMI that pointed to an uptick in factory activity.

Other parts of Asia also fared well with factory activity



A worker welds a bicycle steel rim at a factory manufacturing sports equipment in Zhejiang province, China. — Reuters

expanding in countries ranging from Vietnam, Malaysia and the Philippines. "Manufacturing PMIs and timely trade data reveal that Asia's export-focused industry gained momentum at the turn of the year", said Alex Holmes, emerging Asia economist at Capital Economics.

"While the Omicron variant presents a key threat to the

outlook, it is unlikely to cause nearly as much disruption to industry as Delta did", he said.

In Japan, the world's third-biggest economy, manufacturing activity in December grew for an 11th straight month. And bellwether exporter South Korea saw its main factories gauge enjoy the fastest pace of expansion in three months, the surveys showed.

"We expect Asia's exports and capex upswing to be sustained by continued global recovery, and Asia's manufacturing PMIs will remain moderately strong over the coming months", analysts at Morgan Stanley wrote in a research note.

Some economists, however, warned that supply shortages and rising input costs remain risks

particularly for export-reliant countries like South Korea.

"Given South Korea's prominence in the automotive and electronics industries, substantial improvements in global supply chains will be required before we see a meaningful acceleration in manufacturing growth", said Joe Hayes, economist at IHS Markit.

Japan's PMI stood at 54.3 in December, remaining above the 50-mark threshold that indicates expansion in activity but lower than November's 54.5 as new order growth softened.

South Korea's PMI rose to 51.9 from 50.9 in November to mark the 15th consecutive month of expansion, as rising domestic demand offset sluggish overseas sales. India's manufacturing activity continued to expand in December though at a slower pace than in November, as elevated price pressures remained a concern.

"The Omicron variant poses near-term growth risks by delaying the consumption recovery, but higher vaccination rates in Asia could help limit the damage to growth as compared to the Delta wave", Morgan Stanley analysts said. — Reuters

Wall Street will find ways to satisfy crypto envy

Banks are gearing up to get in on the crypto craze in 2022. That sets them up to wrestle with a host of issues that differ from their core business, from murky regulation to a market that operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Fights over profit and customers may also obscure other risks. The value of digital currencies outstanding has tripled to more than \$2 trillion since the start of 2020.

Traditional US banks currently can't trade such assets themselves, but their customers do and many bankers want in, despite scepticism from luminaries like JPMorgan boss Jamie Dimon who dismissed bitcoin as "worthless" as recently as October.

Those trade on regulated exchanges, one step removed from the underlying digital coins. But that's little more than dabbling. What would really open the flood gates for the largest banks would be the regulatory nod to get directly involved in the custody and trading of digital assets. Among other things, that would help stop lucrative hedge fund clients from going elsewhere for their crypto needs.

But banks, constrained by regulations, can't predict where watchdogs will end up. Take bitcoin-backed loans, for example, one area that is being explored by several firms including Goldman. Banks need to know if regulators will permit such products. Bankers also have to figure out how to structure them if they can't own the collateral directly.

The always-open crypto markets add another dimension. Banks are used to fixed hours of trading in equities, say. Moreover, the whole point is that trades cannot be unwound, even if there are mistakes. Such features increase the importance of third-party digital custodians to help manage risk, and many of those entities are not, as yet, either regulated or transparent.

These are known unknowns. An even bigger danger could be unknown unknowns. Those range from the reliability of the decentralised confirmation processes attached to cryptocurrencies to the risk of hacks or errors that can't be righted. Wall Street's fear of missing out shouldn't obscure the risks of getting in.

— Reuters

Traditional US banks currently can't trade such assets themselves, but their customers do and many bankers want in



TRADING OPENS

Japan's Finance Minister Shunichi Suzuki prepares to ring a bell during the New Year ceremony marking the open of trading in 2022 at the Tokyo Stock Exchange (TSE), amid the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic, in Tokyo, Japan on Tuesday. — Reuters

Bankers flock to firms in M&A boom



ANDY JALIL andyjalil@aol.com

GLOBAL DEAL VOLUMES HAVE HIT MORE THAN \$4TN IN THE FIRST THREE QUARTERS OF LAST YEAR, ACCORDING TO DATA PROVIDER DEALOGIC, AND ARE EXPECTED TO HIT RECORD LEVELS WITH FIGURES (TO COME) TO THE END OF 2021

Mergers and acquisitions deal volumes are on way to break annual records, even as investment bankers have negotiated almost entirely over zoom. Now there are clear message to dealmakers — get back on the road.

Competition for deal fees is tougher than ever and bankers say those who make the effort to court clients have an advantage.

Slightly eased travel restrictions mean bankers can get back to building up their contact lists. September was the turning point they say, bars and offices somewhat fuller and clients are more comfortable with gatherings and at least some sense of normality.

Head of M&A for Europe, the Middle East and Africa (Emea) at Citigroup, Alison Harding-Jones said: "We are absolutely getting back on the road. Face-to-face interaction with clients is critical."

In pre-pandemic times, senior M&A bankers would typically spend up to four days a week travelling. While Covid-19 restrictions have grounded high-flying dealmakers, there has been no let up from their extremely busy schedule.

Global deal volumes have hit more than \$4tn in the first three quarters of last year, according to data provider Dealogic, and are expected to hit record levels with figures (to come) to the end of 2021.

The \$1.1tn in technology M&A is by far the biggest sector — more than double the \$428bn in healthcare.

The novelty of zoom meetings has long worn thin. Senior bankers have had their calendars booked out for months, moving from one virtual call to another in working days that stretch into nights and weekends.

Some bankers have said that one of the reasons for the current deal boom was the lack of air travel, which has allowed more meetings.

"People are just exhausted", said one senior dealmaker. I've been busy during my 20 years in the City (financial district) but the intensity of the current workload, combined with working on video calls has been relentless."

The UK has relaxed some of its travel restrictions for some countries, which allow people to visit them without quarantining on their return.

Meanwhile, the US had said back in September that it would reopen to vaccinated air travellers from 33 countries, including most of Europe, from last November.

Bankers say, in recent weeks, clients have become more comfortable with in-person meetings.

"September has really been the turning point for reconnecting with clients in person", said Guillermo Baygual, co-head of M&A for JPMorgan in Emea. Clients are

more receptive to it.

While M&A surged in 2021, there has been a lack of big-ticket deals, with transactions worth between \$1bn and \$10 bn more than doubling on 2020 and just one — AT&T's spin-off of its media operations to Discovery — greater than \$50 bn. These smaller deals are easier to execute virtually, bankers said.

"A lot of the analysis of the deals, due diligence and day-to-day can be done virtually", said Baygual.

"We're going to travel less — perhaps two days a week instead of four — but we need to build trust with clients. It's a lot easier to seal a deal with a handshake than over zoom."

Harding-Jones said: "People are looking at travelling again, but I don't think it will reach pre-pandemic levels, for practical as well as environmental reasons."

Bankers have been handing more responsibility to sector-focused dealmakers in continental Europe in recent months, dealmakers say.

The bolstering of teams in EU countries since Brexit has helped banks maintain client relationships, but senior M&A London bankers are keen for in-person meetings again. Competitive pressures are also likely to force dealmakers back on the road.

(The writer is our foreign correspondent based in the UK)

Why is the IMF trying to be an aid agency?



KENNETH ROGOFF

The author, a Professor of Economics and Public Policy at Harvard University and recipient of the 2011 Deutsche Bank Prize in Financial Economics, was the chief economist of the International Monetary Fund from 2001 to 2003

Who is going to clean up the inevitable financial mess in emerging markets if persistent inflation forces the US Federal Reserve to start raising interest rates significantly?

The International Monetary Fund, normally tasked with pulling countries back from the brink, seems disenchanted with the job. Rather than embracing its traditional role of helping troubled debtor countries help themselves, the IMF has been attempting to morph into an aid agency.

Of course, it is more fun to be Santa than Scrooge, and rich countries give far too little in foreign aid. I have long advocated establishing a world carbon bank to channel grants and technology.

Likewise, the case for funding

a restructured World Health Organization to fight pandemics is compelling.

But in a world where private capital flows far outweigh official lending, traditional IMF programmes still have a critical role to play in mitigating and managing financial crises.

That role has been abandoned during the pandemic, and re-establishing it will be difficult. Handing out funding with few strings attached made sense in the initial phase of the Covid-19 crisis.

But because the IMF is still very much structured as a lending agency, it eventually will have to be repaid or go bankrupt itself.

To get a sense of what that might look like, consider the tensions with Argentina, which received a massive \$57 billion loan in 2018 with uncharacteristically weak IMF conditions attached and is

now balking at repaying.

The lack of conditionality in some recent cases has been appalling.

Should the IMF really be furnishing virtually unconditional loans to a government that is restricting food imports to an under-nourished population, thereby exacerbating the problems caused by the government's own exchange-rate controls? It has done so in Nigeria in 2020.

In other cases, the Fund has been extraordinarily generous in its normally cautious surveillance assessments, giving its gold seal of approval to countries with exploding debt-to-GDP ratios that stabilize only under very optimistic assumptions. The 2021 Article IV report for Ghana is a case in point.

And the Fund has been even more sanguine about large emerging markets such as Brazil

and South Africa, again arguing that dealing with the pandemic is the absolute top priority, despite soaring debt levels, rising inflation, and simmering banking problems. This lack of conditionality has been by design.

During the pandemic, the Fund massively expanded use of its Rapid Financing Instrument, a lending facility that does not require countries to enter into a "full-fledged" adjustment programme (and that in practice requires few conditions or none at all).

Even more visibly, it has persuaded its members to approve an emergency issuance of \$650 billion in special drawing rights (SDRs, the Fund's reserve asset), which also have essentially no conditions. SDRs are basically direct aid that goes to every IMF member, including Russia and Iran.

And yet, owing to the instrument's arcane structure, developing economies stand to receive only a small fraction of the pot.

There are strong arguments for revamping the financial structure of the IMF and its sister organisation, the World Bank, so that the vast bulk of the funding they provide takes the form of outright grants, rather than loans.

I have been advocating such a transformation for decades, and recently the idea has started to receive serious attention. Because the IMF is currently structured as a revolving fund, it would quickly run dry if it forgave all its loans, as some NGOs are always asking it to do. The only way this would not happen is if the advanced economies agreed to replenish the well, which they seem loathe to do.

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PASSAGE

Elly Hollemans, a retired teacher from the Netherlands, rates the service from the airport assistants at the Muscat International Airport as far superior when compared to the other airports all over the world through which she has passed through in the last 15 years ... **P20**

MUSIC

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Lockwood's first novel follows an Extremely Online woman whose life changes forever when her niece is born with a serious illness — which sounds Hallmark-ready, but Lockwood pulls it off

New Year
concert in
Vienna symbol
of music's
importance

STAR CONDUCTOR DANIEL Barenboim wants to remind people of the importance of music in an upcoming New Year's Day concert in Vienna. "I hope that it inspires some

of the politicians all over the world to really think of the importance of the spiritual need of music for the population", Barenboim told reporters in the Austrian capital on



Wednesday. At the concert on Saturday, the 79-year-old maestro will conduct the Vienna Philharmonic through their annual waltz and polka round

for the third time, following performances in 2009 and 2014. The concert will be broadcast in 92 countries. Last year's event under Riccardo Muti took place in

front of an empty concert hall due to the pandemic. This year, the audience is allowed to return, although the number of spectators was reduced to 1,000 at short notice. Around 700 ticket holders were told that they could no longer attend and that a seat would be reserved for them a year later instead. At events with more than 1,000 people, only those with booster shot scan be allowed in, under the latest rules in Austria. Because many guests from Germany and Switzerland had not yet received the top-up jab, reducing the number of seats was the best solution, said Philharmonic board member Daniel Froschauer. "We are lucky that we can do this with 1,000 people because music has to be enjoyed live", Barenboim said. — **dpa**

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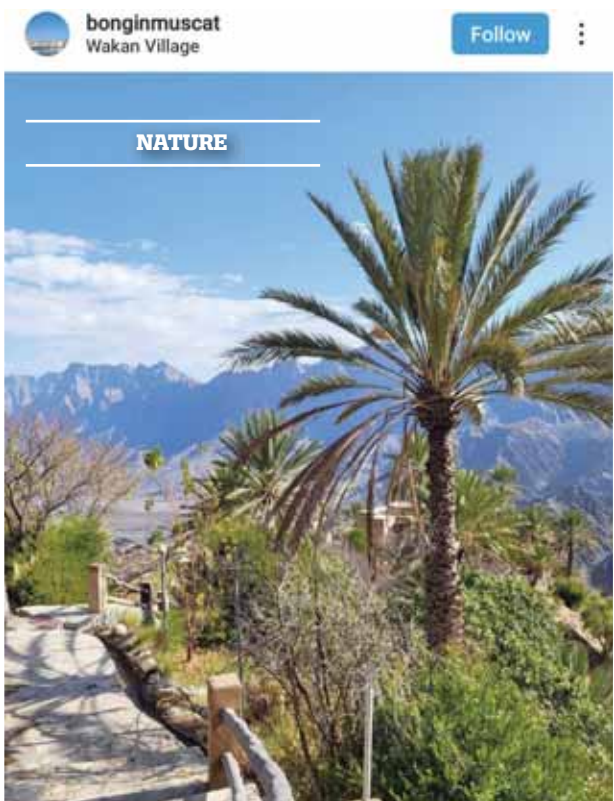
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CINEMA



Cultural director urges Serbian cinemas to show Srebrenica film

THE DIRECTOR OF a cultural centre in a largely Muslim part of Serbia has appealed for an acclaimed movie about the massacre of 8,000 Muslims by Bosnian Serb forces in Srebrenica in 1995 to be shown across Serbia.

More than 1,000 people watched "Quo Vadis, Aida?", named Best Film in the 2021 European Film Awards, in two screenings in the town of Novi Pazar on Tuesday – the first time it had been shown in any part of Serbia.

"The tickets sold out in an hour and a half," said Husein Memic, whose centre showed the movie. "We are appealing for the film to be screened across Serbia; it's absolutely senseless for it to play only in Novi Pazar."

Jasmila Zbanic's movie has also not had a public showing in Bosnia's autonomous Serb Republic, which has thrown Bosnia into turmoil by opposing a law making it an offence to deny that the Srebrenica massacre constituted genocide.

Both Ratko Mladic, commander of the Bosnian Serb forces in 1995, and Bosnian Serb political leader Radovan Karadzic were found guilty of genocide by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia for their roles in the Srebrenica massacre.

Zbanic said many cinemas and distributors in other parts of Serbia and in Bosnia's Serb Republic had wanted to show the film, but feared recriminations or reprisals.

"My intention was never to divide," she said. "My intention was to tell the truth, and for people who don't know about Srebrenica or who even deny Srebrenica to sit and watch it as a movie about a mother who wants to protect her two kids. Because that's what happened there."

Serbian state television, RTS, has always shown previous prizewinning films. But following appeals to air "Quo Vadis, Aida?", it said it would not make programming decisions under media pressure.

Boris Isakovic, who plays Mladic in the movie, said he was disappointed that it was being viewed through a political lens, not as an artistic creation.

"It is clear that (the showing of) this film has been censored," Isakovic said. "But that says a lot about the power of film: that it is a powerful weapon through which stories can be told."

— Reuters

AROUND THE WORLD

Britain's Royal Mint unveils Queen's jubilee coins



TWO NEW COINS designed in celebration of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee have been unveiled by the Royal Mint.

The release of the 50p and a 5 pound crown is the first chance for collectors to own a keepsake from the Platinum Jubilee collection.

The 50p is the first of its kind to celebrate a royal event while the 5 pound coin follows the tradition of marking previous jubilees on crown pieces.

Each of the coins features a new and unique design by a commissioned artist and the obverse portrait of the Queen, designed by Jody Clark.

There will also be 2 pound coins recognising the life and legacy of Dame Vera Lynn and Alexander Graham Bell.

There will also be a 50p coin marking next year's Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

Clare MacLennan, from the Royal Mint, said: "Each year, the Royal Mint unveils a series of commemorative coins to celebrate key milestones that helped shape Britain and this year's annual set is particularly special with a new 50 pence, 5 pound crown and special platinum set in celebration

of Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

"As the original maker of UK coins, the Royal Mint has been trusted to strike coins for Her Majesty throughout an historic 70 years

of Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

"As the original maker of UK coins, the Royal Mint has been trusted to strike coins for Her Majesty throughout an historic 70 years

Osborne Ross and features a clean reverse design that comprises the number 70, The Queen's cypher and the years that span her reign.

The 5 pound crown has been designed by John Bergdahl and features areal design centralised by the quartered shield of the Royal Arms.

The precious metals versions also include the edge inscription "Serve you all the days of my life" in reference to The Queen's longevity as monarch.

The 2 pound Dame Vera Lynn coin features a portrait of the Second World War forces' sweetheart at the height of her fame.

The centenary of the death of Alexander Graham Bell has been recognised with a 2 pound coin designed by Henry Gray.

The reverse of the coin shows the dial of a push-button phone, along with the words "Pioneer of the telephone" inscribed on the buttons.

Finally, the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games 50p has been designed by the Royal Mint's Natasha Preece. — dpa



A PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Giving is not a one-way deal

EVERYONE KNOWS THAT giving is never a one-way deal. A donation to a charitable organisation, for instance, may lead to strengthening the role of individuals and the meaning of giving in the society. However, sending a gift to a friend or standing by a family member who suffers from the difficulties of life increases your relationship with him. At least, you may get thanks or you might have a feeling that is sought in our time by people of high determination and hearts that spread goodness constantly in their communities.

So, if you really want to reap the benefits of giving to others, then give up waiting for thanks, admiration or praise because it's a quick punch of pleasure. Rather, the feeling of happiness is deeper and lasting in the good deed that no one knows you did. Intuitively, what gift would be virtuous - if I may say so - if you knew who would receive it, but not the other way around!

Not to mention, it's almost certain that making a donation or giving in cash isn't the only resource you can provide to your community. Offering, for example, your experience, your energy and your passion can provide great benefits for the happiness of others as well as you. Certainly, volunteering is one of the many ways of giving and sometimes the volunteer may be unknown, seeking reward from God. However, you can at least refrain from flaunting it on social media!

Nevertheless, I firmly believe here that our passion should be the basis of our giving. It's not about how much we

give, but how much love we put into that giving. Moreover, when we give to others, we not only make them feel closer to us, but we also feel closer to them. Thus when we give, we are not only helping the direct recipient of our gift for instance. We also trigger a multiplier effect of generosity through our community. Of course, you agree with me that when a person behaves generously, it inspires the observers to subsequently act generously towards different people.

On the other hand, acts of giving and kindness also play a protective role when it comes to our mental health. Including that these actions stimulate (dopamine and endorphins) in the brain regions and thus make us feel happy and positive and affect our perception and emotions and increase our self-esteem. By our giving and kindness to others we also prevent ourselves from falling victim to depression, anxiety and other mental health problems.

Whether you're buying gifts, volunteering your time, or donating money to charity in your community, your donation is ultimately much more than a chore. Whatever you give, it gives meaning to everyday that you and others live with. Also, help you build stronger social bonds by launching a series of ongoing giving and through your community. don't be surprised if you find yourself benefiting from a huge dose of happiness everyday from your giving.

Dr Yousuf Ali al mulla is a physician, a medical innovator and a writer.



Elly Hollemans
relaxing in
Muttrah



Richard
Harrison with
host Elly
Hollemans

SMOOTH PASSAGE

Liju Cherian
@lijucherianoman

“The Sultanate of Oman has the best standard of service for those with mobility issues while travelling to the airport”, says Elly Hollemans, a 70-year-old retired teacher of English from Vlaardingen, a city in South Holland in the Netherlands. A frequent visitor to the Sultanate of Oman, she has been very impressed by the standard of service which she receives during her frequent visits to the country. Elly rates the service from the airport assistants as ‘far superior’ when compared to other airports all over the globe through which she has passed through in the last 15 years. After some serious health issues a few years ago leading to operations and later to a kidney transplant Elly found she was unable to walk unaided for more than a few dozen yards and had difficulty maintaining her balance when standing for more than a few minutes. As a result she has been using a walking frame (walker) or stroller to get around. Richard Harrison, Founder and Director, Canford Publishing, based in Muscat and UK, hosts Elly during her visits to Muscat and resides at

the Bareeq Al Shatti Apartments. Elly mentions that not even prominent airports such as Heathrow, Miami, Dubai or Schiphol care for those with mobility issues, but it is the airport staff assistants at the Muscat International Airport who have been very ‘cooperative and supportive’ with her. She has always made use of the assistance provided by airports on arrival and departure for passengers with limited mobility. In particular Elly praises the warmth and the caring attitude of the staff, some of whom recognise and call her ‘Amma’ (mother) with extended arms upon her arrival at the airport. Some even go to the extent of checking with her if she needs any money or if she needs to get help at the duty free shopping or to get to the parking area at the airport arrival on way to her guest’s home. A sprightly woman, Elly who goes about her normal activity says, “I have some good experiences with the airport ground staff in the Sultanate of Oman and they handle all my issues very smoothly. The staff is very punctual and their attitude is strong, always courteous and I offer my compliments for their work. Their service is so good when compared with other international airports.” She has received excellent and timely help from the ground handler staff who assist her throughout the process; starting from the check-in until boarding the aircraft. There is a dedicated path and immigration counter for these passengers to



Elly Hollemans holds her walker.

speed up the immigration process which makes their journey pleasant. This incredible feeling prompted her to write to the airport authorities appreciating their gesture. The airport also offers assistance to passengers with wheelchairs. In order to benefit from this service, passengers are required to proceed to the ‘Passengers with reduced Mobility’ office which is clearly signposted in the departures area at the forecourt. Elly has always loved to travel and she has not let her mobility issues stop her from exploring new countries and have visited the Sultanate of Oman on several occasions. The airports or cities she has visited around the world during this period number around 20 and often travels alone. The airports are Muscat, Schiphol, Dubai, Hong Kong,

Colombo, Miami, Orlando, Heathrow, Lisbon, Bali, Krakau, Stockholm, Helsinki, Dublin, Cork, Istanbul, Dalaman airport (Turkey), Marrakech, Curaçao and Nice. In 2004 Elly first started to use the walkers, the initial ones were about 13 kg. She prefers the red colour ones though it comes in various other colours now. She now uses the Trust Care Outdoor Walker of Swedish make with a weight of about 4 kg costing around RO 200. The use of the



Legs out walker

stroller has given Elly total independence and freedom to move around like any normal individual. The outdoor walker is lightweight, smooth and steady and needs little space and stands by itself when folded. This makes her easy to handle the walker during her travels and flight journey. The elegant large front wheels make it easy to turn and cross pavement kerbs. The rear wheel fenders help to protect the clothes from getting dirty. Shock-absorbing suspension on the rear wheels makes it run smoothly on all surfaces. Added to its advantage is it is fitted with an artificial soft leather seat and removable bag, which is designed for indoor and especially outdoor use. Richard, an ELT author, teacher trainer and consultant, says Elly has become something of an expert on the level of assistance provided by each airport in terms of organisation of the assistance, punctuality and perhaps most importantly the attitude of the assistants who

collect her from the plane on arrival or from check-in on departure and guide her and her luggage to the waiting car or taxi (or to the plane). Elly had mentioned the service aspects to Richard several times in recent years and they thought it would be useful and interesting to share this positive view of Muscat airport with the readers through the Observer. Her visits to the Sultanate of Oman are usually during the Christmas holidays. She goes around exploring the parks, beaches and public places in Muscat. During her present visit, Elly was seen moving around in her stroller for an evening walk at the Qurum Natural Park, Muttrah Souq or at the The Palace Wonderland, a winter market, hosted by Al Bustan Palace, A Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Determined that she is, Elly is confident she will make more visits to the Sultanate of Oman in the future, which she terms as a ‘peaceful country with hospitable citizens.’