

P12

MESSI'S ENDURING BRILLIANCE REWARDED WITH ANOTHER BALLON D'OR



P13

OMAN SEES POTENTIAL TO ATTRACT HYDROGEN INVESTMENTS WORTH \$34 BILLION BY 2040



P20

ENDANGERED SPECIES FOUND IN OMAN WATERS TO DEBUT IN GLOBAL TV



MUSCAT

HM GREET'S ROMANIA; SPAIN THANKS HM

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has sent a cable of greetings to President Klaus Iohannis of Romania on his country's National Day. In his cable, His Majesty expressed his sincere sentiments and best wishes of good health and happiness to President Iohannis. His Majesty also wished the friendly people of Romania further progress and prosperity. His Majesty has received a cable of thanks from King Felipe VI of the Kingdom of Spain in reply to His Majesty's greetings cable on his country's National Day. In the cable, King Felipe expressed his sincere appreciation for His Majesty the Sultan's heartfelt sentiments and best wishes. He wished His Majesty the Sultan permanent health and well-being and the Omani people further progress and welfare. — ONA

HM CONDOLENCES TO KOREAN PRESIDENT

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq has sent a cable of condolences to President Moon Jae-In of the Republic of Korea on the death of Chun Doo-Hwan, former president of Korea. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his heartfelt sympathies to President Moon, family of the deceased and the friendly people of Korea. — ONA

Now get news on the go



INSIDE



IRAN SAYS ENDING SANCTIONS KEY TO VIENNA TALKS

P6



FRENCH FAR-RIGHT PUNDIT LAUNCHES PRESIDENTIAL BID

P8

FIFA ARAB CUP 2021 OPENS



Delegated by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, HH Sayyid Theyazin bin Haitham al Said, Minister of Culture, Sports and Youth, and his delegation attended the opening ceremony of Fifa Arab Cup 2021 in the State of Qatar. HH Sayyid Theyazin is accompanied by an official delegation comprising Sayyid Saud bin Hilal al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat, Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, Basil bin Ahmed al Rowas, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth for Sports and Youth and Najeeb bin Yahya al Balushi, Ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman to Qatar. – ONA

OIA ramps up global investment portfolio

MUSCAT: The Oman Investment Authority (OIA) has succeeded in enhancing its international investments by entering into 20 new ventures in different sectors, including mining, logistics, healthcare and space technology.

Stating this Mulham Basheer al Jarf, Deputy Chairman of Oman Investment Authority (OIA), said that the investments, aimed to bolster the OIA's portfolio, are implemented in 36 countries and enable the authority to make gains, despite the adverse impacts of Covid-19 on the global economy. He added that the importance of the investments lies in empowering the Sultanate of Oman, and consolidating its ability to carry out its fiscal balance plans.

"Since 2016, the OIA has pumped RO 5 billion into the

Since 2016, the OIA has pumped RO 5 billion into the state's general finance and thus covered a portion of the deficit resulting from the slump in oil prices

MULHAM BASHEER AL JARF
Deputy Chairman of OIA

state's general finance and thus covered a portion of the deficit resulting from the slump in oil prices", said Al Jarf, noting the OIA has earned profits without resorting to the liquidation of its assets.

NO CASE OF OMICRON YET IN SULTANATE

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

Even though no cases of Omicron variant of the Covid-19 have been detected in the Sultanate of Oman, the Ministry of Health has urged people to continue following preventive measures such as vaccinations, wearing masks, washing hands, physical distancing, apart from conducting examinations at land border crossings and airports.

Mutations of the coronavirus will continue to happen, but the reason for its spread is the unfair distribution of vaccines in the world.

Dr Zakaria bin Yahya al Balushi, a consultant doctor for infectious diseases at the Royal Hospital, has said that the Omicron mutant might not have



started in South Africa.

"It might have happened in countries which do not conduct the examination and do not have infrastructure such as the one in South Africa, so it was discovered when it arrived in South Africa."

He said the Omicron mutant is alarming and needs careful

monitoring and preventive measures as more details are awaited. To avoid the formation of new dangerous mutants, vaccines must be distributed all over the world.

The Ministry of Health has denied social media reports about the possibility of the presence of the Omicron in the country.

The surveillance system which monitors the epidemiological situation is effective.

The ministry called on citizens and residents to follow preventive measures such as social distancing, avoiding crowded places, wearing masks in closed places, maintaining hand hygiene, as well as expediting to receive the booster dose for the eligible age groups. It also called on everyone to take correct information from official sources.

Oman hosts Foreign Press Association's awards ceremony

LONDON: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the Ministry of Information, Oman Vision 2040 Follow up Unit and Oman Embassy in the United Kingdom, hosted the Foreign Press Association (FPA)'s annual awards ceremony "Press Oscar" here on Tuesday.

Dr Abdullah bin Nasser al Harrasi, Minister of Information, said in an online speech that His

Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq considers youth as "the wealth of nations and its inexhaustible resource" and that "Oman is a country in transformation" across different development sectors.

Dr Abdullah added that the Sultanate of Oman attaches great significance to its "close, Royal, diplomatic and cultural relationship with the UK" and values the role of the FPA, the

oldest media organisation of its kind in the world, founded in 1888. The minister affirmed that the Sultanate of Oman is pressing ahead with its economic diversification programme (Oman Vision 2040).

"We are pushing forward with an ambitious programme of diversification, our Vision 2040, to build a sustainable economy for future generations."



SQU graduation ceremony of 2,962 students on Dec 6 and 7

MUSCAT: Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) will celebrate the graduation of 2,962 students of the 31st batch on December 6 and 8 under the auspices of Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation.

The first day will see the graduation of 1,498 students from the College of Arts and Social Sciences, the College of Economics and Political Science and the College of Engineering.

As many as 1,464 students from the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, the College of Nursing, the College of Science, the College of Education and the College of Law will graduate in the second day.



Meanwhile, 2715 students representing the 32nd batch will graduate on 13 and 15 December 2021, in a ceremony to be held under the auspices of Dr Mahad bin Said Baowain, Minister of Labour. On the first day, the ceremony will witness the graduation of 1,369 students from the College of Arts and Social Sciences, the College of Education and the College of Engineering. On the second day, 1,346 students will graduate from the College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, the College of Nursing, the College of Science, the College of Economics and Political Science, and the College of Law.

— ONA

Pensioners up by 8 per cent

ZAINAB AL NASSRI
@zainabalnassri

The number of retirees in the Sultanate until the end of September of the current year increased by 8 per cent to 73,743 retirees, compared to 68,397 retirees until the same month last year. Men accounted for 75 per cent of the retirees and women 25 per cent, according to the latest statistics of the Civil Service Employees Pension Fund.

The Fund indicated that the average age at the end of service was 50 years, average period service was 22 years, and average monthly pension was RO 592. Besides, the total monthly pensions amounted to RO 44 million.

The number of beneficiaries of pensions amounted to 89,201, including 37,699 heirs entitled to the pension, the Fund said.

The number of retirees in 2021

reached 5,346, of whom 43 per cent are men and 57 per cent are females. The average age at the end of service was 48 years, while average period of service was 24 years.

The Muscat Governorate ranked first in terms of the number of retirees with 14,017 followed by Al Dakhiliyah Governorate with 7,100 and Al Batinah North with 6,500.

Last April, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik gave his directives for the establishment of two retirement funds one for the public and private sectors and the other for the military and security units.

The royal directives stipulated that minimum service years required for entitlement to voluntary retirement in all applicable laws, bylaws and regulations is 30 years of service, and this provision does not apply to those who have completed 20 years of service on the date of the issuance of the Social Protection Law.

Royal Opera House Muscat announces sale of tickets

MUSCAT: The Royal Opera House Muscat (ROHM) said that tickets are now on sale for the upcoming 2022 season. Tickets for all performances across the season, which will be held from January 2022 to May 2022, can be booked via the newly relaunched app, the box office in the opera house foyer or on the website. The 2022 season features a broad range of performances from Opera and Classical Ballet to family events, acrobatic shows, stars of the Arab music scene and concerts from world-renowned orchestras and international artists. All shows will be performed with full adherence to the precautionary measures set by the Covid-19 Supreme Committee.

The ROHM app is designed to enable customers to enjoy a smoother and more convenient platform through which to access the host of world class events on offer

throughout the season. This bespoke system contains features which ensure that the experience is quick, secure and easy to navigate. Users can download the free app to their mobile devices and make online ticket purchases in the knowledge that their payment options are securely protected.

The app has also been designed so that audiences can search for performances by genre or specific shows. Users can enjoy a more tailored relationship with the Royal Opera House Muscat, receive notifications of upcoming shows, educational events and special offers. They can also access information about the Opera Galleria and discover the retail opportunities. The Royal Opera House Muscat new and improved app is available to download on the Apple App Store and Google Play. — ONA

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Thu 11 ● ● ●	Sat 04 ● ● ●	Sat 15 ● ● ● ●	Sat 12 ● ● ● ●
Sat 20 ● ● ●	Sat 11 ● ● ● ●	Thu 20 ● ● ● ●	Thu 17 ● ● ● ●
Sat 27 ● ● ●	Sat 18 ● ● ● ●	Sat 29 ● ● ● ●	Sat 26 ● ● ● ●

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In brief

■ MUSCAT

RAO CHIEF
RECEIVES QATARI
COMMANDER

Major General Matar bin Salim al Balushi, Commander of the Royal Army of Oman (RAO) received Major General Fahad Mubarak al Khayareen, Commander of Joaan bin Jassim Joint Command and Staff College of the State of Qatar, and his accompanying delegation, at Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Tuesday. The meeting was attended by a number of senior RAO officers and the Military Attaché at the Qatari Embassy in Muscat.

SAI TAKES PART
IN REGIONAL
WORKSHOP

MUSCAT: The Sultanate of Oman, represented by the State Audit Institution, participated in the regional workshop of the 3rd session of the Arab Anti-Corruption Convention. The online workshop, held on November 29 and 30, was organised by the Oversight and Anti-Corruption Authority of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), in partnership with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), field of integrity and anti-corruption.

ROP ARRESTS 3 PEOPLE
ON DRUG SMUGGLING
CHARGES

MUSCAT: The Directorate of Combating Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances at South Al Batinah Police Command, in cooperation with the Coast Guard Police, arrested 3 Asians on charges of smuggling and possessing drugs and attempting to enter the country illegally. The police also seized 30 bundles of crystal methamphetamine and 10 bars of hashish.

■ SILVER LINES OVER MOUNTAINS



Water pours down from the top of a mountain in Bukha in Musandam Governorate as heavy rains continued to lash the northern governorates, on Tuesday. The direct effects of the low pressure system are expected to end on Wednesday.

Oman hosts
Foreign Press
Association's
awards
ceremony

FROM P1

Our future will be powered by innovation", he said.

In the same context, Dr Abdullah said that "The Sultanate of Oman is a land of opportunities for investors seeking stability and prosperity in the Middle East. It is a trusted, open and innovative business partner, as well as a gentle facilitator on the diplomatic stage".

The minister highlighted the Sultanate of Oman's drive to become a global leader in renewable energy, given the abundance of resources. "We are striving to be a world leader in renewable energy technology. We are blessed with an abundance of solar and wind", said Dr Abdullah. He also laid emphasis on the Sultanate of Oman's strong potential to effectively contribute to the growth of the regional and international economy, thanks to its long coast line and deep-rooted maritime history.

"We are attracting tourists from all over the world", said Dr Abdullah, who underscored the Sultanate of Oman's preparedness to receive tourists from different countries of the world due to the country's pristine beaches, hills and great diversity of wildlife and marine resources.

Kate McCure, President of FPA and Deborah Bonetti, Director of FPA, hailed the Sultanate of Oman's support for the local and international press.

FPA member Robert Moore won the Best Journalist Award 2021. Moore saw Oman hosting this year's FPA Award Ceremony as a message that reflects the importance of promoting journalism and extends all necessary means of empowerment of journalists to enable them to practice their profession.

By hosting the FPA celebration in London this year, the Sultanate of Oman seeks to showcase Oman Vision 2040 and the country's tourist, economic, investment and cultural resources. — ONA

Sardine season attracts
swarms of seagulls

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY
YAHYA AL SALMANI

MUSCAT: The coast is abuzz with fishermen and seagulls as 'Al Ouma' or sardines season begins in the Sultanate of Oman. One can see huge flocks of seagulls swarming over fishing boats brimming with the catch. They land on the fishing boats or the loading vehicles to snack on sardines or other fish. It is a beautiful sight that adds an aesthetic touch to the magnificent beaches.

Sardines or 'Al Ouma', occupy the top spot in fish exports of Oman. There are 21 species of them in the Sultanate of Oman.

Sardines are located in the northwestern part of the Indian Ocean, from the Horn of Africa and along the coast of Oman and the Arabian Gulf, and even spread as far east as the southern coasts of India and Sri Lanka.

Sardines migrate within Oman's coastal waters. Sardines appear on a seasonal basis, where they move in large schools from October to February. Most sardines are concentrated in the governorates



of Al Wusta, Dhofar, South and North Al Batinah, as well as South and North Al Sharqiyah.

Sardines migrate frequently, which provides them with protection from predatory organisms. They belong to the Clupeidae family. It is also called 'Indian oil sardine'.

These fish occupy the bottom of the food pyramid. Sardines are

commercially fished for a variety of uses: For bait; for consumption; for drying, salting, smoking; and for the production of fish meal or oil. The chief use of sardines is for human consumption, but fish meal is used as animal feed, while sardine oil has many uses, including the manufacture of paint, varnish and linoleum.

The migration of sardines

Sardines or 'Al
Ouma' occupy
the top spot in
fish exports of
Oman. There are
21 species of them
in the Sultanate of
Oman

attracts other fish and other living creatures. Fishermen say that tuna, dolphins and whales follow the migration path of sardines. Seagulls and sea turtles feed on sardines.

Al Ouma topped the list of artisanal fish catch in 2020 with 430,130 tonnes, which is equivalent to 54.2 per cent of the total artisanal fishing production, followed by Yellowfin Tuna with 68,578 tonnes or 8.6 per cent of the total production.

Blackish oil is extracted from sardines. It is used in many applications, including coating of boats and ships due to its ability to prevent water from leaking into the interior of the ships. In the past, sardine oil was in great demand by makers of traditional ships.

Oman's Affordable Art Fair on Dec 2, 3

LIJU CHERIAN
@lijuchermanoman

An Affordable Art Fair conducted annually by art fair organisations is scheduled for December 2, 3. Held after a year's gap due to the pandemic, the fair will see a team of experienced and qualified art professionals who have joined forces to organise the contemporary art exhibition.

Over 30 brilliant artists based in the Sultanate of Oman including Omanis are expected to showcase their artworks.

Artist Radhika Hamalai, the chief organiser of Affordable Art Fair since 2017, explains that the fair will provide a huge opportunity for over 35 participating artists and galleries to exhibit their



Radhika Hamalai

artworks which will help increase conversations about art.

As one who has been promoting art and artists in the Sultanate of Oman, she says the art fair will help create an awareness for everyone

who should be able to own a piece of art and make it more affordable.

Radhika says the specialty of the fair "is the joy of collecting art and all the artworks displayed will be priced below RO 150. The event will be widely promoted so as to reach out to a large number of local and international enthusiasts."

"The fair will offer a wide range of art enthusiasts and collectors to the event and help broaden their collection of contemporary and fine arts. Our events are open to the public giving full exposure to Omani locals", she adds.

All the exhibitors will have a stall of their own to exhibit which will include art works, sculptors, drawings, clothes, ceramics, paintings or any medium that they can paint on.

Another important factor about the fair is its aim to promote young and emerging artists providing them a platform for exposure to the local market as well as having senior artists and art galleries taking part.

Omani artists like Ibti al Said, Farah Asqul, Tahira Fida Hussain, Madny al Bakry, Bashayer al Naaime and others along with art galleries namely Al Ghalya Art and Designer, Scientific College of Design, Artist Collective, Rebeca Nigrinis Art Studio-Gallery, Shah Nagardas Manji, Cure8Art Gallery, along with university and college teachers, will be part of it.

The art fair is scheduled to be held at Al Bahja Hall, Qurum, and the timings are from 10 am to 7 pm on both the days.

OIA ramps up global
investment portfolio

FROM P1

In reply to a query about OIA's major investments, Al Jarf said that the authority has succeeded in acquiring the full quota of SpaceX specialised space and satellite communications and technologies. This will place the Sultanate of Oman in the lead to utilise SpaceX technologies, open wide visas for global investments, provide employment opportunities and hone its expertise in economic diversification initiatives, Al Jarf said.

He added that, in the logistics sector, the OIA possesses 35 per cent of Kumpart container port in Turkey (which handles more than 1.2 million containers per annum), acting in partnership with Chinese investment firms. The OIA is also investing in Bharat Port in Mumbai, India, in partnership with Singaporean firms to operate a container terminal whose capacity stands at 4.8 million containers a year, he added.

Other OIA international investments include a tie-up with Kenmir company engaged in mining and production of titanium ore and managing about 10 per cent of global titanium reserves. Recently, Kenmir implemented investment projects that saw its shares soar by 50 per cent, the highest in years.

Meanwhile, the OIA has succeeded in completing gradual withdrawal from some international investments and generated withdrawal returns equal to triple the value of its investments there, said Al Jarf. — ONA

SHORT OF SKILLED HANDS

TRAVEL INDUSTRY
STRUGGLES TO RETAIN
AND FIND EXPERIENCED
PERSONNEL

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

Travel and tourism providers need to brace for newer challenges in Covid era especially retaining skilled personnel, experts and industry leaders say.

“Airlines, as well as other small and big players in the travel and tourism sectors need to embrace the new normal and face the challenges facing them in the Covid era”, says Renny Johnson, a travel and tourism expert having decades-long experience in the sector.

According to him, several skilled employees have left the industry and may not be joining the same organisation for a lesser pay. Recruitment and training to groom the new staff can take several months and resources.

“In this scenario, retaining the experienced staff even at a premium really matters”, he said.

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is focusing on standards, digitalisation and addressing the skilled labour shortage to build resilience and ensure long-term sustainability post pandemic for ground handling activities. Reports suggest that ground handling providers are facing severe shortages and challenges in retaining and recruiting staff.

“There will be challenges as ground handling operations ramp up to meet growing demand as the aviation industry’s recovery from Covid-19 progresses. Overcoming labour shortages, ensuring safety with strict adherence to global standards and digitalisation and modernisation will be critical to achieving a scalable restart”, according to Monika Mejstrikova, Director of Ground Operations at IATA.

Experts further advise that in order

to retain skilled staff, there should be programmes like wage subsidy and lucrative packages although it might mean additional costs on the employer.

“Experienced and skilled staff is always an asset of an organisation that helps it achieve the goals and meet the targets from time to time”, says Reena Rahman CEO of Alhind Travel.

“Various packages to retain experienced staff are in practice across the world and newer plans are currently being worked out by researchers in order not to affect the turnover of the organisation”, she said.

To accelerate training of personnel, the use of competency-based training, assessments and online training should be increased, and training requirements harmonised. A concept of training passport can be developed that would mutually recognise skills across ground handlers, airlines and airport staff members.

Dhofar University hosts graduation



Dhofar University celebrated the graduation of 368 students from the Faculties of Law and Engineering in Salalah on Tuesday. Retired minister Yusuf bin Alawi bin Abdallah, Deputy Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Dhofar University, presented the certificates to graduates.

Ministry warns hotels against social media ads without approval

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MoHT) has warned hotel establishments that advertise their facilities, including on social media, without obtaining the necessary permits.

"It is not permissible for any natural or legal person to occupy, utilise, exploit or dispose of any tourist site or area or part of it, except with a license from the Ministry," the official statement said.

The ministry's previous circular issued on August 17 had warned owners of some hotel establishments advertising and promoting them through various social media without obtaining a tourist license, which is in violation of Article (12) of the Tourism Law promulgated by Royal Decree 33/2002.

The ministry's previous circular issued on August 17 had warned owners of some hotel establishments advertising and promoting them through various social media without obtaining a tourist license, which is in violation of Article (12) of the Tourism Law promulgated by Royal Decree 33/2002

The ministry said it would like to emphasise to the owners of these establishments to stop the activity and follow the procedures for opening new hotels, which were announced on

November 15.

"The applications, which must be made within six months, must be submitted through the website of the ministry."

Earlier this month, MoHT has announced regulations for the establishment of new establishments, aimed at providing a balance to the quality of hotels available to the guests. The ministry will receive requests to establish hotel establishments projects on private lands as per the new regulations from December 1. In Muscat, Muttrah, Al Amerat and Qurayat, MoHT will not allow projects classified as one, two stars, hotel apartments, guest houses. At the same time, three to five-star hotels, luxury hotel apartments, heritage and green hotels will be allowed in the Muscat governorate. The same regulations will be applicable to the Wilayat of Al Seeb.

■ NEW BATCH OF RECRUITS JOIN ROP



The Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences on Tuesday received a new batch of general education diploma (GED) holders to join the Royal Oman Police (ROP) after passing e-tests, interviews and medical examinations. The new batch has joined the Institute of Police Recruits at the Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Sciences. The new police recruits will receive an integrated qualifying programme which comprises military training, academic courses and practical training following which they will be qualified for performing police duties. – ONA

People urged to respect wadis, parks, beaches

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

Visitors to public places such as parks, beaches and wadis should not spoil the habitats around and should consider the species that dwell in these places, according to the Environment Authority.

The Sultanate of Oman is home to rare and unique species of birds, fishes and animals and has many locations of lagoons and wetlands. In Muscat alone, there are Qurum Natural Park and Al Khairan besides different wadis and other protected areas across the country. There are in addition to the man-made wetlands in Al Ansab.

"Public should treat our protected areas carefully and not harm the growth of our rare and unique birds and fishes," said Aziza bint Saud al Adhubiyah (pictured), Head of Wetlands Management Section at the Environment Authority (EA).

"One should refrain from making noise around these areas as they are important habitats for birds and fishes and also, they should obey the restrictions and guidelines kept by the EA near the areas."

Since 2000, the Sultanate of Oman has been carrying out the National Project of Mangrove Transplantation in the Sultanate of Oman with the support of Jaica (Japan International Cooperation Agency) and to date, as many as thirty locations have been transplanted and thousands of mangrove groups have been benefitted.

"We have done a study with JAICA which revealed that many locations of mangrove have been logged and are affected by cyclones and the like. There is a need of protecting them by transplanting them."

Mangroves are considered one of the



rarest plants and the Sultanate of Oman needs to increase the coverage of the same which are of great benefits to the environment and for the other creatures.

Speaking to the *Observer* on the sidelines of a panel discussion on "Conservation of Wildlife in the Sultanate of Oman as experienced by Oman In Focus" which explored ways of protecting various endangered species of creatures and Flora and fauna which are at the verge of extinction, she said that the EA pays attention to transplant with mangroves and safeguard these habitats.

"Protecting these natural habitats has a lot of benefits. They are not only recreational sites for the whole family where people can enjoy the greenery and fresh air but also are of commercial importance. However, all lagoons in the country are protected and catching juvenile fishes in these areas is prohibited. These fishes grow up inside the lagoons and as they get bigger, they go back to the sea," said Al Adhubiyah.

Besides, these wetlands have the capacity to store carbon dioxide five times more than the rainforests, which makes it even more important so that they can reduce the impacts of climate change and global warming. EA provides logistical, technical and financial support to the project initiated by Oman In Focus and Maisa al Hooti. "We also help identify the protected sites and local species for the filming," said Al Adhubiyah.




Tender Announcement

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

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-refundable)
23/2021	Design & Implementation Work for two halls in MOSD HQ	Companies specialized in building contracting and registered with the General Secretariat of the Tender Board in the first degree	Monday 20-12-2021 02:00 PM	Sunday 9-1-2022 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

- ❖ Specialized Companies, registered with the **Tender Board** may obtain the Tender documents at the Tender Board e-tendering digital portal link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>). On Wednesday 1/12/2021.
- ❖ Tender shall be submitted in compliance with the technical specifications and terms along with a local bank warranty at (1%) of the tender value, valid ninety (90) days from the date of e-submission.
- ❖ For Inquiry, please contact through the e-tendering website (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) tel. (24402200).

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

www.mosd.gov.om

Ending sanctions key to Vienna talks: Raisi

TEHRAN: Iran's president has assured his French counterpart that his government is serious about resumed talks on reviving a 2015 nuclear deal but stressed that lifting US sanctions is the absolute priority.

President Ebrahim Raisi's comments in a phone call with Emmanuel Macron on Monday evening were his first after the reopening of the talks in Vienna earlier in the day.

Raisi said that Washington has a special responsibility to rebuild confidence in the agreement as it was then US president Donald Trump who had brought it to its knees in 2018 by pulling out and reimposing sweeping sanctions.

"Those who have started to violate the nuclear deal must gain the confidence of the other party for the negotiations to proceed in a real and fruitful manner," he said.

Raisi said Iran was serious about the talks on reviving the



We stand ready to resume 'full cooperation' with IAEA tasked with monitoring Iran's implementation of the strict limits on its nuclear activities

EBRAHIM RAISI
Iran President

agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and expected its negotiating partners to be so too.



Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service (EEAS) Enrique Mora speaks to journalists after a meeting of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna. — AFP

"Sending a full team to the talks shows Iran's serious will in these talks," he said. "If the Americans lift the sanctions and the Europeans honour their commitments... Iran will meet its obligations too."

Raisi said Iran stood ready to

resume "full cooperation" with the UN nuclear watchdog, which was tasked with monitoring Iran's implementation of the strict limits on its nuclear activities it agreed to in 2015 in return for the lifting of international sanctions.

A statement issued by the

French presidency after the phone call said that France's goal in the talks was to "see Iran return to full respect for all of its commitments under the JCPOA and that the United States return to the agreement".

Macron "underscored the need for Iran to engage constructively in this direction so that the exchanges allow a swift return to the agreement," it said.

"Iran must return without delay to compliance with all its commitments and obligations... and quickly resume cooperation that allows the (UN atomic) agency to fully carry out its mission."

In a separate phone call with UN chief Antonio Guterres on Monday evening, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian promised that Iran would resume its obligations under the nuclear deal as soon as the other parties did so too.

"The other parties must resume

their obligations in full," he said. "When that happens, Iran will halt its compensatory measures."

He was referring to Iran's tit-for-tat suspension of key undertakings in the 2015 deal that has seen it enrich uranium in larger quantities and to higher levels of purity than it had originally promised.

The talks in Vienna are the first since Iran paused them after Raisi's election in June and then ignored Western appeals to restart them for several months.

The remaining parties to the 2015 agreement Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia are participating directly. At Iran's insistence, the US is doing so only indirectly.

The EU chair of the talks, Enrique Mora, said after the first session on Monday that he felt "extremely positive", although he acknowledged that "difficult issues" had yet to be tackled.

— AFP

STUDENTS GO HIGH TECH



Palestinian students interact with a locally-made educational robot during a science class at a private school in Gaza City. — AFP

Sadr's bloc declared biggest election winner

BAGHDAD: Iraq's Moqtada Sadr was Tuesday confirmed the biggest winner of last month's parliamentary election. Sadr's movement won 73 out of the assembly's 329 seats, the election commission said, after a lengthy manual recount of hundreds of ballot boxes.

A distant second in the camp with 17 seats was the Fatah (Conquest) Alliance, the political arm of the Hashed al Shaabi former paramilitary force, which is now integrated into Iraq's state security apparatus.

Hashed leaders had rejected

the preliminary result, which was sharply down from their 48 seats in the outgoing assembly, as a "scam", and their supporters have held street protests chanting "No to fraud".

Their activists have staged sit-in protests outside Baghdad's ultra-secure Green Zone district, where the government, the assembly and many foreign embassies are located.

Analysts have warned that — in a country still recovering from decades of war and chaos, political disputes could spark a dangerous escalation. On

November 7, Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi — leader of the outgoing government — escaped unhurt when an explosive-packed drone hit his Baghdad residence. The attack was not claimed by any group.

The final results must now be sent to the federal court for ratification.

The formation of Iraqi governments has involved complex negotiations in the multi-confessional and multi-ethnic country ever since a US-led invasion toppled ruler Saddam Hussein in 2003. — AFP

Sudan security forces fire tear gas against post-coup deal

KHARTOUM: Sudanese security forces fired tear gas on Tuesday at protesters rallying against last month's military takeover and a deal that saw the prime minister reinstated after his ouster in the coup, witnesses said

Thousands of demonstrators gathered in central Khartoum and marched on the presidential palace when security forces fired tear gas to disperse them, they said.

Security forces were stationed around the palace to prevent demonstrators from approaching. "No partnership, no negotiation, no legitimacy," protesters chanted, urging the military "to go back to their barracks".

"I'm here to demand the fall of military rule," demonstrator Mohamed Alaaldin said.

Sudan's top general, Abdel Fattah al Burhan, seized power and detained Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok on October 25, but after international condemnation and mass protests he reinstated the premier in a deal they signed last week.

Critics lambasted the agreement as "whitewashing" and accused Hamdok of "betrayal" as pro-democracy activists vowed to maintain pressure on the military-civilian authority.

The Sudanese Professionals



Demonstrators hurl tear gas canisters back at security forces amidst clashes in Khartoum following protests against a deal that saw the civilian prime minister reinstated after the military coup in October. — AFP

Association, an umbrella of unions which called for Tuesday's protests, accused Hamdok and Burhan of seeking to "reproduce the former regime" of president Omar al Bashir who was ousted in April 2019 following mass protests.

"Taking to the streets is a clear and decisive response to the putschists' nonsense," said the SPA, which was also instrumental in the anti-Bashir protests.

Hamdok, who has been prime minister in the transitional government since the ouster of long-time autocratic ruler Bashir, has defended the deal which was signed on November 21.

He has told local media he had

partnered with the military to "stop the bloodshed" and to "not squander the gains of the last two years".

The agreement was welcomed by the United Nations, African Union, Western countries as well as Arab powerhouses Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which have strong ties with the Sudanese military

The military has vowed to release detainees kept in custody since the coup and several politicians have since been freed.

Burhan has also pledged to lead Sudan to "free and transparent elections" in July 2023. Burhan has insisted the military's move "was not a coup" but a step "to rectify the transition. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

TRIPOLI

Libya, UN warn intimidation

Libya's government and the UN expressed concern over an intimidation campaign that has shut the court where the son of slain ruler Muammar Gaddafi is appealing his rejected presidential bid.

The elections on December 24 come as Libya seeks to turn the page on a decade of violence since a NATO-backed uprising that toppled and killed Gaddafi in 2011.

Last Wednesday, Libya's electoral commission announced



the rejection of the candidacy of his son Seif al Islam Gaddafi, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes. Unsuccessful applicants were given 48 hours to appeal in court. — AFP

RABAT

Morocco to push for Israeli-Palestinian talks

Morocco will push for a resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, King Mohammed VI said on Monday. "Morocco will continue its efforts, building on its position and its excellent relations with all sides and relevant international actors, to provide the appropriate conditions for a return to the negotiating table," the monarch said in a televised address.

Morocco renewed official relations with Israel in December last year, two decades after it



cut ties with the outbreak of the second Palestinian uprising. The rapprochement came amid a string of normalisation deals between Israel and Arab countries, brokered by the Trump administration. — AFP

ANKARA

Turkey jails opposition party politician

A well-known Turkish defence analyst and founder of the opposition Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA), Metin Gurcan (pictured), has been jailed on charges of "political and military espionage," local media reported. Gurcan, a former member of the Turkish military, was one of the co-founders of DEVA party led by Ali Babacan, a former deputy prime minister within President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ruling AKP party.

Turkish police detained him



on Friday. "I am being detained on charges of political espionage. The police are at home... They are searching. I am shocked and I seek your help," Gurcan tweeted last week. — AFP

In brief

■ MALE



CONVICTED MALDIVES EX-LEADER RELEASED FROM HOUSE ARREST

Former Maldives president Abdulla Yameen (pictured), was released from house arrest after winning an appeal on his money laundering conviction. The former strongman ruled the Indian Ocean archipelago — best known for opulent beachside resorts and their frequent celebrity guests — until his shock election loss in 2018. He was convicted a year later for illegally holding millions of dollars in his bank accounts that had allegedly been stolen from a tourism development agency.

But the Supreme Court freed the 62-year-old after finding the earlier trial had not established a proven link between the agency and the money in Yameen's accounts, a court official said.

■ WELLINGTON



EX-AIRLINE BOSS LANDS AS NEW ZEALAND OPPOSITION LEADER

Former airline boss Christopher Luxon was elected leader of New Zealand's main opposition National Party, becoming the party's fifth leader to try to unseat Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

Luxon, who was chief executive at Air New Zealand from 2012-19, won a party room vote uncontested after his main rival Simon Bridges withdrew from the contest. The 51-year-old is a first-term lawmaker who won his Auckland-based seat of Botany at last year's election.

Luxon said New Zealand was "heading in the wrong direction" under Ardern, whose personal popularity remains high in the electorate.

■ MANILA



EXPLOSION DETECTED AT PHILIPPINES' MOUNT PINATUBO

A weak explosion was detected from one of the Philippines' active volcanoes north of the capital, a government agency said.

Instruments around Mount Pinatubo "recorded seismic and infrasound signals of a weak explosion" after 12 pm, the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said.

"The event produced a plume that was detected by the Himawari-8Satellite and reported to (Phivolcs) by the Tokyo Volcanic Ash Advisory Centre", it said in an advisory. — dpa

Verdicts in Suu Kyi trial deferred to Dec 6

YANGON: Verdicts regarding charges of incitement and violating Covid-19 regulations against ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi have been postponed to next week, according to sources with knowledge of the proceedings.

The verdicts are now expected to be delivered on Monday.

Suu Kyi, 76, was arrested hours before a coup on February 1, as the military overthrew the country's democratically elected civilian leaders and once again put the country under military rule.

She faces charges on 11 offences, including violating foreign trade laws, violating coronavirus measures, inciting sedition and corruption. Together, they carry a combined maximum sentence of 101 years.

Her lawyers refute the charges and her supporters claim that the charges are politically motivated, an attempt to keep her out of politics for the rest of her life.

Her cases have been heard along with those of co-defendant Win Myint, the ousted president, at a court in Naypyitaw since June.

Myanmar has been in a political turmoil since the coup, with the military struggling with resistance forces, who have fought back with

Suu Kyi faces charges on 11 offences, including violating foreign trade laws, violating coronavirus measures, inciting sedition and corruption

everything from peaceful street protests and civil disobedience movements to armed revolution with hundreds of local resistance forces fighting soldiers across the country.

According to the rights group the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, more than 10,000 people have been arrested and almost 1,300 people killed since the coup was launched.

Days after the coup Suu Kyi was hit with obscure charges for possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies, and for violating coronavirus restrictions during elections her National League for Democracy (NLD) won in 2020. The junta has since added a slew of other indictments, including violating the official secrets act, corruption and electoral fraud.

Suu Kyi now appears most weekdays at the junta courtroom,

Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi



Age 76

- 2010** Released from house arrest after spending 16 out of the previous 20 years in detention
- 2015** Leads NLD to a landslide victory in the country's first democratic elections
- 2016** Assumes **de facto national leadership** in the role of state counsellor
- 2020** Leads NLD to **second landslide**



with her legal team saying last month the hectic schedule was taking a toll on the 76-year-old's health.

- Feb 1, 2021** Arrested hours before new parliament due to convene
- Feb 3 - Mar 1** Charged with series of offences:
 - Possession of unlicensed walkie-talkies
 - Violation of Covid-19 restrictions
 - Violation of communications laws
 - Intent to incite public unrest
 - Sedition
- May 24** Appears in court Says "NLD will exist as long as people exist"
- Jun 10** Additional charges announced:
 - Corruption For allegedly accepting 11 kg of gold and \$600,000 in cash
- Jun 14 - Nov 30** Trial in Naypyidaw
- Nov 30** Court delays verdict until Dec 6

Her long spells of house arrest under a previous junta were spent at her family's colonial-era mansion in Yangon, where she would

appear before thousands gathered on the other side of her garden fence. Min Aung Hlaing's regime has confined her to an undisclosed location in the capital, with her link to the outside world limited to brief pre-trial meetings with her lawyers.

In recent weeks, the trials of other ranking members of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy have wrapped up, with the junta doling out harsh sentences.

A former chief minister was sentenced to 75 years in jail earlier this month, while a close Suu Kyi aide was jailed for 20.

The military, which has dominated life in Myanmar for decades, has defended its power grab, citing fraud allegations in last year's general election, which Suu Kyi's party won comfortably.

International pressure on the junta to restore democracy swiftly has shown no sign of knocking the generals off course, and bloody clashes with anti-coup protesters continue across the country.

Around 20 anti-coup demonstrators marched in the centre of commercial hub Yangon on Tuesday, local media showed, chanting slogans and burning a portrait of junta chief Min Aung Hlaing.

— dpa/AFP

Japan oppn picks new leader

TOKYO: Japan's main opposition party on Tuesday elected its 47-year-old policy chief as leader, as it tries to regroup following a disappointing electoral performance against the country's long-ruling conservatives.

Kenta Izumi, who is far from a household name in Japan, takes the helm of the Constitutional Democratic Party after its celebrated founder Yukio Edano stepped down over poor results in October's election.

Izumi faces the difficult task of uniting Japan's fractured opposition bloc in the face of the Liberal Democratic Party, which has ruled Japan for nearly all of the past seven decades.

He has pledged to strengthen programmes to assist the poor and needy in an apparent effort to draw a contrast with the ruling party's generally pro-business policies. "We will conduct politics that are people-centred", he said.

The eight-term lawmaker,



Kenta Izumi reacts after election as the new leader of the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan in Tokyo. — AFP

who beat three candidates for the leadership job, won his first lower house seat at age 29, unusually young in Japan.

The father of three was born in northern Hokkaido and represents a district in Kyoto where he went to college and began working as a staff member

for a local politician.

Japan's opposition had been hopeful that they could capitalise in October's vote on public discontent with the ruling party's virus response after a summer infection surge. But instead, the LDP under new Prime Minister Fumio Kishida secured a strong majority.

FIRST CASE OF OMICRON: Meanwhile, the new Omicron variant of the coronavirus has been detected in Japan for the first time.

An arrival from Namibia who entered Japan via Tokyo's Narita airport on Sunday has tested positive for the coronavirus, Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno was quoted as saying by the Kyodo news agency on Tuesday.

An examination of virus samples by the national institute for infectious diseases had identified the new variant, he said. — dpa



Afghan women during a demonstration demanding better rights for women in front of the former Ministry of Women Affairs in Kabul. — AFP

HRW: Over 100 Afghan security forces killed

ISLAMABAD: The Taliban has executed or forcibly disappeared more than 100 former government security forces since seizing power in Afghanistan, according to a report released on Tuesday.

The 25-page report documents the killings or disappearances of former Afghan officials from the military, police, intelligence services and pro-government militias who surrendered to or were detained by Taliban forces between August 15 and October 31, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW), which compiled the evidence.

The NGO says it gathered credible information on more than 100 killings or enforced disappearances from Ghazni, Helmand, Kandahar and Kunduz provinces, four of the country's 34 provinces.

The Taliban leadership offered a "general amnesty" to all forces from the previous Afghan government both prior to and after the fighter group took over the country in August.

Most of the provinces,

including the capital Kabul, were handed over to them without a fight. The security forces surrendered en masse in several provinces, while others abandoned their duties and went into hiding.

HRW says the Taliban has gained access to employment records the former government left behind and are using them to identify people for arrest and execution.

"The Taliban leadership's promised amnesty has not stopped local commanders from summarily executing or disappearing former Afghan security force members", says Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at HRW.

In response to the findings, Taliban officials told HRW they had removed from their ranks 755 members found to have committed such acts and established a military tribunal for those accused of murder, torture, and illegal detention. According to HRW, however, they have provided no information to corroborate their claim. — dpa

■ AWARENESS FOR AIDS



A volunteer lights candles forming the shape of a red ribbon during an awareness event organised on the eve of the 'World AIDS Day' at Khalpara area in Siliguri, India. — AFP



French minister in talks with unions on Caribbean islands

POINTE-À-PITRE: France’s minister for overseas territories left the Caribbean island of Guadeloupe on Monday night at an impasse over ways to end more than a week of violent protests sparked by Covid-19 restrictions.

Before departing for more talks in neighbouring Martinique, Sebastien Lecornu told reporters that the Guadeloupe negotiations had been deadlocked over the “obvious and indispensable” demand that the various unions condemn the violence.

Discussions were not possible so long as the unions “do not want to condemn assassination attempts” against security forces, he said.

Unrest in the former colonial outpost began with a protest over compulsory Covid-19 vaccinations for health workers, but quickly ballooned into a broader revolt over living conditions, and spread to next door Martinique.

Both islands are now under curfew. In the French overseas territories, each of which has close to 400,000 inhabitants, residents complain of greater poverty, higher costs for basic goods and poorer public services than on the mainland.

Lecornu said his talks with four union representatives in Guadeloupe were limited to the receipt of a list of demands.

Maite Hubert-M’Toumo, secretary general of Guadeloupe’s main trade union UGTG, said the requests include a suspension of the vaccine mandate for health professionals, no convictions for protesters over the violence and improvement of living conditions for Guadeloupean families. Lecornu, who laid responsibility for some of the issues at the feet of local elected officials, said he expects to make better headway in Martinique where the “republican prerequisite” for negotiations has already been met. — AFP

WHO urges ‘rational’ response to Omicron variant

BERLIN: Signs were growing on Tuesday that restrictions could very well be the order of the day as the world heads into 2022, with fear of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus growing and more jurisdictions slapping down movement restrictions.

In Germany, which has been wary about a new lockdown, politicians might have found some resolve after the country’s top court ruled that its last round of lockdowns, earlier this year, were legal.

And in Brazil, more than half a dozen cities have either cancelled or declined to plan their traditional New Year’s Eve parties due to the coronavirus pandemic, local media reported late on Monday.

Salvador, Fortaleza, Belo Horizonte and Florianopolis are among the cities, and the possibility of a spike in coronavirus infections and deaths from the new Omicron variant contributed to the decisions, according to news outlet G1.

Australia also announced that it would delay the reopening of its borders to vaccinated skilled workers, international students and other visa holders, which was set for Wednesday, due to the emerging coronavirus Omicron variant.

“The National Security Com-



Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson during his visit to Lordship Lane Primary Care centre in north London to promote the NHS vaccine booster campaign. — AFP

VACCINE COULD GET NOD IN 4 MONTHS: WATCHDOG

BRUSSELS: Vaccines specially adapted for the new Omicron coronavirus variant could be approved in three to four months if they are needed, the head of the EU’s drug regulator said on Tuesday. The decision on whether new shots are required would, however, have to

be made by other bodies, European Medicines Agency Executive Director Emer Cooke said. “Were there a need to change the existing vaccines, we could be in a position to have those approved within three to four months,” Cooke told a European Parliament committee. — AFP

mittee has taken the necessary and temporary decision to pause the next step to safely reopen Australia to international skilled and student cohorts, as well as humanitarian, working holiday maker and provisional family visa holders from December 1 until December 15,” a Monday evening statement by the Canberra government said.

“The reopening to travellers from Japan and the Republic of Korea will also be paused until December 15.” — dpa

French far-right pundit launches presidential bid

PARIS: French far-right pundit Eric Zemmour announced on Tuesday that he will run for president in next year’s election, staking his claim in a video peppered with anti-immigrant rhetoric and warnings France must be saved from decline.

Zemmour, 63, is the most stridently anti-Islam and anti-migrant of the challengers seeking to unseat President Emmanuel Macron in the April 2022 vote.

His formal entry into the race — anticipated for weeks — adds another element on the far-right to the campaign, alongside its traditional leader Marine Le Pen.

But it remains to be seen if he will maintain the momentum of recent weeks.

He said he had joined the race “so that our daughters don’t have to wear headscarves and our sons don’t have to be submissive”.

Zemmour’s formal entry into the race adds another element on the far-right to the campaign, alongside its traditional leader Marine Le Pen

The former TV commentator made his announcement in a YouTube video, which showed him sitting at a desk reading his speech into an old-style microphone, an image reminiscent of General De Gaulle’s famous 1940 call to the French to join the Resistance against Nazi Germany.

Accusing Macron of failing to deliver on his promise of change, Zemmour, who has been nicknamed the “French Trump” said: “It is no longer the time to reform France, but to save it.



French far-right media pundit Eric Zemmour announces his candidacy for the 2022 Presidential election in a video broadcast on social media in Paris. — AFP

“That’s why I have decided to stand in the presidential election.” In the nine-minute YouTube video, he warned that the France “of Joan of Arc and Louis XIV” and “of Notre-Dame and village churches” was disappearing,” he said.

“You feel like foreigners in your

own country,” he told voters in the speech, which was interspersed with images depicting a country beset by violence and social unrest contrasted with a more glorious past.

“Immigration is not the cause of all our problems but it aggravates them all,” he declared.

He added that, if elected, he would banish gender studies from French schools, slash the public debt and win back France’s sovereignty “from European technocrats and judges”.

The son of Algerian Jewish parents who migrated to France, Zemmour aims to outshine National Rally (RN) leader Le Pen in next April’s election to set up a second-round duel against Macron.

Besides Le Pen, he also faces competition on the right from the centre-right Republicans (LR), who will choose this weekend among five candidates running in a party primary.

Zemmour is due to hold his first official campaign meeting on Sunday morning in Paris. Anti-fascism activists and unions had pledged to mark the occasion with a “silence Zemmour” protest.

Zemmour is one of France’s best-known commentators, making his name by warning in best-selling books about the “colonisation” of the country by Muslims, whose religion he views as “incompatible” with French values.

Acid-tongued, intense and with two convictions for hate speech, he wants to send immigrants who “do not assimilate” back to their country of origin and ban French people from giving their children foreign-sounding first names, such as Mohammed.

Opinion polls in September and October briefly showed him as being the best-placed candidate to topple Macron, who has yet to declare his bid for a second term but is widely expected to do so early next year. But Zemmour’s momentum appeared to fizzle in recent weeks. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

JOHANNESBURG

Ex-PM charged with estranged wife’s murder

Lesotho’s former prime minister Thomas Thabane was charged with the brutal murder of his estranged wife Lipolelo. Thabane, 82, is accused of hiring hitmen to kill Lipolelo in June 2017, two days before the prime minister’s inauguration. He appeared in the High Court boardroom in Maseru on Tuesday — not in the courtroom as normal practice would dictate.

Reading out the charges, High Court clerk Tebello Mokhoema said Thabane “did unlawfully



and intentionally cause the death of Lipolelo Thabane” on June 14, 2017. Five co-defendants in the trial include Thabane’s young wife Maesaiah, who was controversially granted bail in June. — AFP

BAKU

Azerbaijan military helicopter crash kills 14

Fourteen people died in an Azerbaijani military helicopter crash which went down in the east of the Caucasus country during a training flight, officials said.

“Fourteen people died and two more were wounded as a result of a state border service helicopter crash,” the ex-Soviet republic’s frontier guard said in a statement. It said all of the victims were military servicemen.

Earlier, the country’s border service and prosecutor general



said in a joint statement that “a military helicopter belonging to Azerbaijan’s state border service crashed today at Garakheybat airfield in the Khyzy region at approximately 10:40 am while conducting a training flight.”

WASHINGTON

Nasa postpones ISS spacewalk due to debris risk

Nasa postponed a spacewalk outside the International Space Station by two of its astronauts after receiving a “debris notification”.

Astronauts Thomas Marshburn and Kayla Barron had been due to head outside the space laboratory later on Tuesday on a six-and-a-half-hour spacewalk to replace a faulty radio communications antenna.

“Nasa received a debris notification for the space station,” the space agency tweeted. “Due



to the lack of opportunity to properly assess the risk it could pose to the astronauts, teams have decided to delay the November 30 spacewalk until more information is available.”

Seven weeks on, what's up with Iraq poll results?

SALAM FARAJ

Iraqi voters went to the polls more than seven weeks ago, but they are still waiting for the final results as tensions simmer in the war-scarred country.

A major rift has opened since the October 10 parliamentary vote within the camp representing Iraq's majority over who should have a say in forming the next government.

While the movement of firebrand cleric and nationalist Moqtada Sadr made gains in the polls, some factions lost support, and their backers have launched protests claiming election fraud. Behind the scenes, powerful players are trying to hammer out what the next government might look like.

But analysts warn that — in a country still recovering from decades of war and chaos, and where most parties have armed wings — political disputes always come with the risk of military escalation.

The incumbent Prime Minister Mustafa al Kadhemi escaped unhurt when an explosive-packed drone hit his Baghdad residence on November 7 in an attack not claimed by any group.

Iraqi election monitors launched the lengthy manual recounts after some parties alleged voter fraud.

Last Saturday, the electoral commission said it had finally wound up the recount of hundreds of ballot boxes.

A judicial committee has 10 days to certify the counts, after which the commission can name the winners within two days, with the result to be ratified in federal court. According to the initial count, the big winner in the 329-seat unicameral assembly, with more than 70 seats, was the movement of Sadr.

The big loser in the camp was the Fatah (Conquest) Alliance, the political arm of the Hashed al Shaabi former paramilitary force, since integrated in the security apparatus. It lost almost two-thirds of its parliamentary bloc to gain some 15 seats, according to the preliminary results. — AFP

A great deal of what Sadr does is tactical pressure, but he would also love to undermine his rivals as much as he can. Now it's a matter of who will back down... So far neither side has given in to pressure. That is why the chance of escalation and clashes is high at this stage

HAMD MALIK
Washington Institute



A BOAT IN TURBULENCE!

A boat capsized due to strong winds in Istanbul on Tuesday. Strong winds continue to blow across Istanbul where the Bosphorus strait is temporarily closed to boat traffic. Four people were killed and dozens injured on Monday in Istanbul, which was hit by high winds. — AFP

We need to guard ourselves...



Samuel Kutty
@samkuttyvp

THE SULTANATE OF OMAN IS ONE AMONG THE FIRST COUNTRIES TO RESPOND. IT SUSPENDED ENTRY TO TRAVELLERS FROM SEVEN AFRICAN COUNTRIES WHICH WERE REPORTED TO HAVE CASES OF THE NEW VARIANT

It's fear and anxiety everywhere. Nearly two years since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic that has claimed more than five million lives around the world, countries are again on a high alert!

Panic has pummelled stock markets and crude oil fell amid uncertainties about what the new bans would do to the global travel industry. And gold started glittering again as frightened investors are seeking refuge in the yellow metal thanks to its safe-haven appeal.

While governments around the world are scrambling to protect their citizens from a potential outbreak of the newly identified coronavirus variant Omicron, its emergence has led to high-level government meetings to chalk out action plans.

As usual, pharmaceutical giants have started working on strain-specific vaccines just in case!

The Sultanate of Oman is one among the first countries to respond to the alarm. It suspended entry to travellers from seven African countries which were reported to have cases of the new variant.

Many of its citizens and residents cut short their trips as it played a spoilsport during the extended weekend holidays!

Just two days after the new variant was detected, the World Health Organization officially proclaimed it as a “variant of

concern”, as it falls in the most serious category and the first since the Delta variant, which emerged a year ago.

Researchers are now on their toes to find out if the new variant will circumvent the immune protection left behind by Covid-19 vaccines, or evade immune-focused treatments. They are also trying to determine whether it is more contagious and it could cause more severe diseases.

No doubt, there is a lot of news to process, and it comes without a lot of baseline knowledge about the virus itself.

A report quoting Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead for Covid-19 said: “Right now there are many studies that are under way... so far there's little information but those studies are under way so we need researchers to have the time to carry those out...”

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, a number of variants have emerged. Yet the underlying apprehension about new variants, whenever they emerged, has been whether they would imperil the efforts against the pandemic spread or whether they would limit the effectiveness of vaccines.

While vaccination is expected to provide a great deal of protection, experts still suggest physical barriers as a shield against any mutant virus. For this, they

again moot the use of masks, good hygiene including hand washing, physical distancing and good ventilation. This means we need to be our own guards!

But how many of us are using masks and maintaining physical distancing? If reports are to be believed, there are still millions of people in the world who have not taken even the first dose of the vaccine!

If the vaccine is not in the reach of many in the Third World and poor nations due to lack of access, it's the intractable and recalcitrant attitude supported by conventional and conservative distrust that deter several others from taking it.

And what the world failed to address is the fact that a fragile health system in one country, as has happened with the current Omicron, can potentially expose the world to a global health catastrophe as is the current situation.

For this, we must address the root cause of health insecurity, that is, the lack of access of the most vulnerable people to essential health services. Ultimately, it's the absence of universal health coverage that is the greatest threat to health security!

The reality is that at least half the world's population lacks access to essential health services!

Can the centre hold any meaning?



JAN-WERNER MUELLER

THE WRITER IS A PROFESSOR OF POLITICS AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, IS A FELLOW AT THE NEW INSTITUTE, HAMBURG

US President Joe Biden's ambitious “Build Back Better” plan has been stalled and pared by two Democratic senators, Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona and Joe Manchin of West Virginia, who are regularly described as “centrists.” Plenty of observers have wondered what this label actually means in 2021. It is not only cynics who suspect that these figures are not so much centrist as self-centred, guided only by the imperative of getting re-elected.

By what criteria are centrists to be judged? That question has become urgent not only in the United States but also in France, where President Emmanuel Macron, having promised to build a new centre in French politics, will seek re-election next spring. As with the two US senators, critics see Macron's centrism as a

smokescreen for a politician who effectively does the bidding of the right, warranting the label “the president of the rich.”

The question, then, is no longer whether the centre can hold; it is whether centrism holds any meaning in today's politics. The term made much sense in the twentieth century, which many understood to be an age of ideological extremes. Being in the centre entailed a commitment to the fight against anti-democratic parties and movements. But even then, self-described centrists were often accused of bad faith. With characteristic irony, Isaiah Berlin, a liberal par excellence, counted himself among “the miserable centrists, the contemptible moderates, the crypto-reactionary skeptical intellectuals.”

Whereas these earlier self-de-

scribed centrists could live off the credit amassed in the fight against fascism and Stalinism, the legacy of self-consciously moderate politics has since worn thin. In many countries today, there is a kind of zombie centrism — a leftover of the Cold War that no longer provides a genuine political orientation to its adherents.

German Christian Democrats recently learned this the hard way. In September's federal election, they failed spectacularly in their effort to claim the centre against a potential coalition between the Social Democrats and the post-communist Left Party. The party's anti-communist campaign, seemingly lifted straight out of the 1950s, obviously did not address twenty-first-century challenges. The notion that Olaf Scholz, the outgoing government's studiously

responsible finance minister (and now chancellor-to-be), would be waving red flags in the Reichstag appeared positively bizarre.

Still, there remain two forms of centrism that are not reducible to zombie Cold War liberalism. One is procedural: In systems with separated powers, such as the US, politicians are compelled to engage in the art of compromise; this is even more true in an age when clear majorities in legislative chambers have become rare.

A similar imperative applies in increasingly fragmented European party systems. The Dutch parliament currently features no less than 17 parties (or even more, depending on how one counts). And, after weeks of negotiations, Germany will soon have a government in which the left-wing Social Democrats and Greens are

in a “traffic-light coalition” with the business-friendly Free Democrats.

Fragmentation — be it institutional or political — forces politicians to adopt what the Dutch philosopher Frank Ankersmit called “principled unprincipledness” for the sake of making democracy work. After all, most people are not keen on compromise for its own sake, because nobody thinks second-best is ever the best.

The exceptions are those who subscribe to the second plausible form of centrism: The positional kind. Seeing equidistance between political poles as proof of their pragmatism and “nonideological” credentials, positional centrists often try to cash in on the premium that still attaches to bipartisanship (especially in the US).

@Project Syndicate 2021



LUCKY IRAQ SPOIL OMAN’S PARTY

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, NOV 30

Iraq’s Hassan Abdulkarim netted the equaliser in the dying minutes to spoil Oman’s almost certain victory chances as the exciting Group A fixture ended in a 1-1 draw in the opening encounter of the 2021 Fifa Arab Cup on Tuesday.

At Al Janoub Stadium, Salah al Yahyaei put ‘Red Warriors’ ahead in the 78th minute from a penalty while Iraq’s Hassan Abdulkarim netted the equaliser in the 96th minute from a penalty after the first penalty which was saved by Oman goalkeeper Ahmed al

Rawahi was declared invalid due to Al Rawahi’s movement before the penalty was taken.

Iraq team played with ten players from the 69th minute after Yasser Qasim received a second yellow card.

The head coach Branko Ivankovic began the match with starting line up featured from Ahmed al Rawahi as goalkeeper. Ahmed al Kaabi, Juma al Habsi, Ahmed al Khamisi, Amjad al Harthi in the defence.

Mohsin Jawher, Jameel al Yahmadi, Harib al Saadi and Salah al Yahyaei were in the midfield and Mohsin al Ghassani (Khalid al Hajri) and Mundher al Alawi

At Al Janoub Stadium, Salah al Yahyaei put ‘Red Warriors’ ahead in the 78th minute from a penalty while Iraq’s Hassan Abdulkarim netted the equaliser in the 96th minute from a penalty after the first penalty which was saved by Oman goalkeeper Ahmed al Rawahi was declared invalid due to Rawahi’s movement before the penalty was taken

were in the forward line.

The first actual attempt from the national team came in the 17th minute as Ahmed al Kabbi crossed a ball to Al Mundhar al Alawi who tried to convert into goal but it was saved by Iraq’s

that hit the crossbar in the 21st minute.

After half an hour, Iraq’s players were still searching for the opening goal and Ahmed Farhan missed a scoring attempt as his shot was saved by Ahmed al Rawahi in the 32nd minute.

Six minutes later, Alaa Abbas was in perfect position inside the box and continued a ball which went beside the crossbar.

In the following half, Coach Brankovic’s battalion showed a better performance and started to create different attacking shots to score the first goal in the match.

In 69th minute, Yasser Qasim received a second yellow card

after his tough interface with Harib al Saadi.

Coach Brankovic’s men took the advantage of Iraq’s missing player and pressed hard to find the net.

The referee Martiniz Said decided a penalty for the national team in the 76th minute after Iraq’s Hassan Raed struggled Amjad al Harthi in the box.

Salah al Yahyaei converted the penalty successfully into a goal in the 78th minute.

In the dying minutes, Hassan Abdulkarim netted the equaliser in the dying minutes to snatch vital one point from the opening fixture in the group matches.

Ideal Technology pip Winner’s Jotun; Safara beat Pitspot

MUSCAT: Ideal Technology beat Winner’s Jotun by 6 wickets in a D Division match of the Oman Cricket League over the weekend.

Put to bat after losing the toss, Winner’s Jotun were bowled out for 119 in their allotted 20 overs. Prajeesh was the highest scorer for Winner’s Jotun with 26 off 20 balls. Jeyakumar Esakkiappan and Arun Kumar Ganeshan picked up two wickets apiece for Ideal Technology.

In reply, Ideal Technology openers started slow and lost their first wicket in the 2nd over. Arun Kumar Ganeshan steadied the innings, scoring 36 off 33 balls. He was ably supported by Sajil Kareem Vellappilly [34]. The team reached the target of 120 in 17 overs for the loss of four wickets.

Joby Abraham Chacko was the pick of the bowlers for Winner’s Jotun, taking two wickets for 22 runs.

BRIEF SCORES – Winner’s Jotun 119/10 in 20 overs (Prajeesh 26 (20) 6x4; Jeyakumar Esakkiappan – 15/2, Arun Kumar Ganeshan – 24/2) lost to Ideal Technology 120/4 in 17 Overs (Arun Kumar Ganeshan 36 (33) 3x4; Joby Abraham Chacko 22/2) by 6 wickets

In another high-scoring D Division match of the Oman Cricket League, Safara International got the better of Pitspot by six wickets.

Asked to bat first after losing the toss, Pitspot scored a respectable 175 for the loss of six wickets

in their allotted 20 overs, with opener Fahad T Hamsa scoring 39 off 23 balls, studded with seven boundaries. Sandesh Pusalkar was the pick of the bowlers for Safara with two wickets for 33 runs.

In reply, Safara International reached the target in the 18th over with loss of 4 wickets, thanks mainly to Yasir Muhammad’s innings of 57 runs off 39 balls with four boundaries. Sandesh Pusalkar also starred with the bat, scoring 49 off 31 balls. Fahad T Hamsa, Aneesh Chaziyottil, Mohammed Nasir, Monty Navani picked up one wicket apiece.

BRIEF SCORES – Pitspot 175/6 in 20 overs (Fahad T Hamsa 39 (23) 7x4; Sandesh Pusalkar 33/2) lost to Safara International 176/4

in 18.4 Overs (Yasir Muhammad 57 (39) 4x4; Fahad T Hamsa 32/1) by 6 wickets

In an E Division Match of the Oman Cricket League, Y Horizon beat Sam Royals by 39 runs, thanks to a brilliant show by Thiru Mothilal. Choosing to bat first, Y Horizon set a challenging target of 203 for the loss of eight wickets in their allotted 20 overs. Thiru Mothilal was the star of the innings, smashing a brilliant 101 in 60 balls, studded with 14 boundaries and 1 six. Nandakumar Nair was the pick of the bowlers for Sam Royals, picking up two for 39.

Sam Royals started steadily but were bowled out for 164 in the 20th over. Nandakumar Nair was the sole major contributor

with the bat, scoring 35 in 27 balls. Amar Pal Singh & Sanjay Makwana took 3 wickets each for Y Horizon.

Brief Scores – Y Horizon 203/8 in 20 overs (Thiru Mothilal 101 (60) 14x4, 1x6; Nandakumar Nair – 39/2) beat Sam Royals 164/10 in 19.2 Overs (Nandakumar Nair 35 (27) 2x4, 1x6; Amar Pal Singh – 14/3, Sanjay Makwana – 27/3) by 39 runs

In a F Division match, Earn Trust CT brushed aside Royal Gulf by 83 runs. Electing to bat after winning the toss, Earn Trust set a target of 162 for the loss of seven wickets in 20 overs. Opener Maanas Kapoor led from the front, scored 32 in 24 balls with five boundaries before he was run out. Paily Neil was the pick of the

bowlers, taking two wickets for 28 in his allotted four overs.

Royal Gulf in reply could score 79 for the loss of eight wickets in 16.5 overs before conceding the match. Openers Gireesh Nair & Vineesh Raj scored 17 runs each. Mustansar Hussain took two wickets for 16 runs, while Maanas Kapoor also shined with the ball, picking two wickets for 16 runs, while Shameer Khwaja picked two wickets, conceding 20 runs.

BRIEF SCORES – Earn Trust CT 167/7 in 20 overs (Maanas Kapoor 32 (24) 5x4; Paily Neil – 28/2) won against Royal Gulf 79/8 in 16.5 Overs (Gireesh Nair 17 (21) 2x4, Vineesh Raj 17 (22), 1x4; Mustansar Hussain – 16/2) by 83 runs



TEAM FRANCE EXTENDS LEAD AT HALFWAY POINT OF SATT 2021

MUSCAT: Strong winds on Day 5 of Sailing Arabia – The Tour 2021 handed the advantage to Team France as the debuting crew extended their lead over the fleet to four points. Averaging 15-20 knots all day, Team France won all three races while the trailing fleet toiled in the conditions. Team DB Schenker remain in second place overall, Team Oman Sail third, Team Oman Investment Authority finished the Sur leg in fourth, Team Barceló Mussanah Resort fifth and Team Nastro Rosa of Italy in sixth.

Away from Team France's dominance, the remaining podium positions during the day were shared throughout the fleet. Oman Sail finished second in the coastal raid with Oman Investment Authority third.

Team Oman Investment Authority finished second in both in-port races but

were later disqualified from the first race due to a collision. Team DB Schenker finished third in the first in-port race and Nastro Rosa equalled their best result of The Tour so far when they finished third in the second race.

Antoine Rucard, skipper of Team France, said, "Today the races were amazing. We began the day with the coastal race, just outside of the harbour. We turned by the traditional fishing boat, and the wind was very strong. We won the race after a good fight with the Oman Sail team. There were two stadium races with even stronger winds but we won them both. The competition is great; all of the Omani teams are really good. It is great to be fighting for the lead with them and pushing us every step of the way."

Musab al Hadi, skipper of Team Oman Sail, said, "Today it was a very long day, a

Away from Team France's dominance, the remaining podium positions during the day were shared throughout the fleet. Oman Sail finished second in the coastal raid with Oman Investment Authority third

big day for every team. We had a different kind of breeze later than earlier. The coastal race was long but close between the teams. We finished second which made the team happy. Then after that we had an in-port race but suffered a collision on the start line so we were sinking, but we were strong and kept focused to finish the race. It was

very dramatic but that is the sport, you have to accept it and move onto the next race. We lodged a protest against the team that damaged our boat and were given a redress to finish the day second overall."

Suliman al Manji, a local boat builder from Sur, said, "We are pleased to be onsite during Sailing Arabia — The Tour and ready to fix the boats. The maintenance team do everything necessary to prepare the boats, repair damage from the races and make sure the teams can continue. Just like today. This is a great place to sail, the teams are very strong and we are very happy to be a part of the crew for Sailing Arabia — The Tour."

Racing now shifts north to Marina Bandar Al Rowdha on Wednesday 1 December and Thursday 2 December for the second half of The Tour where there will be another coastal raid and two in-

port races. Team France will be looking to solidify their position at the top while the rest of the fleet need to gain ground on the leaders before the final leg in Muscat from 3-5 December 2021.

The event is supported by national carrier Oman Air, OQ and the Barceló Mussanah Resort as official partners, and Be'ah as environmental supporter. The National Mineral Water Company Salsabeel Water provided all essential water supplies for the event while the Royal Navy of Oman provided medical support throughout.

Sailing Arabia — The Tour 2021 is run in full adherence to the government of Oman's latest Covid-19 safety protocols. For more information about the event, the schedule, and safety guidelines, visit the official website <https://sailingarabiathetour.com/>.

England eves arrive in Oman for pre-Ashes camp

MUSCAT: Close on the heels of the successful co-hosting of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup, Oman Cricket has announced that the England Women's Cricket Team has arrived in the Sultanate of Oman for a pre-Ashes warm-weather training camp in the Sultanate from November 30 to December 12, 2021. The England team will be touring Australia for the Women's Ashes in January-February 2022, which will include one Test, three T20 Internationals and three One-Day Internationals. The training camp in the Sultanate of Oman is aimed at acclimatising the team with the weather prior to their tour of Australia. All facilities have been made available for the England team. As the Covid situation continues to evolve, Oman Cricket has put in

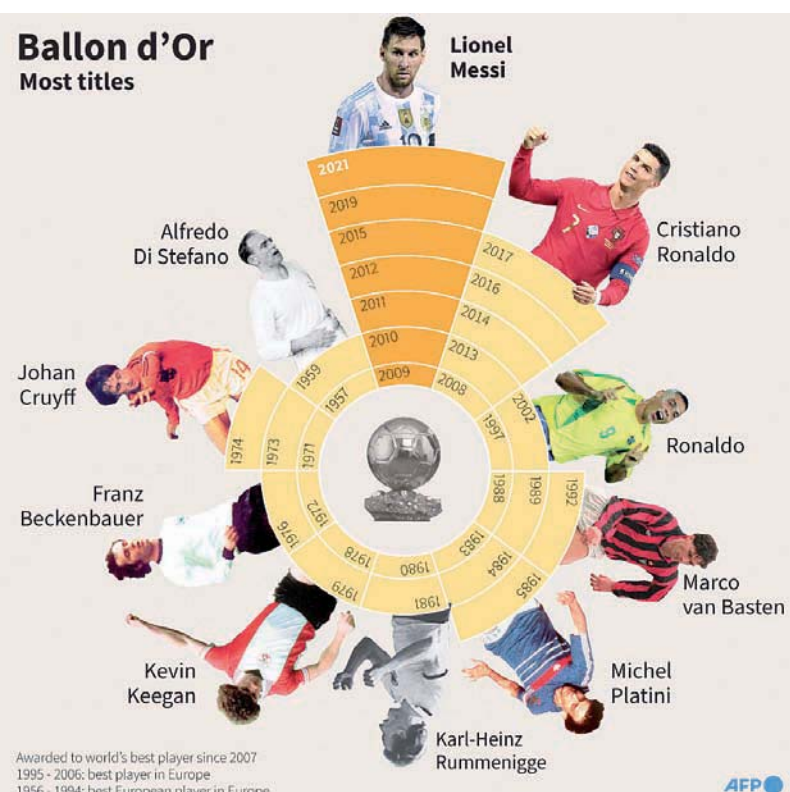
place stringent protocols for the squad's two-week camp in the Sultanate. Duleep Mendis, Chief Development Officer of Oman Cricket, said:

"We welcome the England Women's Cricket team to Oman for their pre-Ashes training camp. We will provide all necessary support as part of their preparations for the tour to Australia, besides given them a chance to experience Oman's culture and hospitality. We hope that they experience our emerging passion for cricket and our efforts on making Oman the next big cricketing hub for every country. Hosting the England Women's Team helps Oman Cricket to take a step further in developing women's cricket form the grassroots level in Oman as well as the global."



Messi's enduring brilliance rewarded with another Ballon d'Or

Ballon d'Or Most titles



PARIS: Some might question whether Lionel Messi really deserved to win his latest Ballon d'Or prize ahead of other worthy candidates, but the Argentinian has been rewarded for continuing to be so good for so long.

The most turbulent year of Messi's glittering career, in which he was forced to tearfully bid farewell to Barcelona, ends with him — at the age of 34 — claiming a record-extending seventh Ballon d'Or for the best player in the world.

In Germany they thought it had to be Robert Lewandowski's year after he missed out 12 months ago when the 2020 edition was scrapped due to the pandemic.

Karim Benzema might have had plenty of support in Spain for his remarkable performances with Real Madrid and Jorginho could stake a claim following a year in which he won the Champions League with Chelsea as well as Euro 2020 with Italy. Yet it is the enduring brilliance of Messi — who won the last award in 2019 — which stays in the minds of the jurors when it comes to voting.

Having joined Paris Saint-Germain in August, he is the first male player to win the award while with a French club since Jean-Pierre Papin of Marseille in 1991, although it was his achievements with Barcelona and with Argentina that counted towards him effectively retaining his crown.

Messi tried unsuccessfully to force his departure from Barcelona in August 2020 but he showed no signs of rancour as he stayed put at the Camp Nou and ended last season with 38 goals in 48 games for his boyhood club.

International success at last

These are the kind of remarkable figures that he has made so mundane over the course of his career — indeed he had actually scored more goals than that in 10 of his previous 11 seasons.

Messi was the top scorer in La Liga for the fifth consecutive year with 30 goals and won the Copa del Rey, scoring twice in the final as

Barcelona beat Athletic Bilbao 4-0.

This will always be remembered as the year his long association with the Catalan giants came to an end, after 672 goals in 778 appearances, a record goal tally for one club.

However, 2021 was also the year he finally won a major international title, captaining Argentina to victory in the Copa America with a 1-0 win against Brazil in the final at the Maracana.

He scored four goals in the tournament as Argentina won the South American championship for the first time since 1993.

"I think I won this trophy thanks to what we did at the Copa America so I dedicate this to my teammates", he said after being handed his latest Ballon d'Or at the Chatelet Theatre in central Paris. Unfinished business

However the shame was that hardly any fans were in the stadium to witness Argentina's Copa America success due to coronavirus restrictions, only adding to the sense that, despite all he has achieved, Messi still has unfinished business.

Not least at PSG, where he has so far played just 11 games since arriving in August, and scored just four goals.

Messi did provide three assists for the Parisians in a Ligue 1 match on Sunday but it remains to be seen how motivated the Argentinian is by the French league. He has other priorities.

"My dream is to win another Champions League", he said at his unveiling in August, with the last of his four European Cups coming in 2015.

Then there is the really big one: the World Cup in Qatar will be under way this time next year and Messi will be 35 by then.

That will surely be his last chance to win the greatest trophy of all, and you imagine he would swap his seven Ballons d'Or to get his hands on it. — AFP



business

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making life easy

Oman targets 15 – 20 year energy transition window

ROBUST COMMITMENT:
Sultanate pledges resolve in embracing green hydrogen as part of decarbonisation strategy

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

The Sultanate of Oman has a roughly 15 – 20-year window to achieve a transition to a greener energy alternative, like hydrogen, before anticipated shortfalls in natural gas supply begin posing a challenge for gas-dependent local industries, a top Omani government official stressed here on Tuesday.

Eng Salim bin Nasser al Aufi, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals, also emphasised that a transition from traditional fossil fuels, which have long bankrolled the domestic economy, to green hydrogen is a climate change imperative for the country, as well as the wider world.

Affirming his strong personal, as well as the Omani government's,

“Thus, in addition to the likelihood of a shortfall in gas supplies that may impact existing industries sometime in the near future, prospects for new energy-dependent industrial investments will also remain dim going forward. So we have no option but to start thinking of what the next best energy alternative is, which is hydrogen

ENG SALIM BIN NASSER AL AUFU
*Under-Secretary,
Ministry of Energy and Minerals*

commitment to embracing green hydrogen as the sustainable energy alternative to fossil fuels, Al Aufi said: “I’m a very strong believer



of hydrogen; those who know me know how much passion I have for the subject.

Some may see me to be overly optimistic and too passionate. I have a lot of passion for Green Hydrogen, but I believe Blue Hydrogen could be a transition to get us to Green Hydrogen. Still, Green Hydrogen is the future of energy as we know it.”

Delivering the keynote address at the opening of the

be running out of the appetite to continue consuming these beautiful molecules that got us to where we are today. And I strongly believe this is going to be the case, whether in 10, 15 or 20 years – it’s anybody guess — but what is important is that we are on a transition journey. The genie is out of the bottle and he is not going back!”

Thus, in addition to the likelihood of a shortfall in gas supplies that may impact existing industries sometime in the near future, prospects for new energy-dependent industrial investments will also remain dim going forward, Al Aufi said. “So we have no option but to start thinking of what the next best energy alternative is, which is hydrogen,” he stated.

In support of this national objective, the Ministry is working hard with partners from different parts of the world — governments, public and private sector organisations and other stakeholders — to explore collaboration in a number of key areas, such as certification of hydrogen fuels, technology

transfer, capability building and In-Country Value (ICV) development, he said.

The Ministry, for its part, is also focused on its own set of deliverables. Besides formulating rules and regulations to support a future green hydrogen industry, the Ministry is also working with fellow government departments in ensuring that potential investors get suitable land and other incentives to help them get started with the green ventures.

Also driving the country’s decarbonisation agenda is the Sultanate of Oman’s commitment to decarbonisation in line with its Paris Accord obligations, he said.

“We all have an obligation to contribute to make the environment better, safer and healthier for future generations. I want my grandkids to grow in an environment that is liveable and not one that is toxic that we created because of our hunger for unclean energy. It got us to where we are today, and we should be thankful for that, and what we need to start doing seriously is to transition out of it to something more clean and sustainable,” he added.

Oil falls 3%
on jitters over
vaccine efficacy



LONDON: Oil prices tumbled nearly 3 per cent on Tuesday after Moderna’s CEO cast doubt on the efficacy of Covid-19 vaccines against the Omicron coronavirus variant, spooking financial markets and adding to worries about oil demand. The head of Moderna said Covid-19 vaccines are unlikely to be as effective against the Omicron variant of the coronavirus as they have been against the Delta variant. Brent crude futures fell \$2.15, or 2.9 per cent, to \$71.48 a barrel at 11:23 GMT after slipping to an intraday low of \$70.52, the lowest since September 1. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude futures fell \$1.83, or 2.6 per cent, to \$68.32 a barrel, off a session low of \$67.06, the weakest since August 26. Fed Chairman Jerome Powell will also tell US lawmakers later in the day the variant could imperil economic recovery, prepared remarks show. — **Reuters**

Oman sees potential to attract hydrogen investments worth \$34 billion by 2040

CONRAD PRABHU
[@conradprabhu](#)

A future national economy powered by hydrogen as a sustainable energy resource envisions new investment inflows into the Sultanate of Oman estimated in the range of \$34 billion in green projects by 2040, a high-level official at the heart of the strategy announced here on Tuesday.

Dr Abdullah al Abri, Head of EnergyRenewal—therenewable and alternative energy unit of Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), said the new hydrogen economy also has the potential to create between 34,000 and 147,000 new “green jobs”, as well as position the country among the region’s Top-3 producers of clean hydrogen.

Additionally, these green investments will contribute to either reducing or offsetting up to 40.5 million metric tonnes of CO2 per annum.

The salient benefits associated with the Sultanate of Oman’s future hydrogen-centric economy were outlined by Dr Al Abri during the opening session of the Green Hydrogen Summit



Oman (GHSO), which formally kicked off at Oman Convention & Exhibition Centre (OCEC) on Tuesday.

The 3-day forum has been organised by Muscat-based Birba Energy Services under the auspices of the Ministry of Energy and Minerals.

Oman Daily Observer is the Official Newspaper of the maiden edition of the annual conference.

In his presentation, Dr Al Abri said Energy Renewal was tasked by the Ministry to study the feasibility of a National Hydrogen Economy—a roughly 18-months-long exercise that has since been handed over to the National Hydrogen Alliance (HyFly) established earlier this year.

“The objective of the work we did, which forms the basis of the National Hydrogen

Economy Strategy, focused on, among other things, the business opportunities available in the hydrogen space, whether the hydrogen is in its gas or liquid form, and if any hydrogen derivatives, such as ammonia, methanol, dimethyl ether (DME), or the products, are feasible,” the official said.

The study also covered issues at the upstream end (focusing on hydrogen production),

midstream (transportation and storage of the fuel), markets and utilisation opportunities, and other aspects of the supply chain, he stated.

Attesting to the strong appetite for hydrogen as a future energy source, a project funnel that was empty a few years ago is now “filling up and maturing nicely” with projects, said Dr Al Abri.

It includes ventures being spearheaded by OQ, the country’s global integrated energy group, and India’s ACME Group, among others.

Other value-add initiatives linked to the hydrogen economy include opportunities to blend hydrogen with natural gas for power and enhanced oil recovery operations, the use of hydrogen as feedstock for industry and fuel for transportation, the production of new and enhanced chemicals from hydrogen, and for export.

Based on the demand outlook, the hydrogen economy targets 1 gigawatt (GW) of renewable energy capacity by 2025, rising to 10 GW by 2030 with a ramp-up to 30 GW anticipated by 2040, he added.

Bank Muscat wins Best Private Bank in Oman Award

MUSCAT: Bank Muscat has once again won the prestigious ‘Best Private Bank in Oman’ award from Professional Wealth Management and The Banker in 2021. This year’s award is a tribute to the exceptional depth and breadth of the bank’s wealth-management solutions and investment options covering all types of asset classes across the globe.

Speaking on the occasion, Abdulnasir al Raisi, Deputy General Manager — Premier Banking, Bank Muscat, said: “Bank Muscat Private would like to thank Professional Wealth Management and The Banker for consistently recognising the bank as the Best Private Bank in Oman.

The bank has carved a name

for itself over the last two decades with its high-end lifestyle benefits, private banking facilities and global investment options, which are unmatched in the Sultanate of Oman.

This prestigious award reflects the consistency of performance, innovative strategies and the highest standards of professionalism achieved by the bank.”

Bank Muscat offers Private banking clients a complete suite of investment options in global asset classes through its wealth management platform and tie-ups with international counter parties.

Its robust execution platform is backed by a team of experienced and dedicated Relationship Managers (RMs) and a strong products



This prestigious award reflects the consistency of performance, innovative strategies and the highest standards of professionalism achieved by the bank

ABDULNASIR AL RAISI
DGM– Premier Banking

team, which provide options to customers based on their individual preferences and market conditions. The range of solutions offered to its clients includes stocks, bonds, ETFs and mutual funds across global markets.

Bank Muscat Private Banking also offers selective exposure to Private Equity Funds, Real Estate Funds and Commodity ETFs; Offshore Banking and Portfolio Management through globally reputed counterparties.

Private Banking clients also receive regular research reports and briefings covering investment ideas, global macroeconomic outlook and updates on key economic and geographic events impacting performance of various

asset classes.

An exclusive Private banking VISA Infinite credit card, a VISA Platinum debit card, luxury car finance and yacht finance are available for Private banking clients along with competitive rates for deposits, loans and foreign exchange.

Private banking clients enjoy 1% cashback rewards on all transactions made through Private Visa Infinite credit card. The Infinite credit card also facilitates unlimited access to 1,000+ airport lounges globally, complimentary chauffeur service to and from Muscat International Airport, special offers at over 900 luxury hotels around the world, multi-trip travel insurance and access to a

Global Concierge Service.

Private Banking customers are also automatically entered in all the prize draws of Al Mazyona, which has a total prize money of RO 11 million. Other services available include conventional accounts, term deposits, currency exchange, domestic and international transfers, online banking and regular asset monitoring.

Bank Muscat remains committed to further expanding its innovative services for Private banking clients and providing an exclusive and unmatched banking experience. It must be noted that Bank Muscat’s Private Banking has won 3 prestigious awards in 2021 in recognition of its elite Private banking services and products.

Awasr appoints new Chief Executive Officer



MUSCAT: Awasr has announced through its board of directors the appointment of the new Chief Executive Officer Eng Adnan bin Mohammed bin Ali al Alawi. This appointment comes in line with the new strategic direction through which the company seeks to continue achieving more progress and success in the telecommunications and ICT sector.

Eng Al Alawi has more than 20 years of diverse experience in building, strengthening, and leading strategic initiatives, business growth, operational, marketing, communications, and profitability management for various organisations within the Telecommunication, Real Estate, Food Manufacturing and IT sectors.

He has attended the National CEO Programme in its first edition and was an integral part of the team that launched the first MVNO operator in the region (Friendi mobile) where he served as the Chief Operating Officer. He was also part of the team that launched the Omani Qatari Telecommunications Company in the Sultanate of Oman.

Dr Hamed bin Salim al Rawahi the Chairman of the Board of Awasr has expressed his confidence about a promising stage of more achievement in which Awasr works to develop multiple telecom and ICT solutions in the Sultanate of Oman and effectively contribute to achieving the goals of Oman Vision 2040 through empowering high qualified Omanis.

He said, “Since establishment, Awasr has been determined to allocating qualified Omani within the senior levels in the company, and we are pleased to welcome Eng Adnan al Alawi as CEO of Awasr as we count on his experience in achieving the company’s aspirations and continuous progress”.

NBO and OIH sign agreement to offer discounts on treatments

MUSCAT: Delivering services that go beyond banking, National Bank of Oman (NBO) has signed an agreement with Oman International Hospital (OIH) whereby all NBO cardholders, including credit, debit, Badeel prepaid and Muzn Islamic Banking, can access a range of discounted treatment packages, plus an additional 5% off on regular promotions at the multi-speciality hospital located in Al Ghubra, Muscat.

Under the agreement, customers can also take advantage of the Easy Payment Plan (EPP), which allows them to pay off their total bills in six and twelve-month instalments when they use their credit card, at 0% interest.

It’s the latest in a number of unique benefits and rewards that NBO cardholders can tap into, simply by using their cards.

Tariq Atiq, Chief Retail and Digital Banking Officer at NBO, said, “We believe that banking should extend beyond mere transactions and add genuine value to people’s lives, and our cards are great example of this.

With a growing number of tie-ups with well-liked brands, we continue to tune into our customers’ spending preferences and lifestyles, while offering a whole host of benefits that make the experience even more



worthwhile.”

Marcelo Pereira, Chief Executive Officer at OIH added, “At OIH we offer the highest international quality standards, combining the skills of renowned local and international medical teams to provide excellent healthcare services.

We are delighted to partner with the National Bank of Oman in line with our objective to increase healthcare accessibility and encourage people to take care of their well-being.”

Oman International Hospital presents a concept that integrates culture with science, safety with comfort, and aesthetics with functionality.

This holistic approach will be felt not only on the spatiality but on how each and every client is assessed according to their

individuality.

With world-class doctors, advanced medical equipment and 5-star hotel-class hospitality, patients are offered a solution for all of their health needs.

As one of the leading banks in the Sultanate, NBO’s suite of credit, debit and prepaid cards offer cashless convenience, tailor-made to meet the needs of its customers locally and internationally.

Providing excellent spending power and a faster and more secure alternative to cash, cardholders can enjoy movie tickets, dining and hotel discounts, free travel insurance, airport lounge access, as well as exciting promotions throughout the year. Moreover, customers will earn Nuqati points on each rial spent using their credit card.

ahlibank launches ahli Global Equity Fund

MUSCAT: ahlibank SAOG is pleased to announce the launch of ahli Global Equity Fund, the first fund of its kind in the Sultanate of Oman to be regulated by the Capital Market Authority.



The Fund provides an attractive platform for clients to invest in global markets; it will be an actively managed Fund which offers diversification opportunities across geographies and sectors.

ahli Global Equity Fund has been launched to cater to investors seeking long-term capital appreciation by investing in a diversified portfolio of high quality businesses that offer GARP (Growth-at-a-reasonable-price). GARP is an equity investment strategy that seeks to combine both ‘growth investing’ and ‘value investing’ to select individual stocks.

With superior risk-adjusted returns, competitive service fees, and a proven investment process that is driven by bottom-up stock selection, the Fund is tailored for wide appeal and is suitable for individuals, as well as corporate and government entities.

The Fund is managed by an experienced investment management team with extensive experience in the market. It will be denominated in Omani rial, with a minimum investment requirement of 1,000 units. As an incentive to new investors, ahlibank Asset Management will waive off all subscription and redemption fees for a limited period of three months.

Explaining the potential of the Equity Fund to investors, Ghadeer al Lawati, Acting Head of Investment Banking at ahlibank said, “Over the past 10 years, the MSCI World Index (a broad global equity index that represents large and mid-cap equity performance across 23 Developed Markets countries) has generated an annualised return of 13.5%. This reflects the world of opportunities awaiting investors, and strongly underscores the significance of exposure to high quality companies to generate strong risk-adjusted returns, as well as avail benefits of diversification.”

Drive the thrill in a RAV4 with exclusive benefits



MUSCAT: Toyota fans in the Sultanate of Oman have much to cheer about with the popular RAV4 now available with exclusive benefits.

Customers interested in owning the RAV4, can look forward to exclusive service 2

years/20,000 kms (Whichever is earlier). (Prospective buyers may be advised that the benefits vary between model variants, model year and manufacturing year. Terms & Conditions apply.)

The campaign is valid up to December 30, 2021. Visit the

showroom for exact details. Complementing the RAV4’s daring looks is a thrilling drive personality imbued by two powertrain options.

A 2.5-litre four-cylinder engine which produces 204 hp and 24.8 kg.m. of torque, mated to a an eight-speed automatic transmission (8AT), resulting in a quicker and smoother acceleration. On the other hand, a hybrid system combines two power sources consisting of a petrol engine and electric motor producing a combined power of 219 hp.

It is also paired to a Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT) that provides the lowest fuel consumption value of 22.2km/L (fuel economy may vary due to driving conditions),

while delivering a new level of driving pleasure.

One of the two major additions to the RAV4 is the hybrid electric model, which combines two power sources consisting of a petrol engine and electric motor. The class-leading model, which offers the lowest fuel consumption value of 22.2km/L (As per GSO Certification. Fuel economy may vary due to driving conditions).

The second addition to the RAV4 is the Adventure model, which was established as a symbolic model to appeal to active users through enhanced Waku Doki — the equivalent of “heart-pumping excitement” in Japanese — and a more powerful image.

It is distinguished by a more aggressive bumper, grille design and fog light surrounds, and

exclusive 19-inch, split five-spoke wheels with matte-black accents.

The RAV4’s distinct personality is completed by its expansive and comfortable cabin, which displays exceptional quality and finish throughout. The instrument panel’s horizontal layout has a slimmer profile and a lower position than before to enhance forward visibility.

Pictures and colours shown may differ from actual specifications. For the latest press releases, test drive requests and more, please visit www.toyotaoman.com, www.youtube.com/toyotaoman or www.facebook.com/toyotaoman, www.instagram.com/toyotaomanofficial/. For any further details & to ascertain availability of stocks, please visit your nearest Toyota Showroom.



ASYAD GROUP PAVES WAY FOR GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE LOGISTICS SECTOR IN OMAN

DRIVING GROWTH: A RO 1.5 billion enterprise, Asyad Group was ranked the fourth biggest logistics company in the MENA region

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, NOV 30

The logistics sector has been part of the Omani government's vision since the dawn of the Renaissance. As an enabler of growth, it has played a key role in diversifying the economy by placing the Sultanate of Oman on the global logistics map and attracting Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) and mega-projects with competitive incentives and benefits.

Leading these efforts is Asyad Group, which has been paving the way for the Sultanate of Oman's logistics drive since 2016. By implementing best practices and adopting the latest technologies and solutions, it has been able to transform the sector and increase its contribution to the national GDP to 4 per cent in 2020.

An RO 1.5 billion enterprise, the global integrated logistics service provider was ranked the fourth biggest logistics company in the Middle East and North

Africa (MENA) by *Forbes* Middle East magazine for the year 2021. It operates three deep ports, two free zones and an economic zone in addition to providing full maritime services with one of the largest drydocks in the Middle East.

Furthermore, it owns a diversified fleet of 60 vessels, supported by a sea transport network that connects the Sultanate of Oman to 86 commercial ports in 40 countries worldwide through an average of 200 direct lines weekly. Omani ports have proved their resilience against a challenging economic backdrop as they continued to sustainably meet the country's food and medical needs.

Port operations and efficiencies remained at an all-time high while new strategic partnerships were forged with a growing list of global shipping lines.

Today, Sohar Port, Port of Salalah and Port of Duqm have become gateways into Oman and important destinations on global trade routes that connect the country to Asian, European and African markets. Oman's medium ports (Suwaiq, Shinas, Khasab and Port Sultan Qaboos) have also played a crucial role in providing local produce with access to markets in the region. Overall, Omani ports' commercial operations and volumes of direct



import recorded a 5 per cent increase over the first nine months of 2021 (Q1 to Q3).

The number of containers handled reached 3.9 million TEUs, a 3 per cent rise compared to the same period in 2020 while general cargo was 7 per cent more with 41.2 million tonnes. The volume of liquid commodity handling also saw a steady increase of 8 per cent compared to 2020, reaching 15 million tonnes.

Likewise, the free zones in Sohar, Salalah and Khazaen Economic City have been instrumental in bolstering the sector's socio-economic contributions by fostering a nurturing environment for Omani SMEs and FDIs to grow and prosper. Offering fully integrated

logistics solutions supplemented with attractive incentives and benefits, Oman's Free zones are well-equipped to serve the needs of local, regional and international companies today and in the future.

Currently, Sohar and Salalah free zones are home to RO 2 billion worth of operating projects, with another RO 450 million worth of projects under construction.

Asyad Shipping and Asyad Drydock have also recorded solid performance, further highlighting the successful integration of the Group's service offering to achieve global competitiveness. The Group today owns a growing fleet of more than 60 state-of-the-art vessels with a total capacity of 9 million tonnes, offering dynamic shipping solutions

to its customers.

A result of its strategic vision, Asyad's container shipping line saw a 19 per cent growth in commercial activities over the first nine months of 2021, shipping 261,686 containers, and connecting the Sultanate of Oman to markets in the GCC, Indian sub-continent and East Asia.

Aiming to better serve the local and regional markets, Asyad Group also purchased 9,600 new containers of which 100 are refrigerated, a sound decision which successfully allowed for the import of food and medical products directly from producing countries.

Today, the Oman Container Line is amongst the Alphaliner's top 100 largest container and liner operators in the world based on capacity. Building a strong reputation in the market, Asyad Drydock serves customers from 35 countries around the world. The Group's services recorded a remarkable year with a 35 per cent increase in ship repair during the first nine months of 2021.

Total projects procured were 143 in comparison to 106 for the same period in 2020. With its eye on the future, Asyad has been continuously building on its dry-dock capacities and capabilities. Today it provides ship building

solutions in addition to maintenance and general vessel repair services, further positioning the Group and the Sultanate of Oman as a one-stop-integrated-logistics-shop.

Serving the increasing demand for e-commerce in the GCC, Asian and African markets, the Group's renowned Asyad Express service is turning all eyes to the Sultanate of Oman as it offers customers in 220 destinations a suite of fulfilment and last-mile solutions that capitalise on its integrated operational structure.

The centre provides a full packaging and wrapping solution, cold and temperature-controlled storage facilities for both imports and exports, helping individual customers and sellers alike locally and internationally.

Catering to the needs of corporates, the center also offers efficient, reliable and fast mail services to over 230 clients worldwide.

A testament of its efforts to drive the growth of the sector, Asyad Group was named Integrated Logistics Service Company of the Year during the 2021 Logistics & Transport Awards. The award recognised the Group's unwavering commitment and dedication during the year to position the Sultanate of Oman as a global logistics hub.

(With inputs from ONA)

Taageer Finance Announces Successful Issuance of OMR Unsecured Non-Convertible Subordinated Bonds – Issue Subscribed by 132%

The bond issue, received significant interest from the local investor community. The issue was successfully closed with an oversubscription of 32% reflecting strong investors' confidence for the Company's fundraising activities. The bond, which has a 2-year tenor, is listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange and the funds raised will be used to support the business activities for the Company.

Mr. Shahin Al Balushi, CEO of Taageer Finance commented, "This recent issuance marks a successful milestone for Taageer Finance. Furthermore, it is in line with the Board's vision, focusing on the need for diversification of funding avenues and for the Company to expand and enhance their position and capabilities to finance small and medium businesses in the Sultanate. I would like to extend, on behalf of the management of Taageer Finance, a warm welcome to all the investors who have placed their trust on the growth story of Taageer and appreciate the efforts of the Issue Managers Ahli Bank and Bank Dhofar for the successful closure of the issue."

Highlighting the importance of this issuance, Ms. Ghadeer Al Lawati, Acting Head of Investment Banking at Ahli Bank, said, "This is a huge step for Ahli Bank's Investment Banking division and we are proud to announce our first debt capital market issuance with the bond for Taageer Finance. We are

proud of the positive reaction of the issue that has generated widespread interest from investors".

Speaking on the occasion, Mohsin Shaik Bin Sehu Mohamed, Head of Investment Banking & Capital Markets at, Bank Dhofar, said: "The successful issuance of this bond is a strong indicator of the Company's positive outlook and the confidence of the investor community in Oman and in Taageer Finance. We are greatly encouraged by the response and reflects the confidence in the issuer's credit profile and strategy, and thank the investors for the success of this issue."

Ahli Bank and Bank Dhofar were the joint lead managers for this bond issue. The order book subscribed over 132% of the issue size and saw excellent participation from high-quality investors, following a series of investor meetings.

Taageer Finance has a rich and proud history of operating in the Finance and Leasing business in the Sultanate. Taageer was established in the year 2002 and converted to a public joint stock company, with its shares listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange since 2005. Today, the Company operates a nationwide network of 5 branches besides its Head Office located in Al Khuwair, Muscat with a focused approach to support the business growth of Small & Medium Enterprises and provide utmost customer satisfaction at all times.

The oversubscription of the Bond issue is a testimony to the high level of confidence placed by investors on Omani economy and local finance and leasing sector, as well as the financial performance of Taageer Finance.

ICT talent will accelerate Oman's future digital economy

Across the Middle East, ICT technologies have ushered historical transformation and enabled Arab leaders to diversify and strengthen economies. Next-generation technologies like 5G, cloud computing, IoT and big data have significantly contributed to the development of the Oman's post-oil, digitally-driven economy and greatly enriched our society.

The Intelligent World 2030 report predicts that by 2030, there will be more than 200 billion global connections, and every enterprise, household and individual on this planet will have 10-gigabit connectivity.

In line with Oman's Vision 2040, digital transformation is taking place across the Sultanate of Oman at an accelerated pace.

According to GlobalData, ICT spending in Oman is poised to touch \$5.6 bn in 2024, growing from \$3.2 bn in 2019.

This growth is expected to be primarily driven by e-governance services, e-commerce and adoption of advanced technologies like cloud computing, 5G, IoT, artificial intelligence, etc.

Fuelling this tremendous growth of Oman's digital economy is its local ICT talent ecosystem. There's undeniably a growing talent gap globally.

According to Korn Ferry,



Developing a robust pipeline of local ICT talent and building the ICT talent ecosystem in Oman is vital for securing its future digital economy

ROBIN CHEN

CEO, Huawei Tech Investments in Oman

there will be a global shortage of more than 85.2 million skilled people by 2030, causing a financial impact worth \$8.452 trillion.

Therefore, developing a robust pipeline of local ICT talent and building the ICT talent ecosystem in Oman is vital for securing its future digital economy. At Huawei, we believe in a collaborative approach to ICT ecosystem development.

We feel that promoting the development of local talent is best done in cooperation between the public and private sectors. In the past two decades, we've helped the Middle East cultivate more

than 100,000 ICT talents, out of which more than 10,000 talents were based in Oman.

In the Sultanate of Oman, we have worked with a vast number of educational authorities, universities, other educational institutions, and partners to set talent standards, build alliances, and demonstrate the value of talent. Some of our partners include the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Salalah College of Technology and Shinas College of Technology.

Additionally, we run many global and regional initiatives that help nurture future ICT leaders, including the Seeds For the Future program, Huawei ICT Academy and Huawei ICT Competition.

Currently, the 5th edition of Huawei ICT Competition is underway and we've witnessed a strong response from Omani students, with around 650 applications this year.

To date, over 4,000 students in Oman have participated in the Huawei ICT Competition since 2017. We truly believe these young minds have the power, resilience and imagination to unlock a world full of incredible possibilities for Oman's digital economy.

Their imagination is the only limit on how far humanity can go, but it is the actions we take now that will determine how quickly we can get there. The best way to embrace the future is to build it ourselves.

Telecom Italia will keep bankers busy in 2022

Telecom Italia could be the meal ticket that keeps European deal advisers well-fed in 2022. The struggling telecom group on Friday said it had set up a board committee to study a non-binding offer from buyout group KKR.

As with Telecom Italia's leveraged buyout in 1999, it's a potential bonanza for bankers, lawyers and consultants.

KKR's bid, worth 33 billion euros including debt, would be Europe's largest private equity buyout ever, according to Refinitiv, bringing hefty fees for merger advice and financing. But other bidders may get involved, and existing Telecom Italia shareholders including Vivendi and the Italian state will have a say.

A takeover could also be the first step towards a breakup of the company.

At present, none of the players have officially retained advisers. KKR is working with US lenders Citi, Morgan Stanley and JPMorgan, sources said.

Rival banks are circling Telecom Italia, which lost its fourth boss in six years on Friday after Chief Executive Luigi Gubitosi resigned.

The telco may retain the services of Goldman Sachs and Bank of America. But Rothschild, Lazard and Italian lender UniCredit are also scrambling to get a mandate.

Vivendi, Telecom Italia's largest shareholder, is on a war footing as KKR's offer of 0.505 euros a share is barely half the average price Vincent Bolloré's company paid for its 24 per cent stake.

The French tycoon is likely to rely on Italy's famed Chiomenti law firm but has not yet selected a banking adviser, although Mediobanca may be willing to play a role.

Meanwhile, state-controlled Cassa di Risparmio di Venezia, which owns 10 per cent of Telecom Italia, could opt for Credit Suisse.

The saga has already attracted the interest of rival private equity group CVC, which has Nomura adviser and ex-Telecom Italia boss Marco Patuano on its side. Meanwhile, the Italian government of prime minister and former Goldman Sachs banker Mario Draghi is arguably the most important player, given Rome's ability to veto a deal.

Bankers are already enjoying what looks set to be the biggest year for deals ever. As of November 18, M&A activity in western Europe had reached \$1.1 trillion, up 46 per cent on the previous year, according to Refinitiv.

Private equity-backed M&A jumped 141 per cent to \$262 billion in the same period. Telecom Italia looks set to keep investment bankers employed next year, too. — Reuters

At present, none of the players have officially retained advisers. KKR is working with US lenders Citi, Morgan Stanley and JPMorgan



DIRTY FUEL

A labourer works in a coal yard at Singrauli in India's Madhya Pradesh state. Thick grey dust hangs in the air and vast chasms are gouged into the land in the Indian coal hub of Singrauli, where giant machines scoop up dirty fuel to power the country's growth while worsening its pollution blight. — AFP

Agreeing to cryptocurrency rules



ANDY JALIL
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CRYPTO-ASSETS ARE EVOLVING FAST, ENABLING INNOVATION AND HOME-GROWN FIRMS TO ENTER THE MARKET, BUT (THEY ARE) ALSO ATTRACTING RETAIL INVESTORS.

The European Commission is calling on member states to come to an agreement on draft crypto-asset regulation, according to one of its most senior officials.

Commissioner for financial stability, financial services and capital markets union, Mairead McGuinness, said member states are "making progress in their negotiations on the draft regulation." McGuinness added: "We're urging them to keep up the tempo so we can get agreement on these new rules."

Her speech at the European Central Bank's fourth forum on Banking Supervision comes as regulators around the world mull over how to supervise cryptocurrencies and digital assets at a time when interest in them has boomed.

She said: "Crypto-assets are evolving fast, enabling innovation and home-grown firms to enter the market, but (they are) also attracting retail investors."

She added: "Our framework for markets and crypto-assets will introduce a bespoke regime for previously unregulated crypto-assets including stablecoins, and I think this will provide clarity, it will help to boost innovation and, at the same time, solid rules for insurers and service providers will prevent abuse, fraud and theft, protecting investors and safe-guarding market stability."

Stablecoins are used mainly by investors to buy and sell crypto assets on exchanges

such as Coinbase, which process trades 24 hours a day. They are also used as collateral for derivatives – contracts to buy or sell an underlying security at a specified price.

McGuinness said: "Innovation and regulation are not enemies. They should actually be friends. So, if we have smart, forward looking regulation, this can create the conditions where innovation flourishes."

Threats of crackdowns by regulators, including those in the US and China, have seen the price of cryptocurrencies yo-yo over the past few months.

Bitcoin, the largest crypto by market capitalisation, reached record highs of more than \$68,000 on 9 November as investors continue to turn to bitcoin as a hedge against rising inflation, low interest rates, and the potential waning of the equity market bull run.

As central banks around the world continue to debate the merits of introducing their own digital currencies, McGuinness also referenced the European Central Bank's discussions about introducing a digital euro, saying that it was a "big decision and one that we would have to get right if we decided to go ahead." She added: "There are big questions to address." "Like what would the impact be for banks? How do we ensure the privacy is protected? How would we keep this digital system secure?"

In the US, the Biden administration has taken the first significant step to impose

bank-like oversight on the cryptocurrency companies involved in the issuance of stablecoins, outlining a process that could shape the future of that digital money.

Last month a Treasury-led panel recommended that Congress impose a new regulatory framework around stablecoins – digital currencies pegged to national currencies such as the US dollar – and limit the issuance of such digital assets to banks. The legislative request is a tall order given both chambers of Congress are narrowly divided.

In the absence of congressional action, the panel recommended that a broader group of regulators charged with detecting risks to the financial system — the Financial Stability Oversight Council — consider whether to designate certain stablecoin activities systemically important. Such a process could ultimately lead to the Federal Reserve writing more stringent risk-management standards for stablecoin companies.

"The rapid growth of stablecoins increases the urgency of this work. Failure to act risks growth of payment stablecoins without adequate protection for users, the financial system and the broader economy," the regulators said in a report issued last month by the President's Working Group on Financial Markets, which includes the heads of several regulatory agencies.

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

The end of free money



HANS WERNER-SINN

The author is Professor Emeritus of Economics at the University of Munich

Although the US Federal Reserve is now thinking about tapering its monthly asset purchases in light of increasing inflation figures, European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde continues to insist that no sustained inflation risk exists.

The currently measured inflation, she says, is a temporary problem that will disappear once supply bottlenecks are overcome, so the ECB will not be changing its policies.

It is like a coachman who refuses to tighten the reins when his horses are bolting, because they will eventually tire themselves out.

Never mind that, according to the Treaty of Maastricht, the ECB is obliged to ensure price stability

under all circumstances. There is no provision for the possibility of letting prices run hot for a while.

And, unlike the Fed, the ECB cannot legally seek to balance the goal of price stability with other monetary-policy objectives.

The current supply bottlenecks owe much to the quarantine measures in ports — particularly, but not exclusively, in China.

Arriving ships cannot unload their cargo and therefore also cannot be loaded with the intermediate products that Europe's economy must be able to supply to its customers. Freight rates for international maritime transport have increased eightfold since 2019.

But the bottlenecks also reflect the domestically imposed lockdowns in

European economies last winter and spring, which led to shortages even of local timber and other building materials produced in Europe.

Hence, in a fall 2021 Ifo Institute survey, 70 per cent of German manufacturers reported difficulties sourcing upstream products. For comparison, the highest that figure ever reached in 30 previous years of surveys was 20 per cent.

Ifo reckons that supply bottlenecks will cost Germany around €40 billion (\$45 billion) of value added — equivalent to 1.15 per cent of its GDP — in 2021. The supply bottlenecks have obviously been unamenable to the huge stimulus and rescue packages that the European governments implemented during the Covid-19 crisis.

The German federal government, for example, enacted programmes amounting to roughly 10 per cent of German GDP if spread out over two years, and the European Union enacted additional programmes amounting to 4.5 per cent of EU GDP over two years.

These programmes were largely financed by new government debt, which in turn was immediately monetised by the ECB and thus was issued at ultra-low interest rates. Never before has Europe experienced stimulus programmes on such a massive scale.

But given the supply bottlenecks, policymakers were effectively slamming on the gas with the hand brake still on. The result was a particular form of economic

overheating that economists call stagflation. Inflation rates today are very high not only in the US, where they stand at 6.2 per cent, but also in Europe. As of October 2021, prices in the euro zone overall had increased 4.1 per cent year on year; in Germany, the continent's largest economy, prices were up 4.5 per cent.

And as if this wasn't bad enough, the German Federal Statistical Office has just announced that annual industrial producer prices were up 18.4 per cent in October. That is the highest increase since 1951, shortly after the Federal Republic of Germany was founded, exceeding even the peak monthly price increase during the 1970s oil crises (14.6 per cent in June 1974).

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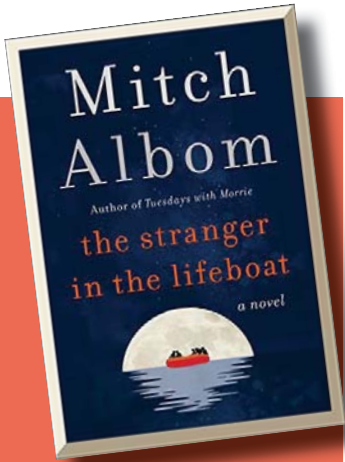
Endangered species found in Oman waters to debut in global tv



Maisa al Hooti and her team in 'Oman in Focus' had been championing putting the spotlight on the Sultanate of Oman's wildlife. Collaborating with international partners, one of their recent projects will finally be featured on global tv. Here's why this initiative is important and check out how you can take part... **P20**

ARCHITECTURE

READ



THE STRANGER IN THE LIFEBOAT
BY MITCH ALBOM

After a ship explodes, 10 people struggling to survive pull a man who claims to be the Lord out of the sea.

'Scrap cathedral' in Spain lives on after originator's death

FOR OVER 60 YEARS, former monk Justo Gallego had been building a cathedral out of scrap materials on the outskirts of Madrid, a project he would never see completed. The 96-year-old died over the weekend, but left the unfinished complex in Mejorada del Campo to a charity run by a priest that has vowed to complete his labour of love. Gallego began the project in 1961 when he was in his mid-30s on land inherited from his family after a bout of tubercu-

losis forced him to leave an order of Trappist monks. Today, the "Cathedral of Justo" features a crypt, two cloisters and 12 towers spread over 4,700 square metres, although the central dome still does not have a cover. He used bricks, wood and other material scavenged from old building sites, as well as through donations that began to arrive once the project became better known. The building's pillars are made from stacked oil drums



while windows have been cob- bled and glued together from shards of coloured glass. "Recycling is fashionable now, but he used it 60 years ago

when nobody talked about it," said Juan Carlos Arroyo, an engineer and architect with engineering firm Calter. The charity that is taking

over the project, "Messengers of Peace", hired the firm to assess the structural sound- ness of the building, which lacks a permit. "The structure has with- stood significant weather events throughout its con- struction," Arroyo said, predict- ing it will only need some "small surgical interventions". Renowned British architect Norman Foster visited the site in 2009 — when he came to Spain to collect a prize — telling Gallego that he should be the one getting the award, Arroyo added. The sturdiness of the project is surprising given that Gallego had no formal training as a builder, and he worked without a blueprint. In interviews, he repeatedly said that the details for the cathedral were "in his head" and "it all comes from above". — AFP



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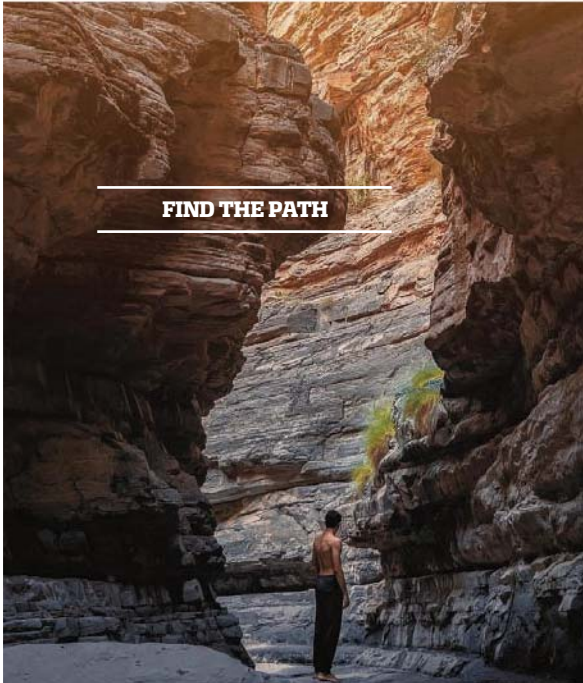
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AROUND THE WORLD

TRAVEL TALE

Fruit galore:
Thai monkey
festival
returns as
tourists come
back



WATCHED BY TOURISTS and locals, thousands of monkeys in Lopburi in central Thailand feasted on two tonnes fruits and vegetables after the town's Monkey Festival resumed following a two year hiatus caused by the pandemic.
Hundreds of macaques, also known as long-tailed monkeys, were seen climbing on people and stacks of fruit, munching away on bananas and pineapples.
The feast, which cost over 100,000 baht (\$3,000), is an annual tradition for locals to thank the monkeys for doing their part in drawing in tourists to Lopburi, which is sometimes known as "Monkey Province."



"Today's special is durian, which is expensive. Lopburi monkeys like expensive things", said Yongyuth Kitwatanausont who has previously organised over 30 monkey festivals.
The theme for this year's festival was wheel-chair monkeys, and Yongyuth planned to donate 100 wheelchairs to needy people.
Tourists have been gradually returning to Thailand after the government launched a quarantine-free travel scheme for vaccinated tourists in November, and the festival proved a popular draw.
Thailand saw more than 100,000 inbound travellers in November, as high as the number of arrivals in the first ten months combined.
"I'm really happy to get to see this and now I'm thinking about going to the next festival", said Moroccan tourist Ayoub Boukhari.
"It's quite unexpected and the monkeys are quite silly." – **Reuters**

GASTRONOMY

Croatia's truffle
hunters seek habitat
protection amid
climate change



THE SOUND OF PAWS scurrying along the forest floor echoes through Croatia's northwestern woods, where the hunt for truffles is being threatened by climate change and deforestation – stirring fears that the country's gastronomic goldmine may be at risk.
The delicate microclimate in the picturesque Istria peninsula's forests has long been famed for producing some of the finest white truffles, which this year fetched up to 2,500 euros (\$2,860) per kilo. But the increase in temperatures and lower precipitation levels linked to climate change along with a shrinking water table and habitat loss could throw off the natural incubator that produces the luxurious ingredient.
"It's more difficult to find a truffle than to sell it", laments Darko Muzica, who oversees the Istria association of truffle hunters, an advocacy group campaigning to protect the peninsula's white truffle.
Along with climate change and diminishing water tables, Muzica says poor forest management has also threatened future harvests, with officials giving preferential treatment to the timber industry.
A 2014 study on Istria's truffles issued a similar warning saying: "Throughout the world the productivity of natural truffle habitats is shrinking which is often linked with climate change but also the ways the land is used".
Truffle enthusiasts say immediate action is needed to protect the area's habitat.
"The whole region would benefit from it", says Ivan Vukadinovic, who is also a

member of the truffle hunter association.
'TOP QUALITY'
Fears over the truffle's future in Istria comes on the heels of a decades-long love affair with the culinary delight in Croatia.
Istria has long been a tourist hotspot in the Balkan nation, famed for its pristine coastline as well as island getaways but has often been overshadowed on the truffle front by neighbouring Italy across the Adriatic.
With money to be made, truffle hunters, accompanied by teams of specially trained dogs, comb through Istria's dense, lowland forests near Motovun hoping to strike white gold.
"Search! Search!" shouts forest scientist Zeljko Zgrablic as his two dogs paw at the ground near a suspected bulb.
After digging away a layer of topsoil, Zgrablic carefully extracts a white truffle weighing some 20 grams – which could net up to 130 euros (\$145). It is a typical scene during Istria's white truffle season that runs from September to late December, attracting a wide swath of aficionados ranging from weekend warriors to locals hoping to pocket extra cash.
Istria remains one of the few areas outside of Italy's famed Alba region able to produce high-end white truffles thanks to its humid climate and alkaline soil that imbues the edible fungi with a strong aroma and optimal density.
"They are heavy, have a good shape... which makes them a top quality product", says Zgrablic as he carefully writes down

details of the truffle.
'TRUFFLE LAND'
The first written reference to truffles in Istria dates back to the late 1920s, when the peninsula was then part of Italy. But the industry has gone into overdrive in the past two decades, with the sector netting millions of dollars annually – spurring Istria to rebrand itself as "truffle land".
The truffle rush started after the discovery of a bulb weighing 1.31 kilogrammes (2.88 pounds) that was listed for a time in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.
"The event started a truffle avalanche", says Giancarlo Zigante, a former hunter and restaurateur, who now produces hundreds of locally sourced truffle products – including oil, chocolate and chips that are exported to dozens of countries worldwide. Hoping to protect the area's lucrative truffle trade, the local association of truffle hunters has begun campaigning for "protected designation of origin" within the European Union.
If granted, it says the certification would help provide better management of the region's forests by eliminating their "irrational devastation", while also guaranteeing the truffle's authenticity and helping raise awareness for preservation efforts. But for many enthusiasts, preserving the area's habitat is about protecting the simple pleasures that come with truffle hunts.
"It's a lifestyle, it gets under your skin", Muzica says.
"The dog is happy whenever I'm happy. And I'm happy when my dog finds a truffle." – **AFP**



Dr Yousuf Ali al Mulla

Aim for better
sleeping hours

FOR A LOT OF US, regardless of who the individual is, the hardest part of our day to day living is the transition between being awake and being asleep. Often, when we are asleep, we wanted to remain awake and in reverse, when we should be awake, we feel that we wanted to continue sleeping.
Adequate sleep improves a human's well-being and we all know that individuals who are well-rested are more social and have more positive experiences with their surroundings. On the other hand, sleeplessness decreases happiness by impairing emotional memory recall common sense advice, but it does not address the roots of resistance to sleep. Hence, I do advise you to set a bedtime that is both realistic and sensible. Thirty minutes prior, tell yourself, I have control over my schedule and I am choosing to go to bed at this time. Perhaps this self-talk sounds childish to you, but it's really a way to deal with the situation maturely.
More importantly, I think we need to believe and understand that sleep is an intrinsic source of happiness. You may look forward to your volunteer night-time adventure and you may even find yourself falling

Research has shown that adequate sleep improves a human's well-being and we all know that individuals who are well-rested are more social and have more positive experiences with their surroundings

and encouraging mental scarcity!
Knowing these facts, we can always say, why not sleep more? Physical conditions, work and stress for instance are common barriers to proper sleep. A lot of us have experienced it that we try putting off going to bed early because we still have to finish a lot of tasks that we felt were important but come morning, when it's time to wake up, we regret not having enough rest.
When you're struggling with this sleep dilemma, you'll often get bits of advice like dealing with the underlying physical or mental health issues some even suggesting to not neglect sleep despite how busy you are and to get plenty of rest for long hours.
Surely, this could be asleep on time. In the end, you get up to go somewhere or to start fulfilling responsibilities and go to bed when you decide, based on a complex calculation of how tired you are and how much sleep you want to get, however that will depend also on how your sleep was. So, beginning tonight, treat bedtime greatly. Make it a regular habit as this determines a lot about your quality of life. Make it your mantra to get better sleep at night and stop treating it as a routine. Instead, when you look at your bed, look at it with a sense of awe and a beginning of your rendezvous with the kingdom of sleep.

Dr Yousuf Ali Al Mulla is a physician, medical innovator and a writer



Endangered species found in Oman waters to debut in global tv

By Kabeer Yousuf

One of the rarest and most unique species, often endangered and found in the waters of Oman will soon be featured in global television platforms all thanks to the united effort of a group of young creative Omanis led by Maisa al Hooti, a passionate underwater photographer and conservation advocate who runs 'Oman in Focus.'

This is possible with the group's collaborative efforts with their foreign counterparts ensuring that the Sultanate of Oman's wildlife is finally given its proper time for consideration and appreciation by the international audience.

Maisa and her team had been shooting at various locations of the Sultanate of Oman since March 2021, with a short hiatus due to the Covid-19 and are carrying out full-fledged operations at the coastal sides of the country.

Oman in Focus team has spotted many rare and endangered species while filming their documentary and there is, however, one endangered species that is a particularly special find, the Arabian Sea Humpback Whale.

Researchers estimate that only around 80 individuals are remaining of this very isolated and unique humpback whale population. And this fact indeed makes finding even one of them to film in the vast ocean is a treasured experience.

"We, at Oman in Focus, are proud to announce that, together with researchers from Oman

Environment Society and with support from the Environment Authority, we have been able to find more than 20 different individuals on their latest excursion! Oman in Focus has had the immense pleasure of working with Dr Gianna Minton, who explained how the population of these whales is calculated using the mark-recapture method. Imagine living in a small town with only one main street", said Maisa.

With the documentary film on Oman from Musandam to Dhofar, Maisa and her team believe it's good to "shed more light on the fact that we need to protect our nature and other creatures around us. It's also an attempt to tell the world that the Sultanate of Oman is home to many of these unique animals and birds. Many people travel to other countries to see them."

Oman in Focus aims to feature Oman's unique environmental assets on a global platform. Researchers believe that, unlike other Humpback Whales, the Arabian Sea Humpback Whales stay in the waters of Oman all year round. They can do this because the monsoon churns the water in such a way that minerals are always available to sustain the small fish, krill and phytoplankton that the whales feed on. The temperate waters also make a suitable breeding ground for these mammals. Unfortunately, however, this population has become extremely endangered, largely due to human activities. Heavy shipping traffic, fishing and pollution all contribute to the decline in numbers for these whales.

The Team Oman in Focus will make a two-part documentary the first of which will showcase the wildlife and unique biodiversity of the Sultanate of

Oman. A second documentary will feature the various conservation efforts that are under way in Oman.

The entire country has interesting habitats, such as Musandam, Sur, Daymaniyat Island, Raz al Jinz, Ras al Hadd, Hasik, Masirah Island, Jebel Samhain, Bar Al Hickman, Al Wusta, Nizwa, Jabal Akhdhar and so on form part of the film.

This ambitious project featuring the country and its rare and unique natural resources and environmental exclusivity has been supported by various governmental agencies and private organisations. While Office for the Conservation of the Environment, Diwan of Royal Court, The Office of the Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Environment Authority, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, Ministry of Information (Oman, Oman Daily Observer and Oman TV), and Royal Opera House Muscat extend their support to the project, Ominvest is its main partner and strategic sponsors are Sohar International, Oman Air, PDO, OQ, Omran and Faisal Mortada.

The public can also be a part of the project by taking a photo or video of a whale whenever one spots the same and sending it to the Team Oman In Focus, along with the date and time of the sighting to ESO to admin@eso.org.om. This will greatly assist with their research and will also help to protect these critically endangered animals.

