

P13

OMAN'S CRUDE BENCHMARK SURGES TO \$68.35/BARREL



P10

DHOFAR STAMP AUTHORITY WITH 10TH TITLE



P19

HARRY AND MEGHAN DETAIL ROYAL STRUGGLE IN OPRAH INTERVIEW



MUSCAT

HM THANKED BY SAUDI KING

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tark has received a cable of thanks from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of Saudi Arabia, in reply to His Majesty's condolences cable to him on the death of Prince Fahd bin Mohammed bin Abdulaziz al Saud. In his cable, King Salman expressed his thanks for His Majesty the Sultan's good feelings and sincere prayers, praying to the Almighty Allah to protect His Majesty against all harms. — ONA

OMAN, ALGERIA REVIEW RELATIONS

His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tark al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office on Monday Mohammed Irki, Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to the Sultanate. The meeting reviewed the good, bilateral relations between the Sultanate and Algeria, as well as aspects of the existing cooperation between them in many fields to serve the joint interests of the two brotherly countries and their peoples. The meeting was attended by the Secretary General and the two advisers at HH Sayyid Asaad's Office. **PHOTO ON P2**



Omani women excel in all sectors

SULTANATE CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

KABEER YOUSUF
[@kabeeryousef](#)

The Sultanate highly supports women empowerment and takes all efforts in upholding their rights, according to the UNFPA representative. Speaking to the *Observer* on the sidelines of an exclusive media briefing on International Women's Day, Karl Kulesa, Representative for the Sub-Regional Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council, said that Oman gives opportunities and freedom to both men and women equally.

"Oman comes up in women's protection in various aspects and this includes in terms of laws being made for all identically, and Oman addresses the issue of equality, while many services are distributed among women without any gender

bias", Kulesa said.

However, according to him, less women are entering the national labour force and they generally focus on some segments only. Women themselves need to change this scenario.

"The level of education among Omani nationals, especially among women, is very high. However, not all educated women are entering the workforce of the nation, while those interested to work are focusing on some sectors alone. We need to drive Omani women towards engineering, hardcore surgical and medicinal roles etc."

Various factors such as marriage, children and striking a perfect balance between the two are main factors. To address these, we need more proactive strategies. **TURN TO P2**



CAA allows return of Boeing 737 Max

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in the Sultanate has approved flight operations using the Boeing 737 Max.

Oman has decided to temporarily suspend all operations of 737 Max aircraft in and out of all airports in the Sultanate from March 12, 2019. The CAA said 737 Max will be allowed

from and to the airports of the Sultanate if the airline wishes to operate that type of aircraft.

It may be noted that the fleet of the national carrier Oman Air includes five 737 Max aircraft, and the authority assures that those aircraft will be authorised to restart operations after it has fulfilled all the requirements for aircraft validity and pilots training. **SEE ALSO P3**

More measures likely to contain virus spread

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

The Sultanate may take more precautionary measures to contain the spread of the Covid-19 variants, according to the Minister of Health. Discussions are also on to exempt those who have received two doses of the vaccine from institutional quarantine.

"We might have to take more precautionary measures if required, and that will be announced after continuous study of the situation based on epidemiological data", Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, Minister of Health, said.

He added that the Supreme Committee's decision to prevent

We might have to take more precautionary measures if required, and that will be announced after continuous study of the situation

DR AL SAEEDI
Minister of Health

travellers from coming from several countries earlier was due to the positive rate of Covid-19 examinations for those coming from those countries, some of

which exceeded 20 per cent.

For vaccination, more target groups will be added and a new group for 60-year-olds will be listed for vaccination during the next week as the target groups for vaccination being administered in several stages.

"We have covered 95 per cent of the target population in the first phase of the national campaign for immunisation against Covid-19, as a total of 5,285 people were vaccinated in the Sultanate, as we continue to add more target groups."

He said that the ministries of health and education are coordinating to set appropriate decisions on second semester classes at the next Supreme Committee meeting.



Whether it's an innocent smile caught through a palm frond basket, an Omani woman in traditional garb crossing over from the light to darkness or focusing in the many astounding structures and scenery in Oman, Sultan Qaboos University is buzzing with different activities not only for artists but specifically, photographers. **DETAILS ON P20**

Omani physician unravels breakthrough using stem cells

MUSCAT: Physician and Clinical Researcher Dr Hind bint Khamis al Balushiyyah, Head of Unit of Stem Cells Engineering and Cellular Therapies Department at the Royal Hospital, has been able to develop a technique to cultivate stem cells for rebuilding of non-cellular textures and the analysis of their curative abilities.

Dr Hind, a specialist in cen-



tres for management, engineering and manufacturing of stem cells and medical cellular treatment units, made the achievement while conducting dissertation towards a PhD study in stem cells engineering at the University College London. The research enabled Dr Hind to join a renowned medical team based in Royal Free Hospital... **TURN TO P4**

SAYYID ASAAD RECEIVES ALGERIAN AMBASSADOR



MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Personal Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, received at his office here on Monday Mohammed Irki, Ambassador of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria to the Sultanate. The meeting reviewed the good, bilateral relations between the Sultanate and Algeria, as well as aspects of the existing cooperation between them in various fields to serve the joint interests of the two brotherly countries and their peoples. The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General and the two advisers at Sayyid Asaad's Office. – ONA

Omani women excel in all sectors

From page 1
Karl Kulesa opines that women have suffered a lot during the pandemic.
“Economically, women work predominantly in people-oriented, small scale, retail, social service, education sectors and Covid-19 has affected their work. Secondly, nearly 44 per cent of women are social workers, whereas in the Arab region it's 80 per cent and chances of infecting with Covid-19 are high,” he said, adding that thirdly, domestic violence across the world is increasing and these are the



Karl Kulesa, Representative for the Sub-Regional Office for the Gulf Cooperation Council

three factors we need to look into when we talk about women empowerment.

This year's International Women's Day theme was “Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a Covid-19 world”, and focuses on the enormous contribution of women in leadership at all levels and across all sectors. UNFPA considers addressing the issues pertaining to women more crucial than ever as we tackle the enormous challenges of addressing the health and socioeconomic impact of Covid-19 because women are in the fore front and centre of local, national, regional and global recovery plans.

449 new Covid-19 cases, three deaths reported

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported three Covid-19 death and 449 new cases of the coronavirus on Monday, taking the overall tally of cases to 144,404 and fatalities to 1,594. The number of people who have recovered reached 134,684, which is 93.2 per cent of the total cases reported, the ministry said. Twenty-eight patients were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 219, including 76 in Intensive Care Units.

Al Saidiya School marks anniversary

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education on Monday celebrated the eighty-year anniversary of the establishment of Al Saidiya School in Muscat, under the auspices of Sayyid Saud bin Hilal bin Hamad al Busaidy, Minister of State and Governor of Muscat. Dr Madeeha bint Ahmed al Shaibaniyah, Minister of Education and Nasr bin Badr al Busaidy, Director-General of Customer Experience with Oman Post attended the ceremony.
The ceremony included a speech of the Omani National Committee delivered by Amna al Balushi, the committee's Under-Secretary. She said: “Education in the Sultanate has witnessed many transformations and historical junctures, from the dhikr circles in mosques, through schools established by scholars, to a new stage when Sultan Said bin Taimour ordered to establish Al Saidiya School in Muscat, for regular education,



in 1940. The school continued in graduating its students from then until the year 2000, to create and prepare the generations to contribute building the renaissance of Oman and its civilisation.”
The chief guest and the attendees toured the photo gallery, which displays images of many educational documents presented for the first time to the museum visitors, such as the student records, preparation books, student certificates, and administrative circulars.
After that, a commemorative postage stamp was issued to commemorate the school's eight-year anniversary. The post stamp will be available in all Oman Post branches throughout Oman.



Women's efforts in alleviating pandemic impacts underscored



MUSCAT: The Sultanate on Monday joined the world in celebrating International Women's Day, which falls on 8 March every year.
Oman's participation in the event stems from the attention accorded to women in the Sultanate and their engagement in all spheres of national action, including development plans and programmes.
The Sultanate lays emphasis on supporting and empowering women across all sectors and highlighting their constructive roles in economic, scientific, social, educational, health and technical fields—to name a few, besides their household responsibilities of upbringing the offspring and enhancing family cohesion and social harmony.
This year, the United Nations (UN) marks the occasion under the theme of “Women in leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a Covid-19 World.”
The event celebrates the tremendous efforts exerted by women and girls around the world in forming a future where the

world enjoys equality at a greater scale. It underscores women's action in addressing the pandemic and alleviating its impacts. The event also focuses on loopholes yet to be tackled in the global social texture.
The Royal attention accorded to women since the dawn of Oman's blessed renaissance and through the Renewed Renaissance era inducted by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, who pledged his noble Royal support to women by reinforcing their participation in the march of national development and by empowering them in all fields.
In this context, Sayyidah Maani al Busaidy, Director-General of Family Growth Department at the Ministry of Social Development, said “The Sultanate extended full support to woman as a human entity by fostering her partnership with man in the nation building process.
Sayyidah Maani pointed out that His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik stressed this point in a Royal speech in which he said that “Citizens' partnership

in moulding their country's present and future is considered a basic pillar of national action. We are keen on enabling women to enjoy their rights stipulated by law, so that she could work side by side with man in all fields as she serves her country and her society. We also pledge our constant backing to these national fundamental principles that can neither be evaded, nor compromised.” In a statement to Oman News Agency (ONA), Sayyidah Maani pointed out that the Sultanate presses ahead with efforts to promote women's status in a manner that guarantees their effective participation in social, economic and political development, as well as public life. “In Oman, woman participates alongside man in representing her country at international events. She proved capable of this mission right from the start of the Sultanate's modern renaissance. Oman was among pioneering countries in terms of women's empowerment in the regional and international arenas,” said Sayyidah Maani. — ONA

Tender Announcement
Supply of Food Parcels for the “Ramadan Iftar Program” for the Year 1442 AH / 2021 AD for Al Mahrah Governorate and Surrounding Areas in the Republic of Yemen
Tender No. 1/2021

Oman Charitable Organization (O.C.O.) announces a tender for the supply of 25,900 (twenty-five thousand and nine hundred) food parcels for the “Ramadan Iftar Program” for the year 1442 AH / 2021 AD, and distributing them to all the districts of Al Mahrah Governorate and the surrounding areas according to the attached list of locations (16 locations).

Specialized merchants and suppliers wishing to submit their bids for this tender can obtain the terms and conditions from the Financial Department of Oman Charitable Organization against payment of nominal fees, during the period from Sunday 7 March 2021 AD to Thursday 11 March 2021. The last date for bid submission and acceptance shall be Tuesday 16 March 2021.

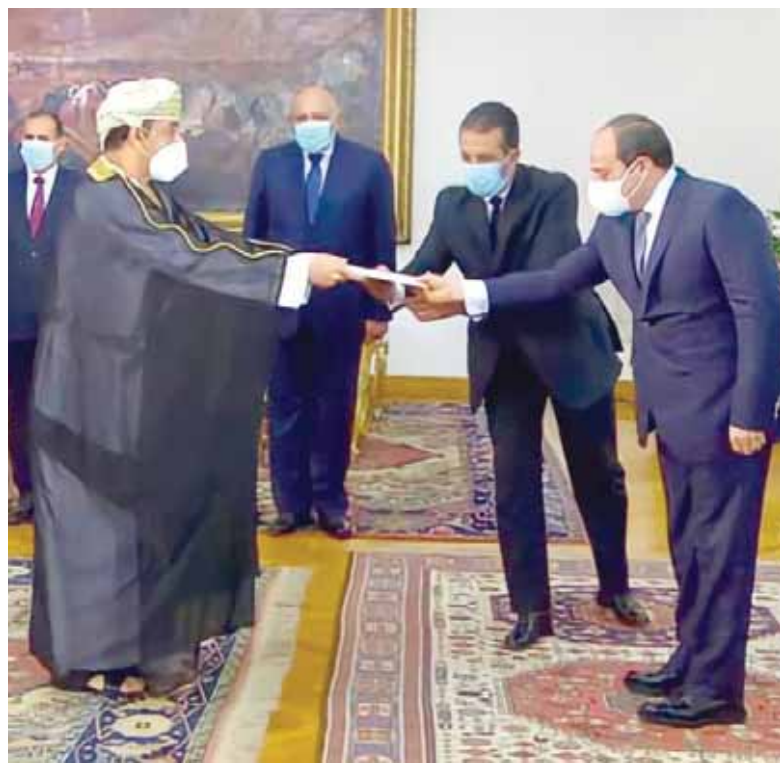
Bids shall be deposited in the tender box at the Financial Department, O.C.O. Headquarters at the Wilayat of Baushar, Muscat Governorate, Al Khuwair 33, Southern Street No. 47, near Sultan Said bin Taimur Mosque.

Bids shall be placed in closed envelopes sealed with red wax and addressed to H.E. the Chairman of the Projects and Tenders Committee of O.C.O. before the specified date.

“O.C.O. is not obligated to award the tender in whole or in part or to consider the lowest price.”



Ambassador to Egypt presents credentials



CAIRO: President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt received on Monday Abdullah bin Nasser al Rahbi, who presented his credentials as the Sultanate's ambassador to Egypt. During the meeting, the ambassador conveyed greetings of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik to President el-Sisi along with His Majesty's best wishes of good health and well-being to the Egyptian President and people. On his turn, the Egyptian President asked the ambassador to convey his greetings and best wishes to His Majesty the Sultan and the Omani people. President el-Sisi pledged support for the development of bilateral relations. Meanwhile, the ambassador expressed his keenness on cementing ties between Oman and Egypt at all levels. – **ONA**

Diam to conduct maintenance works at Quriyat plant



MUSCAT: The Public Authority for Water (Diam) will on Thursday begin a programme of maintenance and improvement of the desalination plant in Qurayyat.

The programme coincides with steps to maintain the main water supply line from Wilayat of Qurayyat desalination plant to Muscat Governorate.

The works are expected to continue for 72 hours from 6 am on Thursday (March 11) to Saturday.

Diam calls upon all subscribers in wilayats that receive water supply from the desalination plant to take precautions and fill their rooftop tanks so that they would be having sufficient water supply during the maintenance period.

Diam also cautioned all to avoid coming close to the maintenance sites and to rationalise their water use.

CAA allows return of Boeing 737 Max

VINOD NAIR

@vinot_nair

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) in the Sultanate has approved flight operations using the Boeing 737 Max.

Oman decided to temporarily suspend all operations of 737 Max aircraft in and out of all airports in the Sultanate from March 12, 2019.

The CAA said 737 Max will be allowed from and to the airports of the Sultanate if the airline wishes to operate that type of aircraft.

It may be noted that the fleet of the national carrier Oman Air includes five 737 Max aircraft, and the authority assures that those aircraft will be authorised to restart operation after it has fulfilled all the requirements for aircraft validity and pilots training.

The grounding of 737 Max seriously disrupted Oman Air's expansion plans and it had to continuously cancel some of the scheduled flights until the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic that led to the serious closure of all kinds of passenger air traffic.

The decision was taken after Ethiopian Airlines Flight ET 302 bound for Nairobi from Adis



Ababa crashed minutes after take-off on March 10, 2019, killing all 157 people on board and prompting the carrier to ground the rest of its fleet.

It was the second crash of the 737 MAX 8 after Indonesian Lion Air crashed 13 minutes after take-off from Jakarta on a domestic flight.

The Sultanate has completed all technical requirements for airworthiness and training and gives priority to the highest levels of aviation safety, CAA said.

The necessary measures and requirements for air safety on this model of aircraft are based on the success of Tests and checks conducted by the US Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in its capacity as the regulatory authority of the country of

manufacture of the aircraft, which has been also approved by the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and civil aviation authorities in some friendly countries.

Any foreign airline operating this aircraft to the Sultanate's airports will also be subject to an audit of aircraft airworthiness procedures, including the license and training certificates granted to it by the countries of registration of these aircraft.

TREE TRIMMING

Meanwhile, some trees on the western side of the Muscat International Airport opposite the landing area of an aircraft will be trimmed to ensure safe flight movements.

The decision was taken as per

the coordinated efforts between the Municipality of Muscat and Oman Airports to determine the appropriate altitudes for safe air navigation around the Muscat International Airport.

"Based on the request of Oman Airports regarding the height of the trees on the western side of the area opposite the landing aircraft area Muscat International Airport, it was decided to some trees in line with the permissible rights."

The Muscat Municipality said that it will use appropriate methods and will take care of the afforestation system at the site with periodic maintenance work.

"The Municipality hopes that the public will understand these measures are taken for the safety of air navigation," the municipality said.

OMAN-FAO PARTNERSHIP



Laila bint Ahmed bin Awadh al Najjar, Minister of Social Development, met with Dr Nora Ourabah Haddad, Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) office in the Sultanate. The meeting touched on several matters pertaining to social development, in addition to means of upgrading partnership between the two sides. – **ONA**

MoAFWR executes grape farming in six governorates

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources (MoAFWR) is currently executing a project for grape cultivation. The project is aimed at developing grape farms by expanding the acreage and applying modern irrigation systems and grape farming and marketing methods.

The project comes within the framework of the efforts exerted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources to boost the agricultural sector's contribution to the GDP. This includes cultivation fruit varieties that suit the characteristics of each governorate in terms of soil quality, water and climate.

Grape is among the fruit varieties that have high demand due to its taste and health benefits. It is cultivated in many



The project is aimed at developing grape farming and boosting production in different governorates as well as training select farmers and ministry's technicians on the modern methods of farming, harvesting and marketing of grapes

governorates of the Sultanate, particularly the mountainous areas that are distinguished by moderate temperatures in summer.

The project is aimed at developing grape farming and boosting production in different governorates as well as training

select farmers and ministry's technicians on the modern methods of farming, harvesting and marketing of grapes. It targets to set up specialised grape farms for cultivating economic grape varieties on areas ranging between 1 and 5 acres as well as spreading the modern irrigation systems and grape farming techniques and establishing and developing genetic banks for grape varieties for the purpose of future propagation and research.

A number of locations have been selected in the governorates for establishing the project with 7 acres allocated for the project in North Al Sharqiyah Governorate, 5 acres in Al Dhahirah Governorate, 5 acres in North and South Al Batinah Governorates, 5 acres in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate and 3 acres in Dhofar. — **ONA**

HALF THE NATION, HALF THE POTENTIALS

THE SULTANATE HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN MAKING REMARKABLE PROGRESS IN GENDER

EQUALITY, ELIMINATING ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND GIVING

THEM ALL THEIR RIGHTS AT VARIOUS SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LEVELS

ZAINAB AL NASSRI, [@zainabalnasseri](#)

When the world is celebrating the Women's Day, some facts about Omani women indicate the country's concern for the welfare and empowerment of women.

According to the Public Authority for Social Insurance, the number of insured women in the social insurance system till the end of March 7, 2021, reached 67,088.

The Sultanate paid attention to women in all areas with a focus on their involvement in development plans and programmes, as also on efforts to support and empower them in various sectors. The Sultanate gained international praise for having Omani women in constructive roles, achievements, and successes over the past fifty years in various fields of national work.

The Sultanate has been successful in making remarkable progress in gender equality, eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and giving them all their rights at various social, economic and political levels. This is based on the Basic Law of the State, speeches of His Majesty the Sultan, and international agreements on human rights, Oman Vision 2040, and the Social Action Strategy 2016-2025.

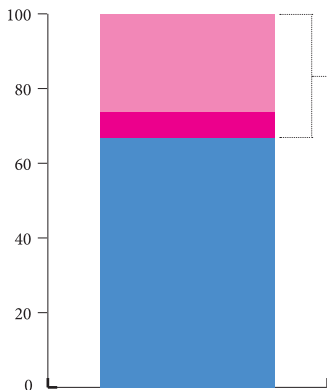
49.7% OF TOTAL POPULATION

Furthermore, Omani women constituted 49.7 per cent of the total Omani population till the end of August 2020. Female children in the age group (0-17 years) constituted 42.8 per cent of the total Omani females in 2019.

Women's access to education, jobs, and their participation in various development fields have contributed to enhancing their role in society and developing their active participation in all areas of national work.

Equal opportunities in education, both basic and higher, and encouraging them to choose in different disciplines and colleges, whether inside or outside the Sultanate, have enabled them to achieve higher ranks in jobs and in many specialised fields. The total enrollment rate for females in grades 10-12 was 96.5 per cent in the academic year 2018/2019,

WOMEN WORKFORCE



The percentage of Omani women working in government and private sectors reached 33.2 per cent of the total workers until the end of July 2020. Their percentage in the private sector reached 26.4 per cent.

while the female illiteracy rate decreased from 11.4 per cent in 2014 to 6.5 per cent in 2019. As for higher education, the percentage of Omani females in higher educational institutions increased to more than 73 per cent, and they constituted nearly 40 per cent of the total number of students on scholarships. The successes achieved by Omani women in public and private work have varied, and the government has affirmed that it will spare no effort to provide more support to Omani women and involve them in all sectors of work and production to continue to fulfil their responsibilities in the country's comprehensive development process.

WOMEN WORKFORCE

The percentage of Omani women working in government and private sectors reached 33.2 per cent of the total workers until the end of July 2020. However, their percentage in the private sector reached 26.4 per cent.

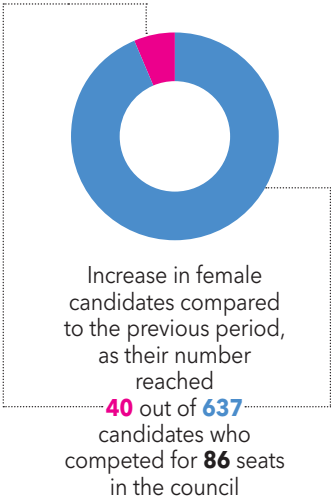
The economic activity of Omani women is concentrated in the wholesale and retail trade sector, followed by construction, financial activities, insurance activities and then the manufacturing sector. The data also indicated that the number of females in crafts industry constitutes 88 per cent of the total number of craftsmen.

Besides, the ninth period of the Shura Council elections (2019-2023), which took place in October 2019, witnessed an increase in the number of female candidates compared to the previous period, as their number reached 40 out of 637 candidates who competed for 86 seats in the council. The number of women voters reached 337,543 represented 47.3 per cent of the total number of voters.

For the current period, two women won the membership of the Council.

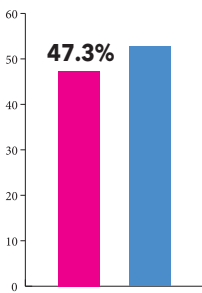
Omani woman carried the Sultanate message of peace to various countries of the world and represented her country in an ideal and honourable manner while building bridges of close relations with the countries of the world. Omani women have also participated with their male counterparts in representing the Sultanate in international forums, as many Omani women employees work in the diplomatic services and the Sultanate's embassies.

SHURA COUNCIL ELECTIONS (2019-2023)



Increase in female candidates compared to the previous period, as their number reached 40 out of 637 candidates who competed for 86 seats in the council

NUMBER OF VOTERS



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67,088

Number of insured women in the social insurance system till the end of March 7, 2021

49.7%

Omani women constituted total Omani population till the end of August 2020

6.5%

Female illiteracy rate decreased from 11.4% in 2014

73%

Omani females in higher educational institutions



■ FROM PAGE 1

Omani physician unravels medical breakthrough



and London University, United Kingdom, that was conducting a rare operation to rescue and treat a child in critical condition. The child had swallowed a battery cell that damaged the trachea.

The medical team received a licence from Medicine and Healthcare Regulatory Agency

(MHRA), UK, to use the new technique to treat the child. The operation was conducted at Cellular and Genetic Treatment Centre at Royal Free Hospital.

The implant, termed success, took place at Great Ormond Street, London.

The child recuperated and is currently enjoying good health

three years after the operation.

A detailed account of the operation will be published in *Nature Medicine* journal.

The new technology is being used to start clinical experiments at Barouth Hospital London, Cambridge University, London University and a specialised drug firm. — ONA

New e-services added to 'Invest Easy' portal

MUSCAT: Based on the Ministerial Decision No (37/2021) recently issued by Qais bin Mohammed bin Moosa al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), on amending some provisions of regulation for organising the registration of trade names, a number of improvements and new e-services have been added to 'Invest Easy' portal, according to MoCIIP.

The new services aim to facilitate the process of amending trade names by the investor himself without a visit to the premises of MoCIIP, and any suspension on the commercial registry could be lifted in order to amend the

concerned trade name.

The first article of the Ministerial Decision No (37/2021) stipulates the cancellation of Clause No (8) of Article (10) in the regulation for organising the registration of trade names "if it carries a meaning synonymous with the business name of the establishment or combines or signals out the name of the registered establishment."

Commenting on these improvements, Mubarak bin Mohammad al Dohani, Director General of Commerce and Head of the Digital Transformation Team at MoCIIP, said that the ministry continues to facilitate the process of starting new busi-

nesses by reducing procedures in all transactions and cutting down the time to complete investor transactions to commence their projects, as well as finding solutions to tackle the difficulties of investors.

Accordingly, Since Thursday, March 4, 2021, MoCIIP has started adding new amendments to a number of services provided by the portal of "Invest Easy", Al Dohani added. He pointed out that MoCIIP has launched a service for registering trademarks electronically through self-service or via Sanad offices. The registration of this service is also being provided through "approved legal offices" via "Invest Easy" portal.

OMREN launches speed test service

MUSCAT: Oman Research and Education Network (OMREN) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation has launched a new Internet speed test service 'OMREN Speedtest' dedicated for the research and education community.

Dr Abdulmunim al Kharousi, OMREN Director, stated that the new OMREN speed test service is a web-based service developed internally by the OMREN team using the well-known application from OKLA to specifically enable users

to test their connectivity easily and accurately either through the MPLS or the ILL lines. This will allow researchers, teachers and the IT support team at OMREN to use communication facilities and services smoothly and share large learning and research resources with confidence and full transparency.

Salim al Amri, Engagement Manager at OMREN, added that the service is hosted at OMREN Data Centre, and is free for OMREN members just like the other services.

SQU researchers develop farm to breed barramundi, bass



MUSCAT: Researchers from Sultan Qaboos University, College of Agricultural and Marine Sciences, have successfully established an experimental farm to produce barramundi or Asian sea bass fish.

The project, which received the support of The Research Council (TRC) for two years, focuses on researching methods of contributing to the national revenues through fish farming, both by increasing income and rationalising the volume of water used in fish farming.

Barramundi (*Lates calcarifer*) is found in the Indian Ocean and the west Pacific zone and it lives in fresh water, river mouth and some sea zones.

This type of fish is considered a new species that enters the aquaculture industry in the Sultanate. Over the past few years, a research group from the Marine Sciences section explored opportunities for breeding barramundi and it gained great experience in the field.

In 2016, a number of students managed to raise adult barramundi at an average size of 800 grams by the 10th month at the SQU's aquaculture farm. — ONA



SEMBCORP SALALAH POWER & WATER COMPANY SAOG
NOTICE FOR ANNUAL ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

Notice for Annual Ordinary General Meeting (AGM) published on 6 March 2021 in "Oman Observer and Oman Daily Arabic" newspapers contained an error in agenda item 10. The correction is as follows:

Correction
Delete and remove "To elect new Board of Directors from amongst the shareholders or non-shareholders" from Item 10 of the Company's AGM agenda in respect to the AGM to be convened on the 22nd of March 2021 and be replaced with, "To elect one member to the Board of Directors of the Company to fill the vacant seat on the Board (either a shareholder or non-shareholder)". The remaining provisions of the said Item 10 shall remain unchanged.

We apologize for inconvenience caused.

MUSCAT MUNICIPALITY
Advertisement No. 10/2021

Muscat Municipality invites interested companies to the following tenders:

Serial	Tender No.	Tender Description	Document Fee	Deadline for Inquires submission	Deadline for Obtaining Tender Docs.	Deadline for Submission Bids
1	12/2021 /MM/HQ-9	Insurance of Muscat Municipality Properties	25/-OMR	25/03/2021	25/03/2021	28/03/2021
2	13/2021 /MM/HQ-10	Maintenance of Water Dispenser and Filters	25/-OMR	28/03/2021	14/04/2021	18/04/2021
3	14/2021 /MM/HQ-11	Supply of Painting Materials	25/-OMR	28/03/2021	14/04/2021	18/04/2021
4	15/2021 /MM/HQ-12	Supply of Building Materials	25/-OMR	28/03/2021	14/04/2021	18/04/2021
5	16/2021 /MM/HQ-13	Supply of Electrical Materials	25/-OMR	28/03/2021	14/04/2021	18/04/2021
6	17/2021 /MM/HQ-14	Supply of Carpenter Material	25/-OMR	28/03/2021	14/04/2021	18/04/2021
7	18/2021 /MM/HQ-15	Supply of Plumbing Materials	25/-OMR	28/03/2021	14/04/2021	18/04/2021

Specialized Companies with a valid registration certificate from Tender Board can obtain tender documents from the website through the following link: <https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>. Starting from the date of this announcement until the end of deadline mentioned above.

Bidders shall submit their offers electronically through the link shown above accompanied with an electronic copy of a bond issued by any local bank in Oman addressed to Muscat Municipality. The details of bond (amount & validity) must be as per tender's terms and conditions in the etendering Website starting from the date of bids submission.

The original copy of the bond shall be submitted as the table below:

Tender at The Serial	The box's location for Tender Bonds
1-2	Muscat Municipality Ruwi Building (Main Entrance), located on Capital Market Street
3-4-5-6-7	Third floor at The Directorate General of Quantity Surveying & Contracts in Muscat Municipality, Head Office, Darsait

Tender not accompanied by a tender bond will be rejected.

Note:

- For any inquiries regarding tenders, please contact us through e-tendering website: (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)
- For technical support of e-tendering system, please send an email to (etenderhd@mtc.gov.om) or call (+96824166670).

Website: www.mm.gov.om

Call for Ordinary Annual General Meeting (AGM) (Super International SAOC)

The Board of Directors of Super International S.A.O.C. inviting Its Shareholders to attend the AGM Meeting at the given date time and venue.

The Agenda and terms of the meeting are attached to the Shareholder reports. The shareholder has the right to appoint any other person on his behalf to attend the meeting and vote on his behalf on the decisions taken by the Board.

You are requested to be at least half an hour ahead of time in the meeting.

Any enquiry on the agenda can be answered by
Mr. Younis Al Namani GSM # 92949673.

Meeting Date: 24th March 2021.
Time: 12:00 Noon.

Venue: Super Plaza – 2nd Floor. Way No. 4805 – Al Azaeba Muscat – Sultanate of Oman

MOORE STEPHENS LLC
NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF WELLBORE INTEGRITY SOLUTIONS LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1382)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Wellbore Integrity Solutions LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1350618, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Members on 21 February 2021. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

Office No.41, 4th Floor, Building No.1022, Way No.1013; Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum
P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman
Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within six months from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Wellbore Integrity Solutions LLC (Under voluntary liquidation)

An announcement for engineers in Oman

جمعية المهندسين العمانيين
Oman Society of Engineers

By virtue of articles 21 and 22 of the Statute and Article 8 of the Bylaws of the Oman Society of Engineers. OSE has decided to hold General Assembly Meeting and elections virtually. Nominations are open according to the following dates:

Subject	Date
Nominations open	9/3/2021
Nominations closed	23/3/2021
End of membership renewal	23/3/2021
Registration for General Assembly open	24/3/2021
Registration for General Assembly closed	28/3/2021
General Assembly	31/3/2021
Elections	31/3/2021

The current Board of Directors urge Omani engineers who wish to nominate themselves to the Board of Directors to contact the OSE office to get the nomination applications.

Note : that a member of the General Assembly is a member who have paid all the outstanding membership fees until 31/3/2021 and have valid membership. The link for attending the AGM and for voting will be sent to OSE members by email.

For more information, please contact:
Tel: 00968- 24478899/ 24482899 | Fax: 00968-24489005,
Email: najwaose@gmail.com

Lebanon’s deadlock fuels 7th day of street protests

BEIRUT: Lebanon’s president asked security forces to prevent roadblocks after protesters shut main roads across the country for a seventh straight day on Monday in anger at more than a year of economic crisis and months of political paralysis.

Measures agreed in a meeting with top security and government officials included ordering a crackdown on anyone “violating the monetary and credit” law, including foreign exchange bureaus, a statement said.

Since the Lebanese pound, which has lost 85% of its value, tumbled to a new low last week, protesters have blocked roads daily.

“We have said several times that there will be an escalation because the state isn’t doing anything,” said Pascale Nohra, a protester on a main highway in the Jal al Dib area.

As Lebanon’s financial crisis erupted in late 2019, a wave of mass protest rocked the country, with outrage boiling over at leaders who have overseen decades of state graft.

Tens of thousands of jobs have



A man stands next to flaming tires at a make-shift roadblock set-up by anti-government demonstrators in the area of Dora on the northern outskirts of Beirut. – AFP

been lost, bank accounts have been frozen and many have been plunged into poverty.

On Monday, three main roads leading south into the capital

were blocked while in Beirut itself, protesters briefly closed a road in front of the central bank.

In Tyre in the south, one man tried to burn himself by pouring

gasoline on his body but civil defence members stopped him in time, the state news agency said.

In Tripoli in the north, one of Lebanon’s poorest cities, dem-

onstrators built a brick wall one metre high to prevent cars from passing through allowing a pathway for emergency cases.

“The new developments on the

Tens of thousands of jobs have been lost, bank accounts have been frozen and many have been plunged into poverty

financial and security fronts must be tackled quickly,” the presidency statement said.

After a port explosion devastated whole tracts of Beirut in August and killed 200 people, Caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab’s government resigned.

But the new prime minister-designate, Saad al Hariri, is at loggerheads with President Michel Aoun and has been unable to form a new government that must carry out the reforms needed to unlock international aid.

On Saturday, Diab threatened to quit even caretaker work to raise the pressure on those blocking the formation of a new government. — Reuters

الشركة المتحدة للطاقة (ش.م.ع.م.)

UNITED POWER COMPANY (SAOG)

P.O. Box 147, PC 134, Jawharat A'Shatti, Sultanate of Oman, Tel: 24689498, Fax: 24698496, Website: www.upcmanah.com

Audited Financial Statement for the year ended 31 December 2020

BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT

Dear Shareholders,

On behalf of the Board of Directors of United Power Company SAOG ("UPC" or the "Company"), I am glad to present you with the Twenty Sixth Annual Report of the Company for the year ended 31 December 2020.

UPC was incorporated in 1995 following the execution of the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) entered with Ministry of Electricity and Water (Novated to OPWPC after promulgation of the Sector Law in 2005) for Phase 1 in June 1994. This covered generation of 90 MW of power and its transmission to designated centres identified in the PPA. The Phase 1 facilities started commercial operations in September 1996 for the period of 20 years ending in September 2016. Subsequently, in 1999, a Supplemental Agreement to the Power Purchase Agreement (SAPPA) was executed for Phase 2, which augmented the power generation by an additional 180 MW, which commenced commercial operations in May 2000 for the term ending in May 2020. Both the PPA and SAPPA were designed on the basis of Build-Own-Operate-Transfer (BOOT) whereby the Plant and Transmission assets would be transferred back to the Government at the end of their respective terms. In order to align with Phase2 term which ended in May 2020, the Phase1 generating plant term was also extended from September 2016 to May 2020. The transmission assets of Phase1 were transferred back to the government owned Companies (OETC and Mazoon Electricity Distribution) in 2016 on completion of 20 years.

In April 2020, we were advised by OPWP to transfer the UPC power generating assets (Manah Plant) to one of the NAMA group Company Al Ghubrah Power and Desalination Company SAOC (GPDCo). The actual handover of the Manah Plant happened on 1 May 2020 in accordance with the terms of the PPA and SAPPA. A separate Transfer Agreement has been executed between UPC, OPWPC and GPDCo in this regard. Accordingly, UPC does not have any operating assets in the Company now.

Furthermore, the electricity regulator Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR formerly AER) has informed UPC of the revocation of the Generation Licence granted by them to operate the Plant, which effectively means that UPC cannot continue its power generating business.

Since 1 May 2020 to date, the Company through a number of disclosures have kept abreast its shareholders, of the actions taken by the Company towards resolving pending matters.

On 24 November 2020, the Capital Market Authority (CMA) was informed that the Board of Directors of the Company have approved to convert the Company from a SAOG to a SAOC in their meeting held on 27 October 2020. The letter to the CMA committed to pursue the CMA Circular No. E/8/2017, titled 'controls regulating the transformation of public joint stock companies'. One of the key requirements of this circular was to get support of major shareholders of holding 75% of the share capital and determination of offer price as per an independent professional firm. Both of the requirements have been met and the matter is now with CMA for its approval to start the process of conversion. The essential purpose of the proposal to convert UPC into a SAOC is to expedite the shareholders' access to their equity in the Company, and not wait till lengthy liquidation proceeding is completed. The Company will not be in a position to start liquidation proceedings till some of the key technical and commercial issues are resolved with its client and its operator. This is expected to be addressed in the second quarter of 2022.

Till the date of the transfer on 30 April 2020, the Manah Power Plant was operating smoothly and efficiently since the commissioning of the Plant primarily due to ENGIE and STOMO/SOGEX who have contributed to Manah IPP since the inception of the project in the mid 90's and their different roles at different stages of the project. We would also like to share that UPC and our operators had successfully achieved a unique record in the global electricity sector i.e. No lost time accident from the inception till the handover of the plant. This is a proud achievement of the Government of Oman.

During the four months of the operations ending 30 April 2020, OPWP actually dispatched 23.461 GWh, which represents 3% of the capacity made available, against dispatch of 121.6 GWh for the corresponding period last year.

The Company recorded in 2020, a net after tax loss of OMR 1.230 million. The detailed explanations of the variations are contained in the separate "Management Discussion and Analysis Report" prepared for the year 2020.

The current capital of the Company is OMR 2,000,000 (OMR Two million). Once the conversion is completed, it is the intention of the Company to reduce the capital to OMR 500,000 (OMR 0.5 Million).

Due to the definitive life of the project and its purpose, it has always been the policy of the Company to maximize distributing its available profits to the shareholders. Past five years' distribution to shareholders, are disclosed separately under 'Management Discussion and Analysis Report'. It also gives me pleasure that the commitments made by the Company in the 1999 Right Issue Prospectus in respect of the return profile for the term of the concession has not only been fully met but has exceeded.

UPC complies and maintains high standards to the Code of Corporate Governance implemented by the CMA as described in the separate report 'Corporate Governance Report'.

Pursuant to the transfer of assets, by the year end, a limited management and staff have been retained.

We thank His Majesty, the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said for opening up the electricity sector to the private sector, a first of its kind in Oman and the greater Middle East in 1994, and entrusting it to our Company to build, own, operate and transfer the Manah Plant.

The Company wishes to thank all the stakeholders involved in the Project in making it a success - our associates, suppliers, contractors; and our Operator and the Plant staff, whose diligence and application has led Manah Power Plant to establish records in Health & Safety (zero LTI since inception) that will be an industry standard.

The Company wishes to place on record its gratitude to all Directors, management and staff of the Company, both past and present, for their service.

United Power Company thanks His Majesty, Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, his Government, APSR, OPWPC, MOG, Statutory entities like MECA, the CMA for the opportunity to serve the community through the Manah Power Plant. The Company is proud to be part of this historical journey in contributing to the security and stability of the Sector.

May Allah protect them for all of us.

Statement of financial position as at 31 December 2020

	2020 RO (000)	2019 RO (000) (restated)	2019 RO (000) (as reported)
ASSETS			
Non-current assets			
Deferred tax assets	-	207	207
Total non-current assets	-	207	207
Current assets			
Inventories	53	37	37
Trade and other receivables	182	3,173	2,411
Cash and cash equivalents	3,151	3,706	3,706
Total current assets	3,386	6,916	6,154
Total assets	3,386	7,123	6,361
EQUITY AND LIABILITIES			
Shareholders' equity			
Share capital	2,000	2,000	2,000
Legal reserve	667	667	667
(Accumulated losses) / retained earnings	(462)	3,068	2,306
Total shareholders' equity	2,205	5,735	4,973
Current liabilities			
Trade and other payables	1,012	849	849
Provision for taxation	169	539	539
Total current liabilities	1,181	1,388	1,388
Total liabilities	1,181	1,388	1,388
Total equity and liabilities	3,386	7,123	6,361
Net assets per share (RO)	1.103	2.867	2.487

Statement of profit or loss and other comprehensive income for the year ended 31 December 2020

	2020 RO (000)	2019 RO (000)
INCOME		
Revenue from contracts with customers	1,128	4,236
Financial income	185	708
Other income	196	154
	1,509	5,098
EXPENSES		
General and administrative expenses	(2,369)	(4,996)
Total expenses	(2,369)	(4,996)
(Loss)/profit before tax	(860)	102
Income tax	(370)	(180)
Net (loss) for the year	(1,230)	(78)
Other comprehensive income	-	-
NET (LOSS) AND OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	(1,230)	(78)
(Loss) per share - basic and diluted (RO)	(0.615)	(0.039)

Note:

The complete accounts will be sent by mail to any share holder who requests the company in either Arabic or English as requested within 7 days.

US condemns attacks on Saudi oil heartland

Forces loyal to Yemen's government get into position during clashes with Ansar Allah fighters in Marib. – AFP

DUBAI: The United States mission in Saudi Arabia condemned drone and missile attacks launched by Yemen's Ansar Allah movement on Saudi Arabia on Sunday, including at a facility vital to petroleum exports.

The mission, in an Arabic-language post on Twitter on Monday, said "the Ansar Allah assaults on civilians and vital infrastructure" demonstrated lack of respect for human life and disregard for peace efforts.

The Saudi energy ministry said there were no casualties or loss of property from the attacks. The defence ministry said it intercepted an armed drone coming from the sea prior to hitting its target at an oil storage yard at Ras Tanura, a site of a refinery and the world's biggest offshore oil loading facility.

Shrapnel from a ballistic missile fell near a residential compound in Dhahran used by state-controlled Saudi Aramco, the world's biggest oil company, the ministries said. — AFP

Pope returns home after historic Iraq trip

ROME: Pope Francis returned to Rome on Monday following his trip to Iraq, the first-ever by a pontiff, according to an AFP reporter on board his plane.

The 84-year-old's packed three-day visit passed off without a hitch despite concerns about security and the coronavirus pandemic.

"Iraq will always remain with me, in my heart," the pope said as he concluded his largest Mass and final public event in Iraq on Sunday in Arbil, the capital of the northern Kurdistan region.

He later met the father of Alan Kurdi, the drowned Syrian Kurdish toddler who became a symbol of the plight of migrants.

It capped off a trip in which Francis covered more than 1,400 kilometres inside the conflict-ravaged country. He brought encouragement to Iraq's diminished Christian community and extended a hand by meeting top cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. — AFP



Women during a demonstration after arriving from neighbouring states to join the farmers who are continuing to protest against the central government's agricultural reforms at the Haryana-Rajasthan border in Shahjahanpur. — AFP

Thousands of women join Indian farmers' protests

NEW DELHI: Thousands of women joined protests by farmers on the outskirts of Delhi on Monday to mark International Women's Day, demanding the scrapping of new laws that open up agriculture produce markets to private buyers.

Since December, many farmers accompanied by their families have camped at three sites on the outskirts of the Indian capital to oppose the biggest farm reforms in decades, which they say hurt them.

Wearing bright yellow scarves representing the colour of mustard fields, the women took centre stage at one key site,

chanting slogans, holding small marches, and making speeches through loudspeakers to target the laws.

"This is an important day as it represents women's strength," said Veena, a 37-year-old from a farming family, who gave only one name in order to protect her identity.

"I believe if us women are united, then we can achieve our target much quicker," added Veena, who travelled from the northern state of Punjab to the sprawling Tikri protest spot. More than 20,000 women gathered at the site near Delhi's border with the state of Haryana, police and event organisers said. — **Reuters**

3 protesters killed in Myanmar

YANGON: Three demonstrators were killed in Myanmar on Monday, witnesses said, while shops, factories and banks were closed in the main city Yangon in protests against last month's military coup. Security forces were also deployed at hospitals and universities, state media said.

Two of the victims died of gunshot wounds to the head in the northern town of Myitkyina, the witnesses said. It was not immediately clear who fired on the protesters although both police and the military were at the scene.

Photos posted on Facebook showed the bodies of two men lying on the street. Witnesses said they were taking part in a protest against the coup when police fired stun grenades and tear gas. Several people were then hit by gunfire from nearby buildings.

One witness, who said he helped move the bodies, said two people were shot in the head and died on the spot. Three people were wounded.

"How inhumane to kill unarmed civilians," said the witness, a 20-year-old man.

"We must have our right to



Riot police hold their firearms as they face off with protesters during a demonstration against the military coup in Naypyidaw. — AFP

protest peacefully."

At least one person was killed and two injured during a protest in the town of Phyar Pon in the Irrawaddy Delta, a political activist and local media said. Police and military have killed more than 50 people to quell the daily demonstrations and strikes against the February 1 coup, according to the United Nations.

A military spokesman did not respond to calls asking for

comment on the latest incidents. Police in Myitkyina and Phyar Pon also did not respond to calls.

Myanmar has been in turmoil since the army overthrew the elected government of longtime democracy champion Aung San Suu Kyi and detained her and other political figures.

The generals say they acted because an election in November which saw Suu Kyi's Na-

tional League for Democracy (NLD) secure a big victory was marred by fraud - a claim rejected by the electoral commission.

They have promised to hold another election, without giving a date. In the meantime, security forces have cracked down hard on widespread pro-democracy protests in a country that has a history of military rule and crushing of dissent. — **AFP**

'Duterte's order to kill rebels legal'

MANILA: Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's order to kill armed rebels was legal, his spokesman said on Monday, as catholic leaders joined the condemnation of the killings of nine activists in separate weekend raids against suspected insurgents.

Human Rights groups are outraged over the deaths of what they said were legitimate activists under the guise of counter-insurgency operations, which came two days after Duterte told security forces they could kill rebels if they were holding a gun and to "ignore human rights".

"The president's 'kill, kill, kill' order is legal because it was directed at armed rebels," his spokesman Harry Roque said in a briefing, adding the government would still investigate the incident.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, an influential church group, in a statement denounced the use of what it called unnecessary force and violence during "Bloody Sunday".

On Sunday, Lieutenant General Antonio Parlade, head of an anti-rebel task force, said the raids were "legitimate law enforcement operations", and authorities had search warrants for firearms and explosives. — **Reuters**

South Korea finds no link between deaths and coronavirus vaccine

SEOUL: South Korea said on Monday it had found no link between the coronavirus vaccine and several recent deaths, as it ordered nearly 100,000 foreign workers to be tested after clusters emerged in dormitories.

Health officials had been investigating the deaths of eight people with underlying conditions who had adverse reactions after receiving AstraZeneca's Covid-19 vaccine, but said they found no evidence that the shots played a role.

"We've tentatively concluded that it was difficult to establish any link between their adverse reaction after being vaccinated, and their deaths," Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) Director Jeong Eun-kyeong told a briefing.

South Korea began vaccinating residents and workers at nursing homes and other at-



A medical worker receives the first dose of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine Covid-19 at the National Medical Centre vaccination centre in Seoul.

— **Reuters File Photo**

risk individuals at the end of February, with 316,865 people having received their first shots as of Sunday.

South Koreans aged 65 or older were not being given AstraZeneca's vaccine after health regulators concluded that more

data was needed to confirm its efficacy among that age group.

But on Monday, Jeong said an expert panel had now recommended that the shot be given to older people, and that the KDCA would soon make a final decision. — **Reuters**

MOORE STEPHENS LLC

NOTICE ON THE COMMENCEMENT OF LIQUIDATION OF REFRACO MIDDLE EAST LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1382)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the liquidation process of Refraco Middle East LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1149172, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Members on 21 February 2021. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

Office No.41, 4th Floor, Building No.1022, Way No.1013; Al Walaj Street, Al Qurum P O Box 933, Ruwi, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman Tel: 24061000, Fax: 24061099

By this announcement, the liquidator calls the company's creditors to submit their claims against the company, together with the supporting documents, to the above address within six months from the date of publishing this announcement for the first time, and any debtors should settle the company's rights with the liquidator on the address above.

Moore Stephens LLC
Official Liquidators of Refraco Middle East LLC
(Under voluntary liquidation)



الشركة المتحدة للتمويل ش.م.ع.ع United Finance Company SAOG

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The Board of Directors of the United Finance Co. SAOG (UFC) is pleased to invite the shareholders of the company to attend Annual Ordinary General Meeting of UFC scheduled to be held on Monday, 22nd March 2021 at 3.00 PM. Via the electronic platform to hold general meetings which can be accessed through the website of the Muscat Clearing and Depository Company (www.mcd.gov.om) if the quorum of the meeting is not completed, the second Annual Ordinary General Meeting will be held at 3:00 pm on Monday 29/3/2021 to discuss the following agenda:

1. To consider and approve the Report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended on 31.12.2020.
2. To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended on 31.12.2020.
3. To consider the Statutory Auditor's Report and approve the audited Balance Sheet and Profit & Loss Account for the financial year ended on 31.12.2020.
4. Approve the sitting fees paid to the Board of Directors for attending the Board and the Board Committee meetings for the financial year 2020 and to approve the sitting fees for the current financial year 2021 (as per annexure).
5. To notify the meeting with the related parties transactions during the financial year ended 31.12.2020 (as per the annexure attached).
6. To appoint Statutory Auditors for the financial year 2021 and specify their fees

According to the Company's Articles of Associations and the controls for holding General Meetings using electronic platform issued by the CMA, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

- Juristic person, only has the right to appoint a natural person as a proxy to attend the General Meeting and vote on its behalf through technical means, provided that this natural person has an investor number in MCDC.
- Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the General Meeting until the voting process ends on the day of the General Meeting. If the shareholder's shares are increased or decreased, the voting process will be canceled, and the shareholder will have to vote again on the day of the General Meeting.

In case of any enquiry please contact **Mr. Ali bin Jaffar bin Mohammad** on (968) 24577373, Mobile No: (968) 99245088, Fax No. (968) 24560885.

Chairman

Auditors

Legal Advisor



SULTANATE OF OMAN

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

BID ANNOUNCEMENT

The Ministry of Health, represented by Ibri Hospital, invite companies and individuals to participate in the bids listed below:-

No.	Subject of bid	Through	Deadline for obtaining bid documents	Date of Submission of bids	Type of Companies	Value of Documents (non refundable)
02/2021	Providing car cleaning services in Ibri Hospital	Sealed Envelopes	25/03/2021	Before 12:00 p.m on Sunday 08/04/2021	Companies and Individuals	25 OMR

- The bid documents available in (Financial Affairs Department) at Ibri hospital Tel no. 25881112 Fax no. 25881440 within the official working hours from 8:00 a.m. until 12:00 pm. The documents costs shall be only as per mentioned above - non refundable.

- The envelope shall be sealed with red wax and addressed to head of Tenders Committee at Ibri hospital, number and subject of the bid shall be written there on, and nothing that would refer to the tender holder or his name.

- The Ministry of Health is unrestricted to provide any reasons for the offers that will not be accepted.

31 killed in
E Guinea
explosions

MALABO: The death toll from a series of explosions in a military barracks in Equatorial Guinea has risen to 31, the health ministry said on Monday, as volunteers continued to search for bodies in the rubble.

About 600 people were injured in the blasts, which started with a fire at the Nkoantoma Military Base in the coastal city of Bata, according to the defence ministry. President Teodoro Obiang Nguema attributed the accident to negligence related to the handling of dynamite and said the explosions damaged almost all homes and buildings in Bata, a city of just over 250,000 people.

Equatorial Guinea's health ministry said on Twitter it had prepared a mental health brigade made up of psychiatrists, psychologists and nurses to attend to the victims of the blast.

"The damages are not only physical but also mental," the ministry said. — AFP

Supreme Court dumps last
of Trump's election appeals



Donald Trump

Courts around the country rejected the cases brought by Trump and his allies

against Trump in those three cases.

It already was clear that the high court, which includes three justices appointed by Trump, had no intention to intervene in the cases and others filed by his allies because it did not act before Congress on January 6 certified Biden's victory. That formal certification was interrupted

when a pro-Trump mob stormed the US Capitol.

In the Wisconsin case, Trump sued two days after the state had certified its election results. He challenged several Wisconsin election policies including one allowing the use of drop boxes for absentee ballots during the Covid-19 pandemic. Both a federal judge and the Chicago-based 7th US Circuit Court of Appeals rejected the claims, noting in part that Trump had waited too long to sue.

Courts around the country rejected the cases brought by Trump and his allies, sometimes in colourful terms. A judge put it this way in November in rejecting a Trump challenge in Pennsylvania: "This claim, like Frankenstein's Monster, has been haphazardly stitched together."

Trump has made — and continues to make — false claims that the November 3 presidential election was stolen from him through widespread voting fraud and irregularities. — Reuters

English children head
back to school



Primary school students at Halley House School in east London as schools reopen following the easing of England's third coronavirus lockdown restrictions. — AFP

LONDON: Millions of English children and teenagers headed back to school on Monday for the first time in two months, having endured their second extended stretch of home learning because of a strict national lockdown to slow the spread of Covid-19.

The reopening of English schools to all pupils is the first step in a four-stage government plan to ease the lockdown while trying to prevent a new surge in infections after a devastating winter wave that severely strained hospitals.

Since the start of the pandemic, Britain has recorded 124,500 deaths within 28 days of a positive Covid-19 test, the fifth highest official death toll in the world and the worst in Europe.

For adults in England, the lockdown remains in force, with social contact severely restricted, people under orders to stay at home except for essential reasons, most shops closed, and cafes and restaurants able to offer only takeaway or delivery.

"Getting all schools back has been our priority and the first step of our roadmap back to normality," Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Twitter.

The reopening of schools is a huge relief to millions of parents who have spent months juggling

work and full-time childcare.

Primary school pupils return to their classrooms and playgrounds with some Covid rules, such as not being able to socialise with children outside a strictly defined "bubble", staggered arrivals and departures, and frequent hand-washing.

For secondary schools and their pupils, the requirements are more onerous. Teenagers are being mass-tested for Covid — a logistical headache for schools — and are required to wear face coverings in class.

Despite these restrictions, the near-consensus among parents, teachers, child psychologists, social workers and broader society is that getting children back into schools is urgent for their mental health, education and life chances.

Most pupils had missed out on more than three months of school in the spring and early summer of 2020, when Britain was under its first strict national Covid lockdown.

In that first shutdown, as in the recent one, only children considered vulnerable or those whose parents are classified as "key workers" by the government were allowed to go to school.

— Reuters



BOARD OF DIRECTORS' REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2020



Dear Shareholders,
On behalf of the Board of Directors of Taageer Finance Company SAOG, I am pleased to present the audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2020.

Performance Summary
Financial results for the year 2020 indicate that the company has made efforts to maintain its portfolio size. Company's Gross portfolio stood at RO 243.19 Million as on 31 December 2020 as compared to RO 239.15 million as on 31 December 2019 thereby registering a minor increase of 1.69% during challenging times in 2020. Total Income for the year ended 31 December 2020 were RO 17.9 million as compared to RO 19.9 million for the year ended 31 December 2019.

The Interest Expenses for the year 2020 stood at RO 8.43 Million as compared to RO 7.8 million for the year 2019.

The Company registered Profit of RO 4.49 Million before Expected Credit Losses (ECL) charge and taxation stood at RO 2.070 Million for the year 2020 vis-à-vis RO 3.803 Million for the year 2019.

The Company allocated RO 2.02 Million towards ECL for the year 2020 with a cumulative allocation of RO 16.951 Million as at the end of the year 2020 as per IFRS 9 requirements on the Net Investment Portfolio. It has maintained its approach towards prudence in allocation to ECL.

During the year 2020 a new branch at Al Kamil was opened to cater to the customers in Sharqiyah Region with a view to improve customer service and offer better proximity to dealers, resulting in enhanced customer experience.

Impact of COVID-19 and Taageer's measures
In 2020, the largest health and economic crisis in recent history forced companies across sectors into extraordinary measures to protect their people and maintain operations. The Pandemic created a sense of panic and business entities irrespective of size and composition were forced to initiate precautionary measures and scale down businesses like never before.

Your Company, with the guidelines and the directives issued by the Central Bank of Oman during 2020, initiated various measures to facilitate deferment requests received from customers within the stipulated rules and parameters prescribed. Pro-active measures to ensure healthy and safety of the employees and the customers were initiated with the guidance of the decisions announced by the Supreme Committee.

As a part of the social distancing and contactless transaction initiative your Company also responded to provide customer convenience through, digital transactions channels like payments through Debit Cards, Direct Transfer to Bank Account and through Mobile Application. The customers were continuously updated through social media to make them aware of safety and convenience measures provided to them from time to time.

Change in the Composition of the Board
During the year 2020, pursuant to the amendment to the Articles of Association approved at the Extra Ordinary General meeting, the number of members in the Board was increased from eight to nine. Accordingly, Ms. Rasha Abdulhussain Jaffer Sulaiman was elected to the Board as an Independent Director.

Proposed Dividends
The company has distributed dividends consistently, year on year, due to sustained profitability levels since the commencement of business. Subject to approval of Central Bank of Oman, the Board of Directors are pleased to recommend a cash dividend of 4 baizas per share (RO 1.01 million) for the financial year 2020, for approval by the shareholders at the Annual General Meeting to be held on March 24, 2021.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
During the year the company kept its spirit of contributing to the community by taking several initiatives to support CSR activities in the areas of Education and Health.

Corporate Governance
Company continued its commitment of adhering to the highest standards of Compliance and Corporate Governance. As elicited more elaborately in the Corporate Governance Report, we assure that the Company has in place policies and procedures that are commensurate to the operations and established internal controls.

Future Outlook
The challenges and the pressures of Market are expected to remain. Although the oil prices have shown some signs of upward movement towards the end of year 2020 the general liquidity is expected to remain tight. The Company is completely aware of these challenges and continuously working towards mitigating them and register sustained growth. With strong leadership and management team the Company is committed to maintaining high standards of business operations and profitability.

Acknowledgement
On behalf of the Board of Directors, I wish to express sincere gratitude to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tareq bin Taimour for his vision and wise leadership.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation and acknowledgement for the guidance and support from the Central Bank of Oman, Capital Market Authority and Muscat Securities Market. We are also grateful to our shareholders, bankers, dealers and customers for their continued trust, confidence and support. Finally, the Board would like to appreciate and thank the management and the staff for all their hard work and efforts.

On Behalf of the Board of Directors.

Rashid bin Saif Al Saadi
Chairman

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION
AT 31 DECEMBER 2020

	2020 RO'000	2019 RO'000
ASSETS		
Cash and bank balances	2,412	3,882
Net investment in finance leases, working capital finance and factoring receivables	170,154	182,169
Other receivables and prepayments	441	456
Financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income	-	-
Deferred tax asset – net	88	1,016
Vehicles, equipment and right-of-use assets	771	922
Statutory deposit	250	250
Total assets	174,116	188,695
LIABILITIES AND EQUITY		
LIABILITIES		
Creditors, accruals and other liabilities	2,480	2,038
Bank overdrafts and short-term loans	65,496	62,520
Unsecured non-convertible bonds	-	6,183
Tax payable	377	1,605
Corporate and security deposits	8,645	10,251
Long-term loans	55,314	64,335
Total liabilities	132,312	146,932
EQUITY		
Share capital	25,359	25,359
Legal reserve	5,141	4,934
IFRS 9 impairment reserve	2,222	-
Fair value reserve	(441)	(441)
Retained earnings	9,523	11,911
Total equity	41,804	41,763
Total equity and liabilities	174,116	188,695
Customers liabilities under guarantees	-	368
Net assets per share (baizas)	165	165

STATEMENT OF PROFIT OR LOSS AND OTHER
COMPREHENSIVE INCOME
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2020

	2020 RO'000	2019 RO'000
Income		
Finance income	16,802	18,295
Interest expense	(8,426)	(7,759)
Net finance income	8,376	10,536
Other operating income	1,035	1,563
	9,411	12,099
Expenses		
Operating expenses	(4,506)	(4,523)
Depreciation	(419)	(354)
Impairment in net investment in finance leases, working capital finance and factoring receivables	(2,021)	(2,553)
	(6,946)	(7,430)
Profit before taxation	2,465	4,669
Taxation	(395)	(866)
Profit for the year	2,070	3,803
Other comprehensive income:		
<i>Items that will not be reclassified to profit or loss</i>		
Changes in fair value of financial assets at fair value through other comprehensive income – net of tax	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	2,070	3,803

Note: The above financial results and proposed cash dividends for the year ended 31st December 2020 are subject to approval of the Central Bank of Oman and the shareholders of the Company.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS IN RELATION TO
Cleaning and Housekeeping Services

The Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC (OPWP), a member of Nama Group, is responsible for procuring new capacity for power and water in the Sultanate of Oman in accordance with the requirements of the law for the regulation and privatisation of the electricity and related water sector promulgated by Royal Decree 2004/78 as amended and the OPWP licence.

Tender Description	OPWP invites bidders to participate in Tender relating to "Cleaning and Housekeeping Services" for its office premises situated at Muscat Grand Mall
Tender Number	2/2021
Tender Purchase Period	9 March to 23 March 2021
Tender Fee	RO 50
Submission date	18 April before 11:30 AM hrs (Muscat Time)
Collection & Payment Methods	The tender documents will be provided in electronic format upon evidence of payment. The payment can be processed by local/international bank transfer and evidence of the bank transfer submitted by email to the procurement officer through procurement.officer@Omanpwp.nama.om
Bank Guarantee	A bank guarantee or a certified cheque of RO 200 shall be enclosed as part of the bid. The bank guarantee must be valid for 120 days from the bid submission date.

Bank account details:
Local Bank account details:
Account Name: Oman Power & Water Procurement Company SAOC
Beneficiary Bank: Bank Muscat
Branch: Corporate
Account number: 0423011072740015
Swift code: BMUSOMRXXXXX

International Bank details:
Correspondent Bank: JP Morgan Chase Bank, New York
Address: 4 New York Plaza, Floor 15, New York
ABA No. 000021 021
Chips No. CP0002
SWIFT Code: BMUSOMRXXXXX
Beneficiary Bank: Bank Muscat
Beneficiary Name: Oman Power and Water Procurement Company SAOC
Beneficiary Bank Account No: 0423011072740015

Oman Power And Water Procurement Co. S.A.O.C.
5th Floor, Building 5, Muscat Grand Mall, Tilal Complex (Office)
P.O. Box 1388, Postal Code 112, Sultanate of Oman Ruwi.
Tel.: 8400 2450 968+ | Fax: 9946 2439 968+ | www.omanpwp.com

Sky is not the limit...

The world celebrated the women on earth on March 8. Across the globe in various countries women of all walks would have taken a moment to enjoy and others wondering what the joy is all about. After all it was the challenge of being a woman that was faced once upon a time that brought about this day.

This year's theme of International Women's Day is #ChooseToChallenge. It indicates that a "challenged world is an alert world, and from challenge comes change".

It is hard to exist without challenges but we can improve ourselves constantly to prepare ourselves to face the difficulties. It all eventually adds up to be part of our experience.

In one of the interviews with the late Shaikh Khalfan al Esry, Life Coach and Islamic Scholar, he said to me that to overcome challenges all we have to do is to accept the situation and the solutions will follow. But most of the time we are so busy channelling all our energy on complaining about the situation that we neither have the energy nor the time to think and act upon the solutions. "Accept the problem, suddenly you will notice it has become small", he had said.

Circumstances might make one



Lakshmi Kothaneth
lakshmiobserver@gmail.com

IT IS HARD TO
EXIST WITHOUT
CHALLENGES BUT
WE CAN IMPROVE
OURSELVES
CONSTANTLY
TO PREPARE
OURSELVES
TO FACE THE
DIFFICULTIES

a victim, but the important factor is to get up and create a new identity for oneself first. It might be a difficult journey of healing but that is where it helps. Accept that there is a problem and you will have enough solutions and inspirations to move on.

The limitations for women in the modern world need only exist in her mind. The sky is not the limit. Today women have gone beyond the sky and onto the space, but what can limit us is the boundary of our mind some of it could have been created by the upbringing — family and the society.

One cannot remain to be a victim because life is not about existing but it is also about thriving and enjoying the very gift of existence. The more one continues to be in the victim syndrome the more opportunities are lost. The true faith is when we believe in a better tomorrow. Somewhere in life we tend to lose the excitement of being alive going through mundane moments day after day.

On the occasion of the International Women's Day on Note It, a programme from *Oman Daily Observer* (on the social media) we spoke to Dr Amira Raidan, Head of Mental Health, Non-Communicable Diseases Department at the Ministry of Health, and this

is what she had to say — break the routine and have the resilience to adapt new ways and means. Boost your energy she says and thoughts alone will not do, ensure that you eat the right food, exercise, become part of group activities. Take time to recharge and reset goals.

Maybe holidays are not just for travelling to holiday destinations but actually to travel to the most beautiful place in each of our lives — our mind. It is each individual's right to have peace in their life and it can only be possible if the mind is happy. Dr Amira urged to move away from negative friends, because it is easy to lose ourselves but to bring ourselves up takes effort.

Interestingly she said compliment others and it is a lovely thought because not only are you making the other person feel appreciated, but you also are able to learn from them through observation at the same time have you noticed the happiness experienced when we compliment others?

Most importantly let us accept ourselves and not reject who we are. If your aims are high do not feel dejected let us develop ourselves to reach there.

The best gifts to give and take are respect and dignity.

WRITE FOR US

Oman Daily Observer welcomes original contributions for publication in its opinion page. The newspaper reserves the right to publish or edit the article accordingly. The article's length must not exceed 550 words. Please send the articles to opinion@omanobserver.om

FEARS FOR PRIVACY

Row as Delhi schools install facial recognition

RINA CHANDRAN

Facial recognition technologies installed in at least a dozen government-funded schools in Delhi are an "overreach" by Indian authorities and an invasion of children's privacy, digital rights advocates said.

The move to introduce facial recognition technology follows a 2019 decision by the Delhi city government to mount closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras in more than 700 public schools to ensure the safety of students.

The facial recognition systems are being installed without laws to regulate the collection and use of data, which is particularly worrying for children,

said Anushka Jain, an associate counsel at Internet Freedom Foundation, a digital rights group that became aware of the rollout last week. "CCTV is already a violation of children's privacy, even though some parents had supported it for the safety of their children... but the use of facial recognition technology is an overreach and is completely unjustified", Jain said. "Its use for

CCTV is already a violation of children's privacy, even though some parents had supported it for the safety of their children... but the use of facial recognition technology is an overreach and is completely unjustified

ANUSHKA JAIN
An associate counsel

children is particularly problematic because the accuracy rate is so low — so in the event of a crime, you could have children being misidentified", she said.

Parents were unlikely to be aware of the risks related to potential data breaches and misuse, she added. Facial recognition technology is being increasingly deployed in airports, railway stations and cafes across India, with plans for a nationwide system to modernise the police force and its information gathering and criminal identification processes.

But analysts say its benefits are not clear, and that it could breach people's privacy or lead to greater surveillance, with few safeguards and little clarity on how the technology works, how the data is stored, and who can access it.

A personal data protection law is being drafted by Indian lawmakers.

Delhi authorities did not respond to requests for comment, but previously said that CCTV had reduced truancy in schools. "CCTV in schools is extremely important to ensure safety of students and bring transparency and accountability in the system", Arvind Kejriwal, Chief Minister of Delhi, said at the time.

Facial recognition systems are often rolled out without a privacy policy or consent from guardians to collect and process the data of minors, said Prasanth Sugathan, Legal Director at Software Freedom Law Centre, a digital rights nonprofit. — Thomson Reuters Foundation

A CULTURAL SHIFT

Madam president? Most Americans think a woman could reach White House by 2030

SONIA ELKS

More than 90 per cent of Americans think the United States could have its first woman president within a decade, a poll showed on Monday, as Vice-President Kamala Harris is increasingly tipped as favourite for the Democratic Party nomination in 2024.

A Gallup poll conducted in 74 countries showed Americans were the most likely to say they thought a woman could lead their nation by 2030.

The majority of respondents in only three countries — Mauritania, Belarus and Sri Lanka — said they did not expect to see a woman leader in the years ahead, found the poll conducted from 2019 to 2020 and released for International Women's Day.

Women serve as heads of state or government in only 22 countries and 119 nations have never had a woman leader, UN Women data showed in January, while on average women hold just over a quarter of seats in parliaments worldwide.

But Harris's election as the first female US vice-president last year was a significant boost for efforts to boost women's political representation and help young women see themselves in top jobs, according to campaigners.

"We all believe (Harris) is going to run for president again very, very soon", said Sara Guillermo, Executive Director of California-based young women's political leadership organisation IGNITE, describing Harris's election as a "huge cultural shift".

"That is really huge, not just for the little girls of the world but for the little



US Vice-President Kamala Harris pauses as she delivers remarks at the House Democratic Issues Conference in the South Court Auditorium of the White House in Washington, DC. — AFP

A GALLUP POLL
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LEAD THEIR NATION
BY 2030

boys, to be able to fully understand that both genders can serve in the highest leadership role", she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation in a video call.

Harris, 56, who also made history by becoming the first Black American and first Asian American to win the second highest US office, is seen as an obvious contender for her party's 2024 candidacy should Biden, 78, decide not to run.

Monday's poll findings follow a warning last week that despite recent high-profile appointments of women globally, wider progress towards equality in political representation and

other key areas is faltering.

A report by the Equal Measures 2030 partnership found half of the 129 countries it examined were lagging behind a target to reach gender equality by 2030 in five key areas including ministerial roles and workplace equity laws.

Progress is "limping along" globally but "rapid change on gender equality is possible", said Alison Holder, Director of the organisation, which assesses progress on an ambitious set of global goals against inequality set by world leaders in 2015.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

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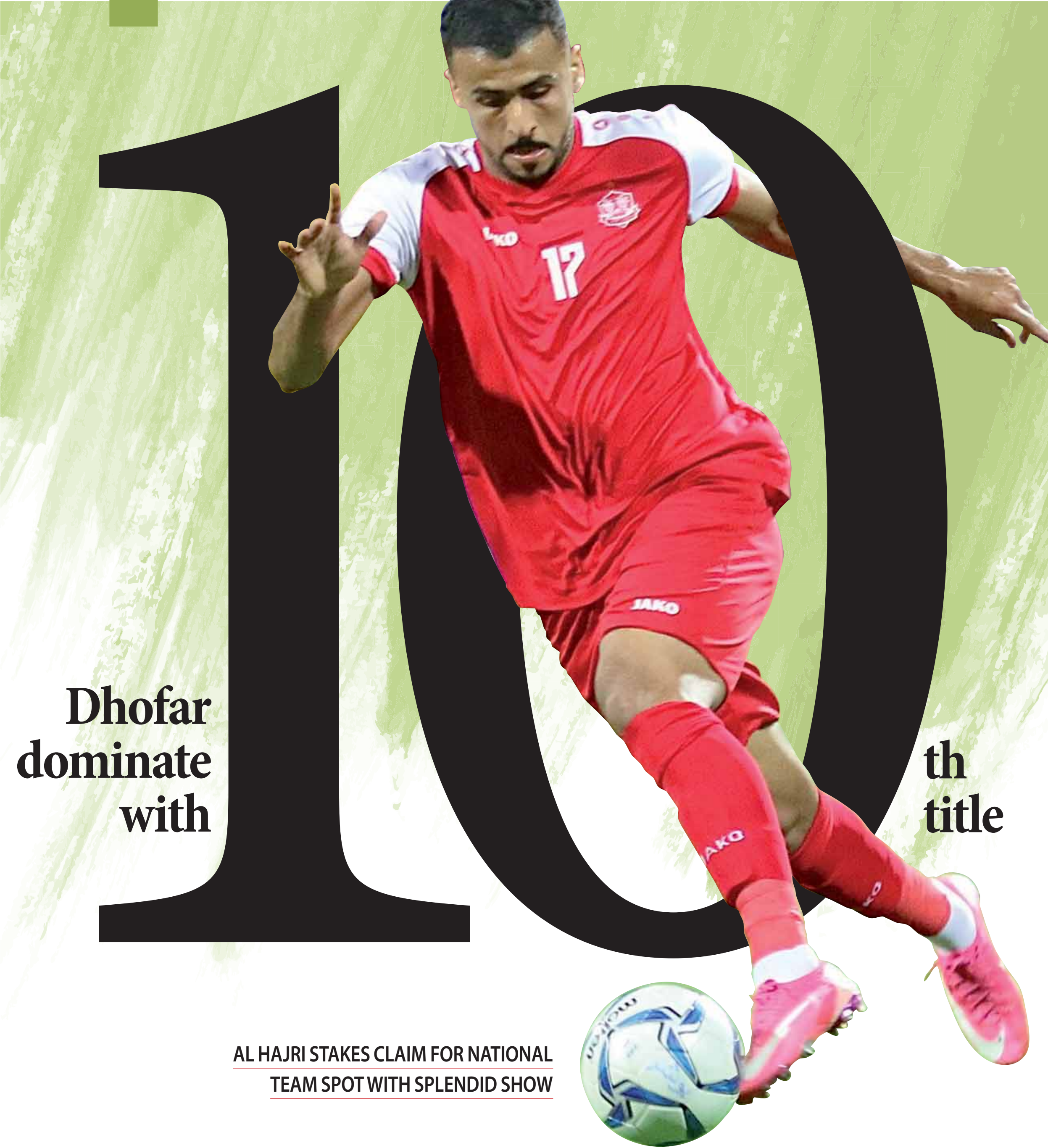
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AL HAJRI STAKES CLAIM FOR NATIONAL
TEAM SPOT WITH SPLENDID SHOW

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

Dhofar cemented their domination in the domestic football events as they lifted the historic 10th title by winning the HM Cup football championship 2020-21. The well-deserved victory made after coach Rasheed Jaber’s men thrashed Al Suwaiq 5-1 in the final at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Sunday night. Dhofar did not face any challenge from opponents Al Suwaiq as they cruised for an easy win. Khalid al Hajri was man of the match as he netted three goals besides to Lawsen Bikai and Yaseen al Shaikh goals.

Al Hajri tweeted from his personal twitter account: ”Thanks to God for the 10th title and it is

first for me personally.”

After his top show on Sunday night, Al Hajri has made his stake high for a national team place.

The striker will be keenly monitored by national team head coach Branko Ivankovic during the Oman team camp which will begin in Muscat on Tuesday.

Due to his unstable health condition, Dhofar Chairman Shaikh Ali bin Ahmed al Rawas did not attend the final match and Abubaker Naji, deputy chairman, was present for the podium ceremony. The players, administration and technical coaching staff dedicated their victory to Al Rawas wishing him a quick recovery.

HISTORIC MOMENT
Naji affirmed that it was a historic

moment for the team to lift the coveted cup two times within four months. “Like everyone, I didn’t expect us to win the match with such a good margin. Our players delivered very high level performance and controlled the proceedings. In Dhofar club, we are not only having nine players from the national team but our substitution list featured top players as well. After this accomplishment, our plan is to focus in the league competition,” he ended.

Dhofar’s celebration were muted in Salalah city due to the ongoing situation of pandemic.

Dhofar media center had announced in twitter account that gathering of crowds are not allowed to celebrate due to the restrictions over Covid-19.

Coach Jaber, said that retaining the title was as an internal challenge for the team since beginning of the season. “We managed to handle this challenge successfully despite many difficulties. Dhofar won the title after superiority on the ground and Al Suwaiq is a well-organised team but due to some technical mistakes the team could not make come back into the match. I believe third goal was the turning point in the match when Al Suwaiq players dropped back and we benefited to score fourth and fifth goals,” the coach added.

TECHNICAL DIFFERENCE
Iraqi coach Hakeem Shaker clarified the reasons for the defeat. “There were huge technical differences between

Dhofar and Al Suwaiq players. In addition to that, the Salalah giants were prepared nicely with full coordination of players and that showed in the final,” Shaker said.

Al Suwaiq’ coach said he tried to reduce gaps in the defence but individual mistakes cost the team a lot. “The second and third goals came from blunders by our players which converted the match totally to Dhofar side. Almost all the substitutions were due to necessary situations rather than tactical purpose,” the Iraqi coach added.

Fahad bin Abdullah al Raisi, newly-appointed Secretary-General and Executive Director of OFA, affirmed that the match was organised under strict medical protocols and according to the instructions of the

Supreme Committee.

MEDICAL PROTOCOL
“We were very keen to implement all the medical protocol measures through minimising number of attendees, applying the social distancing, following the personal protective measures including wearing face masks. I would like to thank all the attendees for following the medical procedures to ensure safety of everyone,” he said.

Al Raisi said the medal ceremony did not last for long and it was very simple. “Congratulations to Dhofar team and hard luck for Al Suwaiq team. Special thanks to both teams for their understanding and adherence to all the rules and regulations,” he ended.



'England may stick with rotation and rest players for Ashes'

England are likely to continue rotating players, including in the Ashes series against Australia that begins at the end of the year, to manage their workload, coach Chris Silverwood said on Sunday. England rigidly stuck to their policy during their 3-1 series defeat by India, opting to rest multi-format players.



CAS reduces Ahmad's football ban to two years

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Monday announced that former African football boss Ahmad Ahmad's five-year ban imposed by Fifa has been reduced to two years, just days before the CAF presidential elections. The decision ends any hopes the Malagasy had of running for another term as president.

NZ PRIMED FOR TWO TILTS AT ELUSIVE WORLD GLORY



WELLINGTON: New Zealand beat Australia in the Twenty20 series to maintain their perfect home season on Sunday in a timely boost for Kane Williamson's team who will get two opportunities this year to shed their status as the game's perennial bridesmaids.

The Black Caps shuffled their batting order, showed faith in part-time bowlers, and displayed tactical flexibility to prevail 3-2 over Australia and make it five wins from as many home series this season.

The win is all the more significant because they will be chasing their maiden Twenty20 World Cup title in India later this year. New Zealand have

The Black Caps shuffled their batting order, showed faith in part-time bowlers, and displayed tactical flexibility to prevail 3-2 over Australia and make it five wins from as many home series this season

never won a major global title, losing the last two 50-over World Cup finals and never reaching the World Twenty20 final.

Eight players, including Williamson, are set to miss the home Twenty20 series against Bangladesh to play in the Indian Premier League (IPL) which begins on April 9.

The team hope to benefit from their experience and head coach Gary Stead believes the forced rejigging will give

him a better idea of their strength in depth ahead of the World Cup.

"If it works out that there will be some players that we don't play because they're going to the IPL, the good thing for us is you're considering who might be in an extended squad that goes to the World Cup," Stead told www.stuff.co.nz.

New Zealand Cricket is hopeful the top players can jump the queue and receive COVID-19 vaccines before

leaving for India and later England, the website said.

Williamson's team will also be competing for the highest honour in the game's longest format having reached the final of the inaugural World Test Championship against India in June.

New Zealand will return to England two years after losing the 2019 ODI World Cup on boundary count after a Super Over in an extraordinary tied final against the hosts at Lord's.

A two-Test series against England should be a perfect preparation for the New Zealanders before they take on Virat Kohli's India in the WTC final at the home of cricket starting on June 18.

— Reuters

Zawawi, ARTT make winning start to T20 League

MUSCAT: Riding on Nishad K's excellent all-round show, Zawawi Powertech beat Awtad International by two wickets in A Division's T20 League game at OC Turf 2 in Amerat on Saturday.

Nishad was outstanding with the ball, taking 3 for 14 in his four-over spell, restricting Awtad to a modest 102 for 6 in 20 overs. Prabhakaran Kannan claimed 2 for 17.

Zawawi took a slow and steady route to victory, scoring 104 for 8 in 19.2 overs as Nishad top-scored with 33. Annermon Abdulrehman bagged 3 for 12.

ZEESHAN BOWLS ARTT TO VICTORY

Earlier in the morning, Zeeshan Siddiqui's 3 for 18 was the highlight of Arabian Region Travel and Tourism's (ARTT) exciting 6-run victory against Basta CT in another A Division T20 match at OC Turf 2.

ARTT posted 145 for 8 on the board, Bilal Asim top-scoring with 28 and Pranav Mehta contributing 23. Najeeb Shaheer claimed 3 for 25 while Shahid mehmood took 2 for 16.



Zeeshan Siddiqui of ARTT

Basta paid the price for batting slowly, leaving itself an improbable task of scoring 30 off the final over. However, Malik Alikhan (24 not out off 10 balls) brought it within 6 runs of victory before Basta ran out of overs, scoring 139 for 9. Chirag was its main scorer with a fine 50. Zeeshan was the pick of ARTT bowlers with a three-wicket haul while veteran Ahmed Khan took 2 for 21.

SULTAN STARS IN E&Y WIN

Sultan Ahmed's outstanding all-round performance powered Ernst and Young to a sensational one-run win over ACT in an A Division 50-over League game at OC Turf 2 on Friday.

Sultan and Alkesh Joshi bowled exceptionally well, taking three wickets each as ACT was dismissed for 225 in the 38th over. Opener Hafiz Irfan top-scored with 71-ball 86. Sultan led the chase with a solid 54 whereas Shahid Naseem struck 45 as E&Y chased down the total with two balls to spare, scoring 226 for 9. Rajesh Devashya, Muhammed Zeeshan and Toseef Ul Hassan all bagged two wickets each.

Allen cameo helps Windies clinch T20 series



Fabian Allen (R) of West Indies hitting the winning runs in Osbourn, Antigua and Barbuda. — AFP

ANTIGUA: Spin all-rounder Fabian Allen smashed 21 off six balls to help West Indies beat Sri Lanka by three wickets and complete a 2-1 Twenty20 International series victory in Antigua on Sunday.

Allen had already claimed 1-13 from his four tidy overs, helping restrict Sri Lanka to a modest 131-4 in the third

match at the Coolidge Cricket Ground.

Sri Lanka elected to bat but were reduced to 47-4 at the halfway stage, raising some doubt as to whether they could bat out their full quota of 20 overs. Dinesh Chandimal made 54 not out and Ashen Bandara remained unbeaten on 44 to help them to a competitive total on a slow track. Reigning Twenty20 world

champions West Indies started well but the Sri Lankan spinners refused to throw in the towel. Wanindu Hasaranga dismissed Evin Lewis and Lendl Simmons in his successive overs to put pressure on the hosts, who slumped to 105-7 in the 17th over.

Needing 20 off 12 balls, Allen smashed Akila Dananjaya for three

sixes to secure their victory with an over to spare. Dananjaya had claimed a hat-trick in the first match before being smacked for six sixes in an over by West Indies captain Kieron Pollard.

The teams will meet again in a three-match one-day series from Wednesday which will be followed by two Tests.

— Reuters

SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA	
D Gunathilaka c & b Allen	9
P Nissanka c Sinclair b Holder	5
N Dickwella c Holder b Sinclair	4
D Chandimal (not out)	54
A Mathews c Pooran b McCoy	11
A Bandara (not out)	44
Extras (LB-1, W-3)	4
Total (for 4 wkts, 20 overs)	131
Fall of wickets: 1-10, 2-15, 3-27, 4-46	
Bowling: Allen 4-0-13-1, Sinclair 2-0-19-1, Holder 4-0-27-1, Pollard 2-0-11-0, McCoy 4-0-29-1, Bravo 4-0-31-0	
WEST INDIES	
L Simmons st Dickwella b Hasaranga	26
E Lewis lbw Hasaranga	21
C Gayle b Sandakan	13
K Pollard c Dickwella b Chameera	0
N Pooran b Chameera	23
J Holder (not out)	14
R Powell b Sandakan	7
D Bravo c Dananjaya b Sandakan	0
F Allen (not out)	21
Extras (LB-5, NB-1, W-3)	9
Total (for 7 wkts, 19 overs)	134
Fall of wickets: 1-37, 2-54, 3-61, 4-75, 5-95, 6-105, 7-105	

BRIEF SCORES

A DIVISION T20 LEAGUE

Awtad International 102 for 6 in 20 overs (Nobish Kattileparambu 29 - 3x4, Nishad K 3-14, Prabhakaran Kannan 2-17) lost to Zawawi Powertech 104 for 8 in 19.2 overs (Nishad K 33 - 1x4, 1x6, Kalairasan Natarajan 29 - 2x4, 2x6, Aneermon Abdulrahman 3-12, Muhammed Waqas 2-22) by 2 wickets.

ARTT 145 for 8 in 20 overs (Bilal Asim 28 - 4x4, Najeeb Shaheer 3-25, Shahid Mehmood 2-16) beat Basta CT 139 for 9 in 20 overs (Chirag 50 - 3x4, 3x6, Zeeshan Siddiqui 3-18, Mohammed Ahmed 2-21) by 6 runs.

A DIVISION 50-OVER LEAGUE

ACT 225 all out in 37.2 overs (Hafiz Irfan 86 - 11x4, 3x6, Alkesh Joshi 3-38, Sultan Ahmed 3-40, Rana Zeeshan 2-55) lost to Ernst & Young 226 for 9 in 49.4 overs (Sultan Ahmed 54 - 3x4, Shahid Naseem 45 - 4x4, Rajesh Devashya 2-35, Muhammed Zeeshan 2-44, Toseef Ul Hassan 2-49) by 1 wicket.

F DIVISION T20 LEAGUE

KCA Deutag 121 for 6 in 20 overs (Khalid Balushi 31 - 2x4, Sufiyan Muhammed 3-16, Yasir Jamal 2-19) lost to Israr Ghala 122 for 3 in 13.4 overs (Ahmed Tahir 44 - 5x4, Sagheer Muhammad 29 - 1x3, 3x6, Haneef Muhammad 2-22) by 7 wickets.

BSI CT 136 for 7 in 20 overs (Usman Siddique 32 - 5x4, Mohammad Ali 2-21) lost to ACT Cricworld 137 for 9 in 19.5 overs (Mohammed Ali 86 - 11x4, 2x6, Saud Haroon 4-13, Dravin Shetty 3-15) by 1 wicket.



UNITED END CITY WIN SPREE

ANDY JALIL
MANCHESTER, MARCH 8

Manchester United's performance was a masterclass in defence and counter-attacking in their 2-0 win over their biggest rivals Manchester City. It took their unbeaten run to 22 in Premier League away matches and ended City's impressive sequence of 28 unbeaten matches in all competitions including 21 successive wins which also has them leading the league table by 11 points.

United manager, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, praised his team: "We've improved massively, we're more robust and resilient, and there is more personality in the team — that is what I like. We need to improve on so many things to get our consistency better. We need to be a better Man United than we were 16 months ago.

He added: "I thought we defended really well and we were more like ourselves with the ball attacking-wise. City are so far ahead you can't really think about anything but making sure we win our games and be better than last year. We were third last season, so we want to move up the table, of course."

United went into the lead as early as the second minute with a penalty when within 40 seconds of the start Gabriel Jesus, who had lost possession of the ball in midfield, came into the box and sent Anthony Martial sprawling. Bruno

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE TABLE AFTER SUNDAY'S MATCHES (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):												
Man City	28	20	5	3	56	19	65					
Man Utd	28	15	9	4	55	32	54					
Leicester	28	16	5	7	48	32	53					
Chelsea	27	13	8	6	42	25	47					
Everton	26	14	4	8	39	33	46					
Tottenham	27	13	6	8	46	28	45					
West Ham	26	13	6	7	40	31	45					
Liverpool	28	12	7	9	47	36	43					
Aston Villa	26	12	4	10	38	27	40					
Arsenal	27	11	5	11	35	28	38					
Leeds	26	11	2	13	43	44	35					
Wolves	28	9	8	11	28	37	35					
Crystal Palace	28	9	7	12	30	47	34					
Southampton	27	9	6	12	33	44	33					
Burnley	28	7	9	12	20	36	30					
Newcastle	27	7	6	14	27	44	27					
Brighton	27	5	11	11	27	35	26					
Fulham	28	5	11	12	22	33	26					
West Brom	28	3	9	16	20	56	18					
Sheffield Utd	28	4	2	22	16	45	14					
ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS ON SUNDAY:												
Liverpool 0 Fulham 1 (Lemina 45)												
Manchester City 0 Manchester United 2 (Fernandes 2-pen, Shaw 50)												
Tottenham 4 (Bale 25, 49, Kane 52, 77)												
Crystal Palace 1 (Benteke 45+1)												
West Brom 0 Newcastle 0												
ON SATURDAY												
Burnley 1 (Wood 39) Arsenal 1 (Aubameyang 6)												
Sheffield United 0 Southampton 2 (Ward-Prowse 32-pen, Adams 49)												
Aston Villa 0 Wolves 0												
Brighton 1 (Lallana 10) Leicester 2 (Iheanacho 62, Amartey 87)												

Fernandes placed the spot kick to the left of Ederson who got a hand to it but the

shot was firmly struck.

City missed chances, the best of which came to Raheem Sterling who missed his kick from a good position and Ilkay Gundogan shot wide tamely. United kept defending well and Dean Henderson in goal, in place of David De Gea — on paternity leave in Spain — looked safe.

Within two minutes of the start of second half, City could have equalised but Rodri's shot hit the bar after a clever build-up between Riyad Mahrez and Jesus. But just three minutes later, United again got an early goal, as they did in the first half.

Henderson's long throw located Luke Shaw who raced passed two defenders and exchanged passes with Marcus Rashford before striking a low shot inside the far post. In the later stages Jesus put a shot wide and Sterling missed after a pass from Kyle Walker with United's defence remaining solid.

A disappointed City manager, Pep Guardiola, said: "We will be in the news because we lost but the news is 21 victories in a row. The result is going to help us a lot to understand how difficult it is. It's a lesson in football everything can happen. Congratulations to United." He added: "We need six or seven victories from 10 games. It's in our hands. Our opponents have to win all their games and we have to lose four or five. We have to start to win again."



AC Milan's defender Diogo Dalot celebrates after scoring with Rafael Leao (left) during the Serie A match in Verona. — AFP

Milan close gap on Inter with win over Verona

MILAN: Rade Krunic and Diogo Dalot scored in either half as AC Milan beat Hellas Verona 2-0 to close the gap on Serie A leaders Inter before next week's Europa League trip to Manchester United.

Krunic curled in a free-kick after 27 minutes with Manchester United loanee Dalot doubling the visitors' account five minutes after the break to pull Milan three points behind Inter, who host in-form Atalanta on Monday.

Champions Juventus are four points behind Milan in third, with a game in hand, after claiming their seventh straight win at home, 3-1 against Lazio on Saturday.

Despite the absence of key players including star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, winger Ante Rebic and defender Theo Hernandez, Milan kept the pressure on their city rivals two weeks after their 3-0 derby defeat.

Ibrahimovic, who has scored 14 goals in as many league games for the club, joined the team at Verona despite a leg muscle problem. "Today we've shown that we are there, that we are a team and still believe," said coach Stefano Pioli.

"We are stronger when we're all together, but we're also strong with absences.

"Ibrahimovic arrived before the game, followed the technical meeting, and helped to stimulate us as great champions do. He is a pack leader."

Rafael Leao started up front in Ibrahimovic's absence, and the Portuguese forward threatened after quarter of an hour with a header which went over the bar.

The breakthrough came when Krunic was brought down just outside the box. The Bosnian midfielder dusted himself down and whipped a free-kick past a stunned Marco Silvestri from a tricky angle for his first league goal in Milan colours.

Defender Dalot also got off the mark in Serie A four minutes after the break, blasting in an Alexis Saelemaekers cross.

Milan took a valuable three points before they travel to Manchester for the first leg of their Europa League last 16 tie with United before hosting

Napoli in the league next weekend.

Verona, in eighth, fell to their first home defeat since losing to Inter before Christmas.

INSIGNE DOUBLE
LIFTS NAPOLI

Roma moved up to fourth, one point ahead of fifth-placed Atalanta thanks to a Gianluca Mancini goal, ahead of their Europa League tie against Shakhtar Donetsk in Rome.

Champions Juventus are four points behind Milan in third, with a game in hand, after claiming their seventh straight win at home 3-1 against Lazio on Saturday

Mancini jumped highest to turn in a Lorenzo Pellegrini corner after 24 minutes at the Stadio Olimpico, beating second choice goalkeeper Federico Marchetti who replaced Mattia Perrin. Roma sit nine points behind Inter after the win.

"One more step is missing to beat the big teams, we need to improve because something more is needed to reach the Champions League," said Mancini.

In Naples, Lorenzo Insigne scored twice with Victor Osimhen adding a third as Napoli consolidated sixth place, three points off the Champions League berths, with a 3-1 win over Bologna. — AFP

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS ON SUNDAY:

AS Roma 1 (Mancini 24) Genoa 0
Florentina 3 (Martinez Quarta 28, Milenkovic 42, Iacopini 90+4-og)
Parma 3 (Kucka 32-pen, Kurtic 72, Mihaila 90)
Hellas Verona 0 AC Milan 2 (Krunic 27, Dalot 50)
Crotone 4 (Simy 27-pen, 54, Rea 80, Ounas 90+4) Torino 2 (Mandragora 45, Sanabria 84)
Sampdoria 2 (Bereszynski 78, Gabbiadini 80) Cagliari 2 (Joao Pedro 11, Nainggolan 90+6)
Napoli 3 (Insigne 8, 76, Osimhen 65)
Bologna 1 (Soriano 73)

business

MUSCAT
STOCK
MARKET

3,667.71

CRUDE
OIL PRICE

Oman Crude \$68.35

Brent Crude \$70.56

Light Crude \$66.31

0

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TOTAL WEEKLY PRIZES
Oman Rial 171,600

TOTAL MONTHLY PRIZES
Oman Rial 343,200

TOTAL MID-YEAR PRIZES
Oman Rial 16,000

TOTAL NATIONAL DAY PRIZES
Oman Rial 55,000

TOTAL PRIZES FOR LADIES
Oman Rial 11,000

TOTAL MEGA PRIZES
Oman Rial 112,000

Oman’s crude benchmark surges to \$68.35/barrel

New triggers: Brent crude futures climbed above \$70 a barrel on Monday for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic began, while US crude touched its highest in more than two years, following reports of attacks on Saudi Aramco’s giant facilities

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

Oman’s benchmark crude oil futures contract soared to \$68.35 per barrel on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) on Monday in trend with spikes reported by other global benchmarks propelled by reports of drone attacks on Saudi



Flames burn off at an oil facility in Saudi Aramco’s oilfield in Rub Al-Khali desert in Shaybah, Saudi Arabia. – Reuters

oil facilities. The Omani benchmark gained \$1.94 per barrel to settle at \$68.35, a figure last seen in January 2020. It came on the back of an earlier spike on Thursday when the Opec+ alliance of global producers, which includes the Sultanate, agreed to roll over production curbs into April 2021. Brent crude futures climbed above \$70 a barrel on Monday for the first time since the pandemic began, while US crude touched its highest in more than two years, following reports of attacks on Saudi Aramco’s giant facilities. Brent crude futures for May hit \$71.38 a barrel in early Asian trade, the highest since January 8, 2020, and were at \$70.56 a barrel by 0730 GMT, up \$1.20, or 1.7 per cent. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude for April rose \$1.08, or 1.6 per cent, to \$67.17. The front-month WTI price touched \$67.98 a barrel earlier, the highest since October 2018. Asian stocks also rose after the US Senate approved a \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill while positive economic data from the United States and China bode well for a global economic rebound. Yemen’s Houthi forces fired drones and missiles at the heart of Saudi Arabia’s oil industry on Sunday, including a Saudi Aramco facility at Ras Tanura vital to petroleum exports, in what Riyadh called a failed assault on global energy security. “We could see further upside in the market in the near-term, particularly as the market probably now needs to be pricing in some sort of risk premium, with these attacks picking up in frequency,” ING analysts said. (With inputs from Reuters)

Oman’s first private power firm prepares for liquidation

Sectoral milestone: When it commenced operations in 1996, Manah power project set up by United Power Company became the Middle East’s first privately funded and operated power plant

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

United Power Company (UPC), which set up the Sultanate’s first privately funded and developed at Manah in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate back in 1996, is preparing to delist from the Muscat Stock Exchange ahead of its formal liquidation. It comes as the company – a pioneer in Oman’s electricity sector and indeed the wider Middle East region – approaches the end of its contractual obligations upon the expiry of its power generation license. When it brought into operation a modest-sized 90 MW power plant in September 1996, UPC made history in the region as the first private company to finance, develop, operate and maintain an electricity generation facility as an Independent Power Project (IPP). Output from the plant was supplied to the erstwhile Ministry of Electricity and Water under a 20-year Power Purchase Agreement (PPA). Three years later, additional capacity of 180 MW was added to the site, with its output covered by a separate 20-year Supplemental Agreement to the PPA. This second phase was launched in May 2000.

TENDER
ANNOUNCEMENT

Tender No. (2/2021)
Job Skill Enhancement Programme (Khibrat)

Ministry of Labour announces its has extended the period of purchase and bid submission for the abovementioned tender according to the dates mentioned in the below table:

	Previous dates	New dates
Last date of electronic purchase	2/3/2021	15/3/2021
Period of inquiries	From 24/2/2021 to 4/3/2021	From 5/3/2021 to 17/3/2021
Last date of bid submission	10/3/2021 10:00 am	23/3/2021 10:00 am
Time to open envelops	11:00 am	

labour_OMAN

Invitation from Bank Muscat (S.A.O.G)
For an Extraordinary General Meeting and an Annual Ordinary General Meeting of the Shareholders of the Bank

Bank Muscat “SAOG” takes pleasure in inviting all its shareholders to an Extraordinary General Meeting and an Annual Ordinary General Meeting at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, 23rd March, 2021, through the electronic platform to hold the general meetings, which you can access via the Muscat Clearing and Depository’s website (www.mcd.gov.om). If the quorum is not met to hold this meeting, a second meeting will be held at 4:00 p.m. on Thursday, 25th March, 2021 through the above mentioned electronic platform, to consider and decide on the following Agenda:

First: The Agenda for the Extraordinary General Meeting:

To consider and approve the proposed increase of the authorized share capital of the Bank from RO. 350,000,000/- to RO. 450,000,000/- and amend the Articles of Association accordingly.

Second: The Agenda for the Annual Ordinary General Meeting:

1. To consider and approve the Report of the Board of Directors for the financial year ended 31st December, 2020.

2. To consider and approve the Report on Corporate Governance for the financial year ended 31st December, 2020.

3. To consider the Auditor’s Report and approval of the Balance Sheet and Profit and Loss Accounts for the financial year ended 31st December, 2020.

4. To consider the report of the Shari’a Supervisory Board of Meethaq, the Islamic Banking window, for the financial year ended 31st December, 2020.

5. To consider and approve the recommendation to distribute cash dividend at the rate of (25%) of the issued share capital of the Bank (being 25 Baiza cash dividend for each share of a nominal value of 100 Baiza) for the financial year ended 31st December, 2020.

6. To consider and approve the recommendation to distribute stock dividend at the rate of (10%) per share of the issued share capital of the Bank (being 10 bonus shares for each 100 shares) for the financial year ended 31st December, 2020. The approval of the distribution of the bonus shares will result in the

increase of the issued share capital of the Bank from (3,249,522,539) shares to (3,574,474,792) shares of a nominal value of (100) Baiza each.

7. To consider and ratify the sitting fees for the Board of Directors and its committees’ meetings for the financial year ended 31st December-2020, and fix sitting fees for the current financial year.

8. To consider and approve the Board of Directors’ remuneration of RO. 150,000/- for the financial year ended 31st December, 2020.

9. To consider the Related Party Transactions for transactions concluded during the financial year ended 31st December, 2020.

10.To consider and approve the Related Party Transactions that will be concluded during the financial year ending 31st December, 2021.

11.To appoint the statutory auditors for the Bank and the external independent Sharia auditors for Meethaq, the Islamic banking window of the Bank, for the financial year ending 31st December, 2021 and fixing their fees, subject to the applicable regulatory approvals.

In accordance with the regulations for holding general meetings using modern technology issued by the Capital Market Authority, we would like to draw your attention to the following:

1. A Juristic person, exclusively, has the right to delegate a natural person to attend the general meetings and vote on its behalf through the electronic platform, provided that this natural person has an investor number at Muscat Clearing and Depository Company.

2. Voting on any of the agenda items begins no more than three days before the date of the meetings until the end of the voting process during the meeting. In the event that the shareholder’s shareholding balance is changed by increase or decrease, the voting process will be canceled, and he will have to vote again on the day of the meetings.

For any clarifications in respect of the agenda of the above meetings, please contact Ms. Fatma Malallah Mohamed Al Lawati, at the Secretariat to the Board of Directors, Tel. No. (24768345), Fax No. (24780062), E-mail (fmalallah@bankmuscat.com).

Khalid bin Mustahail Al Mashani
Chairman of the Board of Directors

Ernst & Young
Statutory Auditors of the Bank and
External Independent Sharia Auditors for
Meethaq, the Islamic banking window

Legal
Advisor

TURN TO P14

Global scams surrounding Covid-19 vaccines sales

Darknet operators: Covid-19 vaccines for sale on the underground for \$250 to \$1,200

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

The entire globe is currently undergoing one of the largest and most complex vaccination campaigns in history, and, not surprisingly, scammers and sellers on the dark market have been eager to make a profit off the process.

Researchers from cybersecurity services firm Kaspersky examined 15 different marketplaces

on the Darknet and found advertisements for three major Covid vaccines: Pfizer/BioNTech, AstraZeneca, and Moderna. There were also sellers advertising unverified “Covid-19” vaccines.

The majority of sellers came from France, Germany, the UK, and the USA, and the prices per dose ranged from \$250 to \$1,200, with an average cost of about \$500. Communications are made via encrypted messaging apps like Wickr and Telegram, while payments are requested in the form of cryptocurrency, primarily bitcoin.

The majority of these underground sellers have made between 100-500 transactions, indicating that they’ve been



completing sales but what exactly Darknet users are purchasing remains unclear.

With the information available to Kaspersky experts, it’s impossible to tell how many of the vaccines doses being advertised online are actual doses (many medical facilities have found themselves with leftover doses)

The majority of these underground sellers have made between 100-500 transactions, indicating that they’ve been completing sales but what exactly Darknet users are purchasing remains unclear.

and how many advertisements are a scam.

Even if you did receive something in the mail, most likely what you would receive would not be an effective, valid dose. More importantly, obtaining such doses is illegal, it warned.

“You can find just about anything on the Darknet, so it’s not surprising sellers there would attempt to capitalise on the vaccination campaign.

Over the past year, there have been a whole host of scams exploiting the Covid topic, and many of them have been successful.

Right now, not only are people selling vaccine doses, but they’re also selling vaccination records — pieces of paper that can help you travel freely. It’s important for users to be cautious of any “deal” related to the pandemic, and, of course, it’s never a good idea to buy a vaccine off the Darknet,” comments Dmitry Galov, security expert at Kaspersky.

Electronic system for licensing of health insurance TPAs



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 8

The Capital Market Authority launched an electronic system for licensing health insurance Third Party Administrators (TPAs).

The electronic system is part of the e-services series provided to the participants of the capital market and insurance sector through the CMA’s portal to create time saving channels for the participants coupled with best standards of quality.

The CMA now has 40 electronic services in the various sectors and the TPAs licensing system is the first in the electronic transformation plan of 2021. TPAs can now apply for registrations and renewal of licenses electronically.

The Authority had earlier issued licensing requirements for TPAs as a significant move to enhance the regulatory aspects of the health insurance sector in the Sultanate.

The best time to own a Lexus RX is now

MUSCAT: Customers looking forward to owning an RX must take advantage of the exclusive benefits that include free service 3 years / 30,000 kms and free registration (Conditions apply. Please visit your nearest Lexus showroom for details.)

The Lexus RX makes every drive power-packed with its choice of two powertrains. The RX 350 model comes with a 3.5-litre V6 petrol engine, which produces 296 HP and 37.7 Kg.M of torque and is paired to an eight-speed automatic transmission.

Meanwhile, the RX 450h hybrid variant is equipped with a 3.5-litre V6 petrol engine and two electric motors and produces a combined system output of 308 hp. The RX Hybrid is



available with a hybrid battery warranty of 8 years or 160,000 kms, whichever is earlier.

The Lexus RX 450h can be driven in EV drive mode to reduce noise while driving in residential areas and to reduce exhaust gas in indoor parking lots and garages or through

a combination of its petrol engine and two electric motors, depending on the vehicle’s speed and customer’s driving behaviour. The batteries in the hybrid electric drivetrain are automatically charged by either the petrol engine or when braking and decelerating, eliminating the need to plug in a power cord.

A host of advanced technologies ensure the RX 450h drives like any other conventional vehicle, while not requiring special fuel. As with any Lexus vehicle, safety is a top priority for the new RX.

For more information, please visit www.lexusoman.com or www.youtube.com/lexusoman or www.facebook.com/LexusOmanSBA or instagram.com/oman.lexus/.

Neswa: Specially designed for the modern woman



MUSCAT: Meethaq’s Neswa Savings Account is specially designed taking into account the requirements of women in the contemporary world.

It enhances their privacy and has several features that are tailor-made to meet their needs. Neswa account holders have access to a wide range of features, which include a Visa Debit Card with an ATM withdrawal limit of RO 800, access to the largest network of ATMs and CDMs across Oman, complimentary Takaful life cover up to RO 10,000, coverage up to RO 1,000 for loss of wallet or handbag resulting in misuse of cards and coverage up to RO 100 for loss of ID cards and keys. Account holders can also receive attractive indicative profit rates on their average monthly balance up to 1.50pc p.a. and are eligible for up to 50pc discount on the first year’s rental charge for safe deposit lockers.

All Omani and resident women above the age of 18 are eligible to open a Neswa savings account with a minimum balance amount of RO 300 or a minimum salary transfer of RO 500.

PRESS RELEASES

GET BONUS INTERNET WITH OOREDOO’S SHAHRY ENDLESS 15

Ensuring customers stay connected around the clock, Ooredoo’s Shahry Endless 15 now offers more value, and more fun, than ever before. The popular postpaid plan now includes 32GB of Internet of which 8GB is for social, in addition to an extra 1GB of roaming data and unlimited local calls, all for an amazing RO 15.

Customers can now have plenty of access to all their favourite apps like WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, YouTube, and Facebook, without eating into their regular data, it’s another way Ooredoo is enriching customers’ digital lives.

Ooredoo’s Shahry Endless plans offer greater benefits tailored to users digital needs. With never ending Internet, unlimited local voice and so much more, the contract-free plans offer the ultimate convenience, flexibility and fun.



RSM OMAN AND WTS DHRUVA CONSULTANTS COLLABORATE ON VAT SERVICES IN OMAN

To provide VAT implementation and related services to clients in Oman, RSM Oman has partnered with WTS Dhruva Consultants, UAE, which is a boutique tax services provider with extensive experience in VAT implementations across India, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

George Mathew, the Managing Partner of the firm said: “With VAT coming to Oman, it is essential to address the requirements of each of our clients and provide the best possible services, so that our clients are able to comply with Oman’s VAT laws. WTS Dhruva’s highly experienced consultants, working along with our tax consultants will bring the required knowledge and experience to serve our clients well.”

Nimish Goel, the Partner of WTS Dhruva Consultants, UAE, said: “This will be a highly strategic partnership where we, at WTS Dhruva Consultants, will bring our extensive VAT experience to Oman. Our market leading expertise in handling complex VAT implementations across the Middle East and GST implementations in India for varied sectors including real estate, retail, healthcare, construction, education and financial services enables us to provide a distinctive advantage to the businesses we serve.”

ARAB OPEN UNIVERSITY HOLDS CONFERENCE ON POST-COVID 19 WORLD

The Faculty of Business Studies at Arab Open University, Oman organises an International Conference virtually on ‘Co-Creating the Post-Covid 19 world: Exploring Sustainable Paths’ on March 8, 2021.

The conference was under the patronage of The President of Arab Open University. During this conference an edited volume book titled ‘Co-Creating the Post-Covid 19 world: Exploring Sustainable Paths’ was released.

This conference features two keynote presentations, ‘The Promise of an Entrepreneurial orientation for Sustainability in the Post Covid-19 World’ by Dr Andreas Walmsley, Director of The International Centre for Transformational Entrepreneurship, Coventry University, UK. The second is titled ‘The importance of Digital Transformation in the Post Covid-19 World’ by Maqbool al Wahaibi CEO, Oman Data Park, Sultanate of Oman.



Oman’s first private power firm prepares for liquidation

FROM PAGE 13

But unlike Independent Power Projects (IPPs) developed under the modern Sector Law promulgated in 2005, which are covered by the Build-Own-Operate (BOO) model, the two phases of the Manah project were designed on the basis of the Build-Own-Operate-Transfer (BOOT) model.

Under the latter model, United Power Company was obliged to transfer the plant assets to the

government upon the expiry of the 20-year contract.

Those obligations began to take effect starting from last year. Following a notification from the Oman Power and Water Procurement Company (OPWP) — the sole procurer of capacity and buyer of power and water output under the Sector Law — UPC formally transferred ownership of the Manah power assets on May 1, 2020.

Those assets passed into the hands of Al Ghubrah Power and

Desalination Company (GPDCo), a state-owned subsidiary of Nama Group (formerly The Electricity Holding Company).

Earlier, in 2016, a few transmission assets linked to Phase I of the Manah project were transferred to Oman Electricity Transmission Company (OETC) and Mazoon Electricity Distribution, also subsidiaries of Nama Group.

Following the transfer of its generating assets, UPC was informed by the sector regulator,

the Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR), that its generation licence had been revoked as well.

With no more assets to its name, United Power’s Board of Directors last November sought approval from the Capital Market Authority (CMA) for the conversion of the listed company (SAOG) into a SAOC.

The Authority’s green-light will allow for UPC to reduce its current capital of RO 2 million to RO 500,000.

That move will eventually pave the way for the company’s liquidation — a process likely to take a couple of years.

Looking back on UPC’s historic role as a trendsetter in the region, Murtadha bin Ahmed bin Sultan, Chairman of the Board of Directors, said: “Till the date of the transfer on April 30, 2020, the Manah Power Plant was operating smoothly and efficiently since the commissioning of the plant primarily due to ENGIE and STOMO/SOGEX who have

contributed to Manah IPP since the inception of the project in the mid-90s and their different roles at different stages of the project.

We would also like to share that UPC and our operators had successfully achieved a unique record in the global electricity sector i.e. No lost time accident from the inception till the handover of the plant. This is a proud achievement of the Government of Oman,” he added in the Directors’ Report for fiscal 2020.



Saudi banks' assets surge

Assets of Saudi banks listed on the Saudi Stock Exchange (Tadawul) increased by 13.1 per cent on an annual basis in 2020 or SAR 321.82 billion (\$85.82 billion). — Reuters



Swiss jobless rate increases

Switzerland's jobless rate increased in February, government data showed. The jobless rate rose a seasonally to 3.6 per cent in February from 3.7 per cent in January. — dpa



Ireland construction sector shrinks

Ireland's construction sector contracted sharply in February. The Ulster Bank Construction Purchasing Managers' index rose to 27.0 in February from 21.2 in January. — dpa

China's shift away from 5-year targets increases policy flexibility

BEIJING: China's decision not to set an economic growth target for its new five-year plan will give policymakers more room to account for uncertainties and respond to changes, a senior state planner official said on Monday.

In its 2021-2025 economic plan delivered to the nation's legislature on Friday, China did not include any average annual growth targets, unlike the previous five-year plan issued in 2016.

It did, however, pledge to keep growth in a "reasonable" range over the five-year period and set an annual gross domestic product target of above 6 per cent for the current year, having dropped the 2020 target last year amid global uncertainties caused by the pandemic.

Hu Zucui, Vice-Director of the National Development and Reform Commission, said on Monday predicting growth for an annual period contingent on the circumstances would be easier than setting targets over a five-year period.

"By not setting a specific and quantitative (five-year) growth target, we will be more proactive, active and at ease in coping with all sorts of risks, which is



Residential apartments are under construction at Hengqin Island, China. — Reuters

conducive to boost the flexibility of our development", Hu told a press conference on the sidelines of the annual parliament meeting.

He added that it also helps to guide agencies to focus on improving the quality of efficiency of growth, instead of just numerical growth.

"We are confident that GDP will maintain a certain level (over the next five years)", he said. Beijing's targets for unemployment and energy and carbon intensity in 2021-2025 are linked to GDP, suggesting growth was targeted to stay in line with its potential rate.

He did not specify the potential

rate, a gauge of the economy's growth when inflation and unemployment conditions are stable, although analysts estimate it to be around 5 per cent.

China aims to keep its jobless rate within 5.5 per cent and cut energy intensity by 13.5 per cent over the period. — Reuters

EU banking regulator hit by Microsoft email hack

PARIS: The European Banking Authority, a key EU financial regulator, says it has fallen victim to a hack of its Microsoft email system which the US company blames on a Chinese group.

Microsoft said last week that a state-sponsored group operating out of China was exploiting previously unknown security flaws in its Exchange email services to steal data from business and government users, believed to number in the tens of thousands so far.

The "Hafnium" group was a "highly skilled and sophisticated actor", it said. Hafnium has previously targeted US-based companies including infectious disease researchers, law firms, universities, defence contractors, think-tanks and NGOs, it added.

In a statement issued late on Sunday, the EBA confirmed the attack on its email systems which it had decided to take offline "as a precautionary measure."

"The Agency has swiftly launched a full investigation, in close cooperation with



The Europlaza tower, where the European Banking Authority (EBA) is located, stands in the La Defense in Paris. — AFP

its ICT provider, a team of forensic experts and other relevant entities", it said.

The EBA warned that as a result of the attack, personal data could have been accessed and it would provide advice on possible mitigation measures if necessary.

Microsoft executive Tom Burt said last Tuesday that the company provided updates to fix the security flaws and urged customers to apply them. "We know that many nation-state actors and criminal groups will move quickly to take advantage of any unpatched systems", he added.

— AFP

Jet leasing in shake-up as AerCap, GE discuss tie-up

WASHINGTON: Aircraft leasing is on the brink of its biggest shake-up in almost a decade as its top two players AerCap and General Electric's GECAS discuss a deal to forge an industry titan with over 2,000 jets, financial sources said on Monday.

Negotiations for a tie-up follow years of speculation over the sale of GECAS and come as Covid-19 is expected to shift more of the world's passenger aircraft fleet into the arms of the leasing industry, which already takes about half of Airbus and Boeing deliveries.

The Wall Street Journal, which first reported the possible



A man takes a picture of a GE engine during the China International Import Expo in Shanghai, in this file photo. — Reuters

deal, valued it at \$30 billion and said an announcement could come as early as Monday, barring a last-minute hitch. General Electric (GE) said it did not comment on speculation.

— Reuters

Iran slips record volume of oil into China

TEHRAN: Iran has quietly moved record amounts of crude oil to top client China in recent months, while India's state refiners have added Iranian oil to their annual import plans on the assumption that US sanctions on the Opec supplier will soon ease, according to six industry sources and Refinitiv data.

US President Joe Biden has sought to revive talks with Iran on a nuclear deal abandoned by former president Donald Trump in 2018, although harsh economic measures remain in place that Tehran insists be lifted before negotiations resume.

The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has started reaching out to customers across Asia since Biden took office to



Gas flares from an oil production platform at the Soroush oil fields, Iran. — Reuters

assess potential demand for its crude, said the sources, who declined to be named because of the sensitivity of the matter.

The sanctions caused a precipitous drop in Iranian

exports to China, India, Japan and South Korea since late 2018.

Those measures, and output cuts by fellow Opec+ producers, have led to tight supplies of Middle East sour crude in Asia,

the top global oil market. Asia imports more than half of its crude from the Middle East.

Restored Iranian supplies to India, the world's third-largest crude importer, could reduce demand for spot cargoes, which has climbed recently after Iraq cut supplies and Kuwait reduced the duration of some contracts.

India, which is hurting from the recent sustained recovery in global crude prices, expects Iranian supplies to return to the market in 3 to 4 months, a government official said.

Another Indian refiner said they had been told by NIOC officials that a formal agreement on crude supply would be signed after Iran's elections in June.

— Reuters

Bad loans to rise at Indian banks as easy liquidity tightens

BENGALURU: Bad loans and credit costs are expected to rise at Indian banks as easy money policies to shore up a pandemic-battered economy may start to tighten, Fitch Ratings said.

The coronavirus lockdowns last year slammed an already struggling financial sector, but recent quarterly reports have shown an improvement in profits and asset quality. Noting that the recent improvement masked underlying pandemic stress, Fitch said banks



A man walks past the Reserve Bank of India logo in New Delhi. — Reuters

would increasingly feel the pinch from the continued impact on small businesses and rising unemployment.

"Fitch believes that the disproportionate shock to India's informal economy and small businesses, coupled with high unemployment and declining private consumption, have yet to fully manifest on bank balance sheets", the rating agency said.

India's economy returned to growth in the third quarter, but many sectors continue to

operate below capacity and some indicators point to stress in retail customers, Fitch said.

Fitch added it sees high risk of a "protracted deterioration" in asset quality with more pressure on loans to retail and stressed small and medium-sized enterprises. The Reserve Bank of India had in January warned that banks may see bad loans double to 14.8 per cent under a severe stress scenario.

State-owned banks, with their limited capital buffers, will be more vulnerable to the impact of

the pandemic than private-sector peers, and the government's plan to pump \$5.5 billion into these lenders over fiscal 2021 and 2022 is unlikely to be enough.

The ratings agency estimates state-owned lenders need \$15-58 billion in capital, under various stress scenarios. Higher contingency reserves at private banks, which offer them better earnings and capital resilience, make them better poised for growth in 2021, Fitch said. — Reuters



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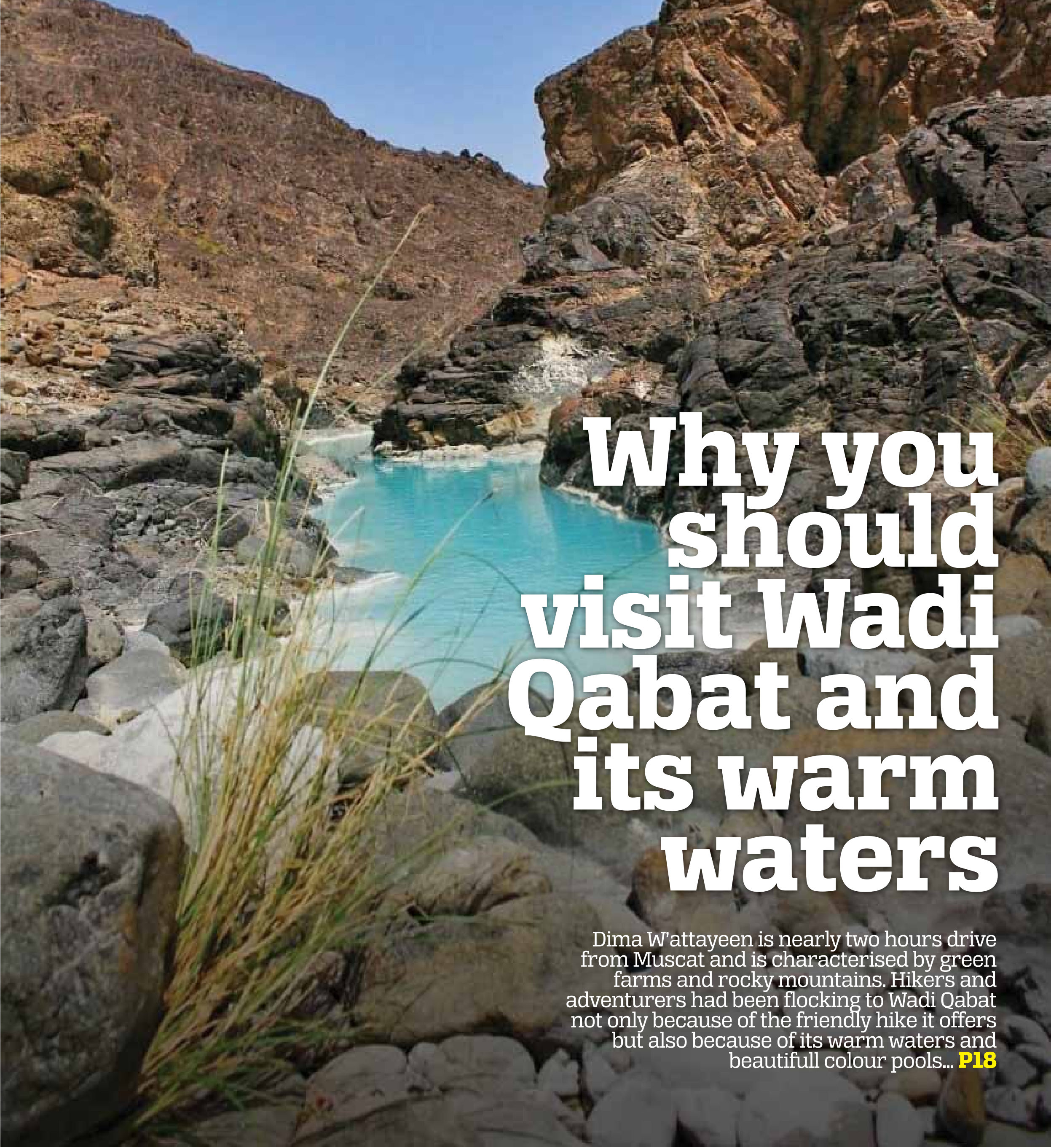
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features



Why you should visit Wadi Qabat and its warm waters

Dima W'attayeen is nearly two hours drive from Muscat and is characterised by green farms and rocky mountains. Hikers and adventurers had been flocking to Wadi Qabat not only because of the friendly hike it offers but also because of its warm waters and beautiful colour pools... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

LOCAL SCENE



PHOTOGRAPHY WEEK IN SQU KICKS OFF THIS WEEK

Whether it's an innocent smile caught through a palm frond basket, an Omani woman in traditional garb crossing over from the light to darkness... Sultan Qaboos University is buzzing with different activities not only for artists but specifically, photographers... **Story on P20**

ENTERTAINMENT



HARRY AND MEGHAN DETAIL ROYAL STRUGGLE IN OPRAH INTERVIEW

Meghan, the wife of Prince Harry, accused Britain's royal family of raising concerns about how dark their son's skin might be and pushing her to the brink of suicide, in a tell-all television interview that will send shockwaves through the monarchy... **Story on P19**

READ



THE ROAD TO UBAR

BY NICHOLAS CLAPP

Going back at least two millennia, stories about a vast city, Ubar, filled with gold that disappeared almost in an instant haunt the literature and lore of Arabia.

ART



RARE BERNINI DRAWING TO GO ON SALE IN FRANCE

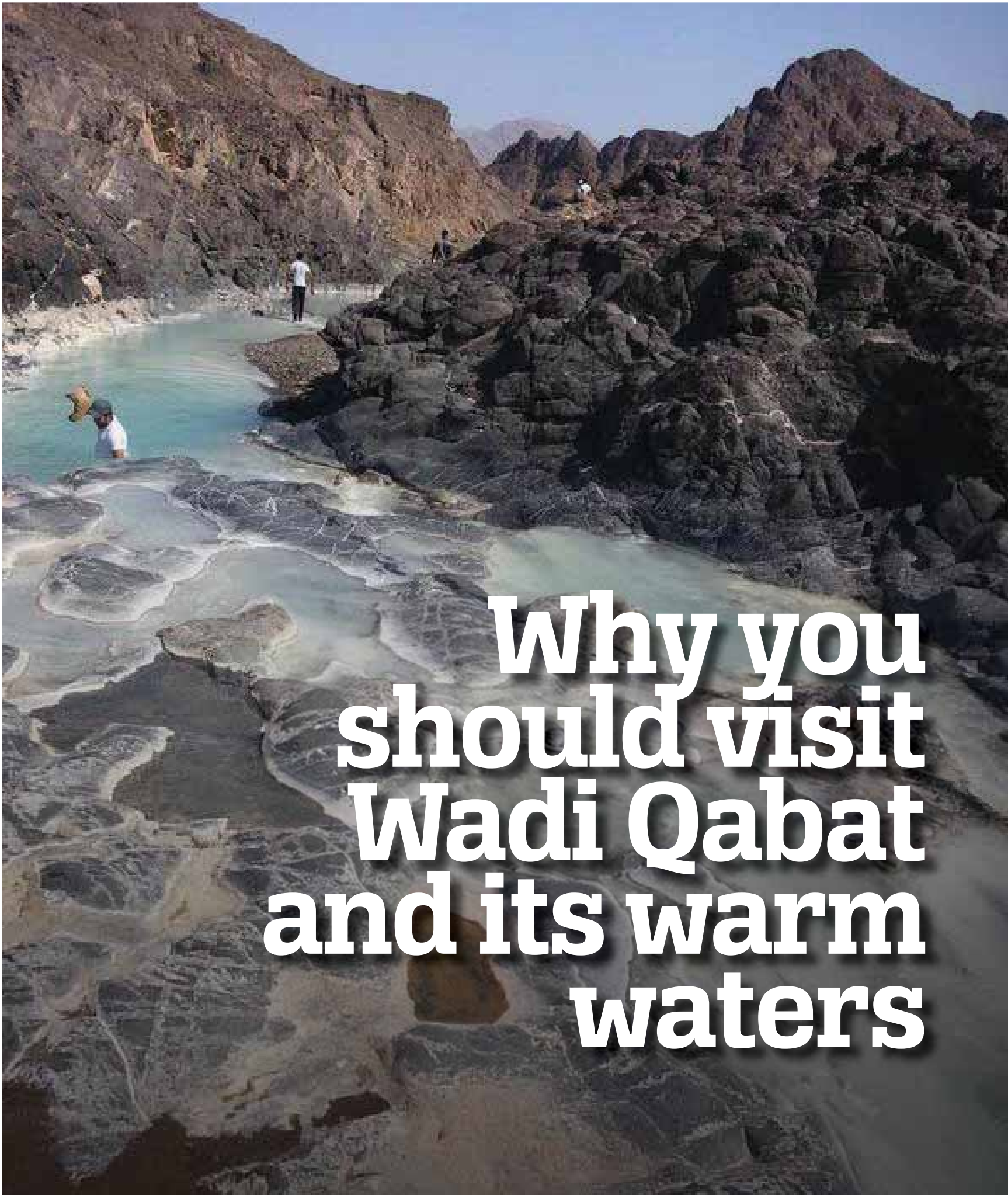
A rare drawing by the Italian Baroque artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini is to go on sale on March 20 at an auction house in Compiègne, the French northern city where it was discovered six months ago... **Story on P19**

CONSERVATION



TWO-THIRDS OF TROPICAL RAINFOREST DESTROYED OR DEGRADED GLOBALLY, NGO SAYS

Humans have degraded or destroyed roughly two-thirds of the world's original tropical rainforest cover, new data reveals - raising alarm that a key natural buffer against climate change is quickly vanishing... **Story on P18**



Why you should visit Wadi Qabat and its warm waters

TEXT BY BARAAH AL MUJAINI
PHOTOS BY SAID AL-SAWAFI

No doubt that the strategic geographical location of the Sultanate of Oman has significantly shaped the spectacular landscape and the outstanding variety of tourist places. Carved mountains, pristine water, hewn rocks and golden sands, there is so much natural beauty embraced by the Omani lands and seas beneath its painted sky.

Wadi Qabat is one of the breathtaking tourist destinations that you have to add to your 'must visit' list located in Dima W'attayeen, in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate. Specifically, from 'Muss' village you can establish exploring the endless beauty of rocky nature for about 30 minutes to reach the Wadi. What makes this isolated attraction highly recommended by many tourists' guides and trip companies is its uniqueness.

Initially, its distinguished waters — a mix between crystal white and vivid turquoise will immediately creep over your soul with tranquillity, joy, and astonishment. Many wonder about the secret of its extraordinary colour. Some even believe that due to its smell, that it's sulphur. Upon seeing the water, one can easily mistake it as such but the collected white powder is a type of mineral but not sulphur.

Qabat is not just a perfect destination for those who



are seeking isolated, calm, and magnificent areas, but its warm water is considered as healing and can cure different aches, as reported by the village residents. Due to some other Wadis in the same region that caused slight damage to Wadi Qabat; the destination now is under maintenance, which shows the interest of the government and tourism sector to preserve these destinations from any kind of further damage.

Due to the pandemic that swept the whole world, and imposed many restrictions that damaged our entertainment zone; numerous tourist landmarks have been discovered. We have discovered Oman from a closer angle,

and the credit goes to those adventurers who preferred exploring our country and seeking unique destinations. Never forget the major role of social media in facilitating the mission of exposing Oman as the idealist touristic spot.

Photographers have performed an important part in helping promote different local destinations providing amazing visuals that allow others to appreciate the destinations more. These photographers and explorers have done massive sacrifice sometimes putting themselves in danger to capture amazing angles.

Wadi Qabat is mostly suitable for hiking amateurs and adventurers since the path to reach the destination

requires almost 30-minutes of walking (from the last point you can drive the car). Moreover, the path is quite unpaved; so it might be a bit challenging for some, while others will super enjoy it, especially those who prefer to investigate new regions, distance themselves, and reflect in the authentic nature.

If you are planning to schedule a visit to Wadi Qabat, and enjoy its adventure-filled paths — there are many tourists' companies arranging for such guided tours. Oman has hundreds of spectacular destinations worth a visit; some remains to be undiscovered. These magical spots will provide us with many interesting choices to spend our free time and vacations.

CONSERVATION

Two-thirds of tropical rainforest destroyed or degraded globally, NGO says



HUMANS HAVE degraded or destroyed roughly two-thirds of the world's original tropical rainforest cover, new data reveals - raising alarm that a key natural buffer against climate change is quickly vanishing.

The forest loss is also a major contributor to climate-warming emissions, with the dense tropical forest vegetation representing the largest living reservoir of carbon.

Logging and land conversion, mainly for agriculture, have wiped out 34% of the world's original old-growth tropical rainforests, and degraded another 30%, leaving them more vulnerable to fire and future destruction, according to an analysis by the non-profit Rainforest Foundation Norway.

More than half of the destruction since 2002 has been in South America's Amazon and bordering rainforests.

As more rainforest is destroyed, there is more potential for climate change, which in turn makes it more difficult for remaining forests to survive, said the report's author Anders Krogh, a tropical forest researcher.

"It's a terrifying cycle," Krogh said. The total lost between just 2002 and 2019 was larger than the area of France, he found.

The rate of loss in 2019 roughly matched the annual level of destruction over the last 20 years, with a football-field's worth of forest vanishing every 6 seconds, according to another recent report by the World Resources Institute.

The Brazilian Amazon has been under intense pressure in recent decades, as an agricultural boom has driven farmers and land speculators to torch plots of land for soybeans, beef and other crops. That trend has worsened since 2019, when right-wing President Jair Bolsonaro took office and began weakening environmental enforcement.

But the Amazon also represents the best hope for preserving what rainforest remains. The Amazon and its neighbours - the Orinoco and the Andean rainforest - account for 73.5% of tropical forests still intact, according to Krogh.

The new report "reinforces that Brazil must take care of the forest," said Ane Alencar, a geographer with the Amazon Environmental Research Institute who was not involved in the work. "Brazil has the biggest chunk of tropical forest in the world and is also losing the most."

Southeast Asian islands, mostly belonging to Indonesia, collectively rank second in terms of forest destruction since 2002, with much of those forests cleared for palm oil plantations.

Central Africa ranks third, with most of the destruction centred around the Congo River basin, due to traditional and commercial farming as well as logging.

Forests that were defined in the report as degraded had either been partially destroyed, or destroyed and since replaced by secondary forest growth, Rainforest Foundation Norway said.

That report's definition for intact forest may be overly strict, cautioned Tasso Azevedo, coordinator of the Brazilian deforestation mapping initiative MapBiomas. The analysis only counts untouched regions of at least 500 square km (193 square miles) as intact, leaving out smaller areas that may add to the world's virgin forest cover, he said.

Krogh explained that this definition was chosen because smaller tracts are at risk of the "edge effect," where trees die faster and biodiversity is harder to maintain near the edge of the forest. A forest spanning 500 square km can fully sustain its ecosystem, he said. — Reuters

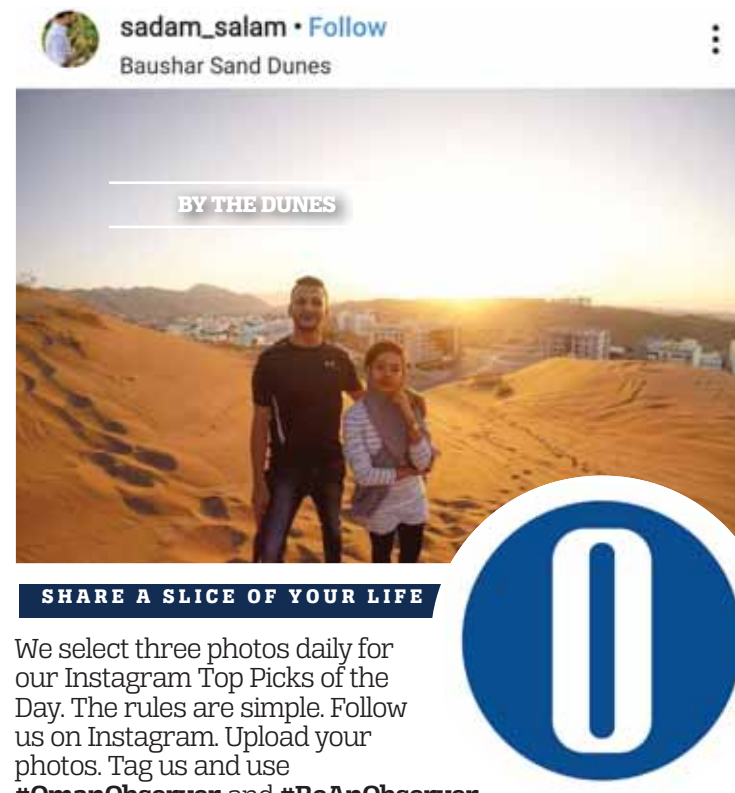


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Harry and Meghan detail royal struggle in Oprah interview

LONDON: Meghan, the wife of Prince Harry, accused Britain's royal family of raising concerns about how dark their son's skin might be and pushing her to the brink of suicide, in a tell-all television interview that will send shockwaves through the monarchy.

The 39-year-old, whose mother is Black and father is white, said she had been naive before she married into royalty in 2018, but that she ended up having suicidal thoughts and considering self harm after pleading for help but getting none.

Meghan said that her son Archie, now aged one, had been denied the title of prince because there were concerns within the royal family "about how dark his skin might be when he's born".

"That was relayed to me from Harry, those were conversations that family had with him," Meghan recounted in an interview with Oprah Winfrey aired on CBS late on Sunday.

Meghan declined to say who had aired such concerns, as did Harry. He said his family had cut them off

financially and that his father Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, had let him down and refused to take his calls at one point.

Buckingham Palace was not expected to give an immediate response to the interview, which aired in the early hours of Monday morning in Britain.

The two-hour broadcast was the most anticipated royal interview since Harry's late mother Princess Diana shared intimate details of her failed marriage to Charles in 1995, denting the heir's reputation and the family's standing in the eyes of the British public.

Nearly three years since her star-studded wedding in Windsor Castle, Meghan described some unidentified members of the royal household as brutal, mendacious and guilty of racist remarks.

She also accused Kate, the wife of her husband's elder brother Prince William, of making her cry before her wedding.

While the family came in for open criticism, neither Harry nor Meghan attacked Queen Elizabeth directly.

Still, Meghan said she had been silenced by "the Firm" - which Elizabeth heads - and that her pleas for help while in distress at racist reporting and her predicament had fallen on deaf ears.

"I just didn't want to be alive any more. And that was a very clear and real and frightening constant thought. And I remember how he (Harry) just cradled me," Meghan said, wiping away tears.

'REALLY LET DOWN'

Harry and Meghan's announcement in January, 2020, that they intended to step down from their royal roles plunged the family into crisis. Last month, Buckingham Palace confirmed the split would be permanent, as the couple looks to forge an independent life in the United States.

Harry, 36, said they had stepped back from royal duties because of a lack of understanding, and he was worried about history repeating itself - a reference to the death of his mother Diana who was killed in a 1997 crash as her car sped away from chasing photographers.

Asked what his mother would

say about events, he answered: "I think she would feel very angry with how this has panned out and very sad." He felt "really let down" by his father.

Harry denied blindsiding Queen Elizabeth, his grandmother, with his decision to shun life within the monarchy, but said Prince Charles stopped taking his calls at one point.

"I had three conversations with my grandmother, and two conversations with my father before he stopped taking my calls. And then he said, can you put this all in writing?"

Detractors say the couple, whose official title is the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, wanted the limelight, but were not willing to live with the attention and scrutiny it brought.

To supporters, their treatment shows how an outdated British institution lashed out against a modern, independent biracial woman.

"I know first-hand the sexism and racism institutions and the media use to vilify women and people of colour to minimise us, to break us down and to demonise us," Serena Williams, one of the world's most successful tennis players and friend of Meghan's, said on Twitter.

Amanda Gorman, the poet who wowed viewers at the inauguration of US President Joe Biden, said on Twitter that Meghan had been the "Crown's greatest opportunity for change, regeneration, and reconciliation in a new era. They didn't just maltreat her light - they missed out on it."

LIES AND TEARS

There have also been allegations of bullying against Meghan which appeared in *The Times* newspaper in the buildup to the couple's appearance. Buckingham Palace said it would investigate the claims, adding it was "very concerned".

Meghan told Winfrey that people within the royal institution not only failed to protect her against malicious claims but lied to protect others.

"It was only once we were married and everything started to really worsen that I came to understand that not only was I not being protected but that they were willing to lie to protect other members of the family," Meghan said.

Meghan denied a newspaper story that she had made Kate, Duchess of Cambridge, cry before the wedding and said it was a turning point in her relations with the media and the palace.

"The reverse happened," Meghan said. "A few days before the wedding she (Kate) was upset about something, pertaining to yes the issue was correct about the flower girl dresses, and it made me cry. And it really hurt my feelings."

Meghan, who said they were not paid for the interview, conceded she had not realised what she was marrying into when she joined the British monarchy and "went into it naively". The couple also revealed that Meghan, who is pregnant with their second child, was expecting a girl. Harry said Meghan had "saved" him from his trapped royal life. "I would disagree, I think he saved all of us. You made a decision that certainly saved my life," Meghan said.

"This is in some ways just the beginning for us." — **Reuters**



Rare Bernini drawing to go on sale in France

A RARE drawing by the Italian Baroque artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini is to go on sale on March 20 at an auction house in Compiègne, the French northern city where it was discovered six months ago.

The drawing "Academie d'Homme" is in sanguine or red chalk and represents a muscular naked man reclining on a rock and holding his forehead in his right hand in a gesture of despair.

Bernini was a 17th century master sculptor and architect who is behind many of Rome's landmarks such as the Four Rivers Fountain in Piazza Navona.

"One can see the artist has not forgotten the power and virility of Michelangelo subjects," said Dominique Le Coent de Beaulieu, head of auction house Acteon.

The work had previously been wrongly attributed to French Baroque painter Pierre Puget.

"There is almost no doubt, we are 99 per cent sure it is a Bernini," said old drawings expert Patrick de Bayser, adding it was typical of Bernini's style to use discontinued hatching on the body's outlines.

Acteon expects that the drawing will fetch much more than its initial price range of 30,000 to 50,000 euros.

In 2019, Acteon sold a rare painting by 13th century Italian master Cimabue "The Mocking of Christ" for 24 million euros, eight times the price it had been valued at. — **Reuters**



Astonishment: Photography week in SQU kicks off this week



Whether it's an innocent smile caught through a palm frond basket, an Omani woman in traditional garb crossing over from the light to darkness or focusing in the many astounding structures and scenery in Oman, Sultan Qaboos University is buzzing with different activities not only for artists but specifically, photographers.

The activities of the 24th edition of photography week in SQU kicked off this week. The week carries the title "Astonishment", which aims at highlighting the artwork of the new members of the Photography Group.

A quick visit to the university's gallery would showcase some of the best works students and participants can produce competing against each other for artistry and creativity.

The exhibition is divided into five pavilions, namely: The interface, the blogs, personal photos, themes and a pavilion for side activities.

There are 33 photos exhibited with varied subjects that include natural scenes, people's lifestyle, portrait, Conceptual art and silent nature. The collection also covers six themes.

Alongside the exhibition, several workshops will be held on nature photography, silent nature photography and photography using mobile phones.

