

Sultanate marks Teacher's Day; hails role in moulding students

The Ministry of Education has hailed the generous gesture by the Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, who has greeted teachers on the occasion of Teacher's Day, considering it as an incentive for teachers to exert more effort in disseminating knowledge and education among the students. In a statement, the Ministry of Education pointed to the attention accorded to the education sector by the Government of His Majesty, commending His Majesty's confidence on the bearers of the education message. **DETAILS ON P2**



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OMAN OBSERVER

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FIRM TO STUDY 'GREEN
HYDROGEN' PILOT



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SRI LANKA SAVES
LAST LEGUME FROM
EXPRESSWAY AXE



MUSCAT

HM GREETINGS TO KUWAIT EMIR

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has sent a cable of greetings to Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait, on the occasion of the National Day of the sisterly State of Kuwait. In his cable, His Majesty the Sultan expressed his sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to Shaikh Nawaf, praying to the Almighty Allah for the return of this occasion on Shaikh Nawaf while the brotherly people of Kuwait realise aspirations of further progress and prosperity. — ONA

OMAN, US DISCUSS STRATEGIC RELATIONS

Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a telephonic call from Dr Antony Blinken, US Secretary of State. During the call, the two sides stressed the strategic relations between the two friendly countries in various areas. They also exchanged views on several issues of common concern. Both ministers reiterated the importance of supporting all endeavours to maintain peace and stability in the region. — ONA

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Sultanate and Saudi agree on boosting bilateral ties

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, on Wednesday conducted bilateral consultations with Prince Faisal Farhan al Saud, Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The two sides expressed their deep pride over the historic, fraternal and strong relations between the two brotherly countries and peoples.

They also expressed keenness of the two wise leaderships to promote the bilateral relations in various spheres to achieve mutual benefits and open new and diverse horizons to support opportunities of trade, investment and tourism and develop scientific cooperation.

The two sides also discussed promoting cooperation in sectors of energy, technology, transport, cybersecurity, health,



Sayyid Badr Hamad al Busaidy and Prince Faisal Farhan al Saud during talks. — ONA

agriculture, fisheries and environment.

At the diplomatic and political level, the two sides also exchanged views on a range of regional and international issues. They reaffirmed the importance of joint action within the GCC framework and following up outcomes of Al Ula Summit hosted by Saudi on January 5.

The two sides also stressed the

importance of supporting efforts to consolidate pillars of security, stability and peace in the region and the world at large.

Later, Prince Faisal and his delegation left this evening after a short visit to the Sultanate.

He was seen off by Sayyid Badr and Dr Khalid bin Said al Jaradi, Acting Head of the Protocols Department at the Foreign Ministry. — ONA



EXCEPTIONAL ADVENTURES THROUGH OMAR'S LENS

Adventure photography is about telling a story, believes talented Omani photographer Omar bin Ahmed al Busaidi. "When shooting, I tell the events as an interesting story so that people get enthusiastic both while viewing the photos and also to try the adventure themselves. I become more intimately involved and tuned into possible dramatic events as the adventure proceeds." **DETAILS ON P20**

Ban on entry from 10 countries begins today

KABEER YOUSUF

@kabeeryousef

The ban on entry of visitors from 10 countries in the Sultanate will begin from Thursday noon. This is part of the assessment of the pandemic situation by the Supreme Committee on Covid-19 and follow-up action in the wake of the rapid spread of the new variants.

Accordingly, entry for people from Sudan, Lebanon, South Africa, Brazil, Nigeria, Guinea, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Tanzania and Ethiopia is suspended for the next 15 days.

Other visitors, not from the countries under the current list, who have passed through any of these countries within 14 days before applying for entry to the Sultanate, too will be denied entry to ensure full safety.

However, this rule does not apply to Omani citizens, diplomats and health professionals and their families. They will be subjected to the existing rules on quarantine and other isolation procedures in the country.

Edmond Iluyemi, Chairman of the Nigerian Community in Oman, said: "All nationals have been updated on the new rule which is taking effect from today, and Nigerians who are either stuck outside Oman or back home, were asked to return immediately."

"We have been educating our people through various social media platforms. They are aware of the importance of following the rule. Most of our people have returned to the Sultanate in view



I booked a ticket to Kochi last week, but had to postpone it twice and then cancel it because of the non-availability of seats to other airports

S MOHAMMED

A media person

of the new rule", Edmond said.

There are 9,000 Sudanese, 4,000 Ethiopians and 4,000 Ugandans in the country. Representatives of other countries too said they have kept their citizens in the loop.

BRISK TICKET SALE

Travel agents said there has been a rush for tickets from these countries in the past few days as most of the employees of the local workforce were on the end of their vacation and they wanted to bring them back.

"We sold a lot of one-way tickets from these 10 countries due to high demand", Aysha Adam, a travel agent, said.

The Supreme Committee has also urged citizens and residents to avoid unnecessary travel during the coming days.

Johnson & Johnson vaccine highly effective against severe Covid

WASHINGTON: The single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine is highly effective in preventing severe Covid-19, including newer variants, according to documents released by the US Food and Drug Administration on Wednesday.

The news came as the regulator was set to convene an independent panel on Friday that will likely vote to authorise the vaccine, making it the third available

in the country hit hardest by the coronavirus pandemic.

In large clinical trials, the J&J vaccine's efficacy against severe disease was 85.9 per cent in the United States, 81.7 per cent in South Africa and 87.6 per cent in Brazil.

Overall, among 39,321 participants across all regions, the efficacy against severe Covid-19 was 85.4 per cent, but it fell to 66.1 per cent when including moderate forms of the disease.

Crucially, analyses of different demographic groups revealed no marked differences across age, race, or people with underlying conditions.

The vaccine was generally well-tolerated, with no reports of severe allergic reactions (anaphylaxis), which have been seen in rare cases for the Pfizer and Moderna shots.

Mild to moderate reactions, like injection-site

pain, headache, fatigue and muscle pains were more likely to occur in younger participants than older.

There were no reported deaths in the vaccine group, but five in the placebo group.

"The analysis supported a favourable safety profile with no specific safety concerns identified that would preclude issuance of an EUA (emergency use authorisation)", the FDA wrote in its report. — AFP



Vials labelled Covid-19 Coronavirus Vaccine and syringe are seen in front of displayed Johnson & Johnson logo in this illustration taken last week. — Reuters

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 30°C Min 20°C SALALAH: Max 26°C Min 20°C NIZWA: Max 33°C Min 18°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:32 FAJR: 05:17 DHUHR: 12:25 ASR: 15:44 MAGHRIB: 18:13 ISHA: 19:23



Sayyid Shihab receives Italian ambassador

MUSCAT: His Highness Sayyid Shihab bin Tarik bin Taimour al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs, received at his office in Muaskar Al Murtafaa on Wednesday Federica Favi, Ambassador of the Italian

Republic to the Sultanate. The meeting reviewed relations between the two friendly countries. It also exchanged views on matters of common concern. — ONA

Sultanate marks Teacher's Day

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Education has hailed the generous gesture by the Honourable Lady, Spouse of His Majesty the Sultan, who has greeted the teachers on the occasion of the Teacher's Day, considering it as an incentive for teachers to exert more effort in disseminating knowledge and education among the students.

In a statement, the Ministry of Education pointed to the attention accorded the educational sector by the government of His Majesty, commending His Majesty's confidence on the bearers of the education message.

On Wednesday, the Sultanate marked the Teacher's Day which falls on February 24 each year, amid gratitude and appreciation to the great and leading role undertaken by teachers in building generations and providing them



with knowledge that makes their lives better. The occasion of the Teacher's Day this year sheds more lights on the teachers' role

in this tough situation the world is currently experiencing due to the Covid-19 pandemic which affected the educational sector all

over and closed down schools for several months before turning to the blended learning system and distance education.

RNO COMMANDER INSPECTS NAVAL EXERCISE SHARP DAGGER



MUSCAT: Rear Admiral Saif bin Nasser al Rahbi, Commander of the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO), on Wednesday inspected the naval exercise "Sharp Dagger" which is being implemented by RNO at Al Batinah naval site with participation of friendly countries' navies and assistance of the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO) jets. The RNO commander viewed the drill's activities and was briefed about the processes and the participating ships and the roles they are executing as part of the exercise's plan. The RNO commander was accompanied by a number of senior RNO officers. — ONA

Covid-19: Risk, resilience and recovery

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
lakshmioman

We could be going through psychological resilience after almost a year since the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 as a pandemic and when the public across the globe went through anxiety, unknown expectations, the debate on the source of the virus and some in denial.

Many families lost their loved ones, at the same time job losses and now from the psychological perspective this is where we are – psychological resilience.

"Psychological resilience basically means being able to bounce back after any particular eventful life occurrence just like doing bad in an exam when the individual goes through anger, feeling bad, blaming the teacher and then finally getting ready to retake the exam. Psychological resilience is a condition in which one is able to take up any challenge that the life throws," explained Dr Hamed al Sinawi, Senior Consultant Old Age Psychiatrist, Sultan Qaboos University Hospital and Chairman of Oman Alzheimer's Society.

One of the measures that eased people's anxiety is the transparency in numbers of Covid-19 and information on precautions to take and rules to adhere to prevent the virus, said the psychiatrist.

"If initially people had panicked, there was a change when the health advice became clearer



they began to accept and follow the guidelines. The precautions to be taken such as wearing the face masks and maintaining social distancing were accepted and people wanted to join in and follow the rules. Nevertheless, families did lose their loved ones to the virus and it has been the same with jobs, which also impacted lifestyles," he pointed out.

In between there was a bit of peace enough to celebrate and take short holidays within the country. But now caution is up again and there are restrictions on gatherings.

Whatever the situation the two groups of people who have been affected are the elderly and the children. The elderly people were shielded from the very beginning because it was believed that they could develop complications due to Covid-19. This, however, has had an impact on the senior citizens because of the disturbance to their regular routine, and was most prominent amongst Alzheimer's patients.

"Not able to see the loved ones affected them, and the masks did not help either when it came to

Look at the different ways people have bounced back – there have been innovations, Omani farmers produced more crops and contributed to local food, we saw investment in technology to serve the country and produce masks and protection gears

DR HAMED AL SINAWI
Senior Consultant Old Age Psychiatrist, SQUH and Chairman of Oman Alzheimer's Society

communications with caretakers. They also gained weight," noted Dr Hamed, who continued his sessions online during the lockdown.

Meanwhile, children had a complete changeover in lifestyle moving on to online classes which took away from them direct interaction with teachers and classmates, added to that was the closure of parks and beaches which were all the requirements the nation had to take to prevent Covid-19.

However, people are coping up and it could be that most of them could be going through

psychological resilience.

"Look at the different ways people have bounced back – there have been innovations, Omani farmers produced more crops and contributed to local food, we saw investment in technology to serve the country and produce masks and protection gears. This allowed people to get that strength compared to what we saw in the beginning symptoms such as panic shopping as seen in some countries in the region. Luckily, here in Oman we pretty much stayed normal, but there were concerns especially when it came to a stop to socialising at the same time there were worries about whether people would get the virus and what would happen to them if they did. Tensions also included the worry about surviving, hospitalisation and even having enough hospital beds and equipment."

According to Dr Hamed, even if the virus has affected physically some people, it has affected everybody psychologically, which included loneliness as in the case of expatriates, effect of losing jobs or being unable to travel and not able to send home money and not to forget the stress graduate students who were ready to graduate but had to delay because of Covid-19.

"There were toxic talks about the vaccination that went around as conspiracy theories but now we are overcoming that because people are signing up for vaccinations," he observed.

Muscat ranked best city for expats in the Arab world

BERLIN: Muscat has been ranked the best city in the Arab world for expats, according to the Expat City Ranking 2020 published by the German network for expats InterNations.

Muscat was ranked 14th internationally and first in the Arab world followed by Doha.

The network said in its website that Muscat has been ranked 14th globally at the index adding that the expatriates living in Muscat particularly appreciate the affordable and readily available healthcare services in addition

to the entertainment options and nice weather. Valencia came in 1st place worldwide as the best destination for expats. The Spanish city is among the top 5 in all topical indices but one. It even ranks first worldwide in both the Quality of Urban Living and the Local Cost of Living Indices.

A total of 15,000 expats from 173 countries and living 181 countries over the world participated in the survey.

The network said that the expatriates also prefer cities where they feel safe and other ethical aspects. — ONA

311 new coronavirus cases, one death

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Health (MoH) reported one Covid-19 death and 311 new cases of the coronavirus on Wednesday, taking the overall tally of cases to 140,300 and fatalities to 1,558.

The number of people who have recovered reached 131,385 out, pushing the recovery rate to 94%, the ministry said.

Thirty-one patients were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of inpatients in hospitals to 199, including 75 in Intensive Care Units.

The ministry urged everyone to adhere to social distancing instructions issued by the Supreme Committee.



Authorities crackdown on illegal charcoal production



SAID AL SALMANI
AL RUSTAQ, FEB 24

The department of environment in South Al Batinah Governorate, in cooperation with the Royal Oman Police (ROP), has arrested expat workers who were burning large piles of Samar and Ghaff woods at a farm for the purpose of producing charcoal to be sold in

the local market.

The crackdown was part of the efforts exerted by the department of environment to curb the cutting down and burning of wild trees to produce charcoal, an activity prohibited by the law due to its negative effect on ecological balance and the spread of desertification.

Legal action against the offenders is under way.



Follow safety guidelines to avoid fires: PACDA

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 24

The Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA) has called on residential, industrial, and agricultural facilities to follow the procedures to prevent the occurrence of various dangerous accidents.

Brigadier Salim bin Yahya al Hinai, Director General of Civil Defence at the Public Authority for Civil Defence and Ambulance (PACDA), said that it has been giving attention to public safety via awareness campaigns on various media and through lectures to reduce the occurrence of various accidents.

He said that PACDA carries out continuous field visits and urges companies operating in the industrial zones to adhere to the safety requirements.

Al Hinai said out that among the most important causes of fires in industrial facilities is a failure to comply with the requirements set by the Civil Protection, random storage, buildings with unstable and non-fireproof materials, lack of commitment



to periodic maintenance of alarm and extinguishing systems, and the lack of assurance of the validity of electrical connections inside Building.

PACDA relies on the commitment of institutions

and companies to the safety requirements issued by them, and that non-compliance leads to accidents and loss of life and property.

A high-level delegation including the Wali of Muttrah, the

chairman of Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI), members of Majlis Ash'shura, and the Municipal Affairs Committee had visited the site in Wadi Kabir industrial area where the fire broke out on Thursday.

Ban on import of live birds from several countries

MUSCAT: Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has issued a ministerial decision banning the import of live birds and their products from certain countries.

The decision says that it is prohibited to import live birds and their products, derivatives and offal from: Nigeria, Nepal, Wales in the United Kingdom, Iran, Algeria, the states of Gujarat and Chhattisgarh in

India, Astrakhan Oblast and Krasnodar Krai regions in Russia.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources has issued a ministerial decision lifting a ban

on the import of live birds from the Indian state of Karnataka.

The ministry said the decision was based on recommendation from the veterinary authorities which concluded that the cause of the ban has ended. — ONA

KUWAIT CELEBRATES 60TH NATIONAL DAY, REJOICING GREAT ACHIEVEMENTS

KUWAIT: Kuwait is celebrating its 60th National Day today, marking the efforts of its leadership to develop all sectors and preserve the country's peace and stability.

This year's celebration is the first under the leadership of Shaikh Nawaf al Ahmed al Jaber al Sabah, Emir of Kuwait and Shaikh Mishal al Ahmed al Jaber al Sabah, Crown Prince.

During the celebrations, Kuwait is also remembering the great efforts of the late Shaikh Sabah al Ahmad al Jaber al Sabah, who passed away on 29 September 2020, after long years of national and international achievements at every level.

Although this year's celebrations come in time of the coronavirus (Covid-19) crisis, it showed Kuwaiti people's strength and unity in facing the pandemic. Even though public celebrations are banned by the government due to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, Kuwaiti families will continue celebrating the event in their homes.

Kuwait celebrated the first national day on 19 June 1962. Then, Kuwaiti Emir Shaikh Abdullah al Salem al Sabah said in his speech that Kuwaitis will unite in building a great future for their country and

achieve social equality. In the same year, Kuwait launched an establishment council tasked with setting the constitution that relies on democracy. The constitution was approved by Shaikh Abdullah Al Salem in November 1962, then holding the first legislative elections on 23 January 1963. National day celebrations continued to be held on June 19 between 1962-64, but an Amiri decree issued on 19 May 1964, merging Independence Day with ascension of Shaikh Abdullah Al Salem to office to be 25 February.

Kuwait's foreign policy has always been neutral and peaceful while also focusing on cooperation with regional and international organisations to achieve international peace and stability. Kuwait has also built strong relations with the Arab and Muslim Worlds, and exerted great efforts in supporting the work of the GCC, Arab League and the UN.

Moreover, the country has great achievements in the humanitarian field, continuously aiding those in need around the world. These efforts were recognised by the UN in September 2014, granting late Shaikh Sabah the "Humanitarian Leader" title, and Kuwait the "Humanitarian Center" title.

— ONA





Proposed amendments to consumer law discussed

MUSCAT: The Board of Directors of Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) held its first meeting for 2021 under the chairmanship of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources, CPA Board Chairman,

on Wednesday.

The Board discussed amendments proposed by the CPA to the consumer protection law within the framework of reviewing and updating laws and legislations governing consumer protection to upgrade the work in

serving consumers and protecting their rights.

The Board also discussed the current budget for 2021. It also approved the closing account of the fiscal year 2020 and the annual report of the previous year. — ONA

Oman successfully sends first shipment to Saudi Arabia using TIR system

MUSCAT: The Sultanate succeeded in transporting the first consignment of foodstuff to Saudi Arabia through the application of the international road transport system — Transports Internationaux Routier (TIR), thereby cutting customs fees by 30 per cent and timeframe by 50 per cent, compared to the ordinary transport system.

The accomplishment celebrates efforts exerted by Asyad Group in cooperation with the Directorate-General of Customs, Royal Oman Police, to facilitate cross-border transport and eventually promote commercial exchange between the Sultanate and countries of the world.

The system's launch also seeks to round up the series of import and promote the Sultanate as an international logistics hub offering integrated services and competitive incentives to its clients.

The logistics sector plays a major role in supporting other economic sectors in the Sultanate and enhance the growth of its national economy. By activating TIR, Asyad aims to support Omani exports heading to neighbouring countries, save time and cost of export and encourage Omani industrial establishments to



benefit from the system in exporting their products.

Senyar, the company serving as the local guarantor of TIR, will support small and medium enterprises. It enabled "Al Ayadi Al Fidhiya" company to open the first cargo record book.

The International Road Transport Union has hailed the Sultanate's efforts made by the Directorate-General of Customs and Asyad. It described the first TIR-based consignment transportation as "a turning point in regional trade and a step forward in accelerating electronic procedures". — ONA

Over 49,300 SMEs registered till January

MUSCAT: The total number of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) registered in the Authority for Small and Medium Enterprises Development till the end of January 2021 stood at 49,337, compared to 43,134 in January 2020, an increase by 14.4 per cent, according to the data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

Among the governorates, the Governorate of Muscat topped the list with 33.6 per cent of the total registered SMEs till the end of January 2021, followed by the Governorate of North Al Batinah with 15.7 per cent, the Governorate of Al Dakhiliyah with 12.6 per cent, the Governorate of Dhofar with 8.3 per cent, and the rest of governorates with 29.8 per cent.

— ONA

New guidelines issued for beauty salons

STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, FEB 24

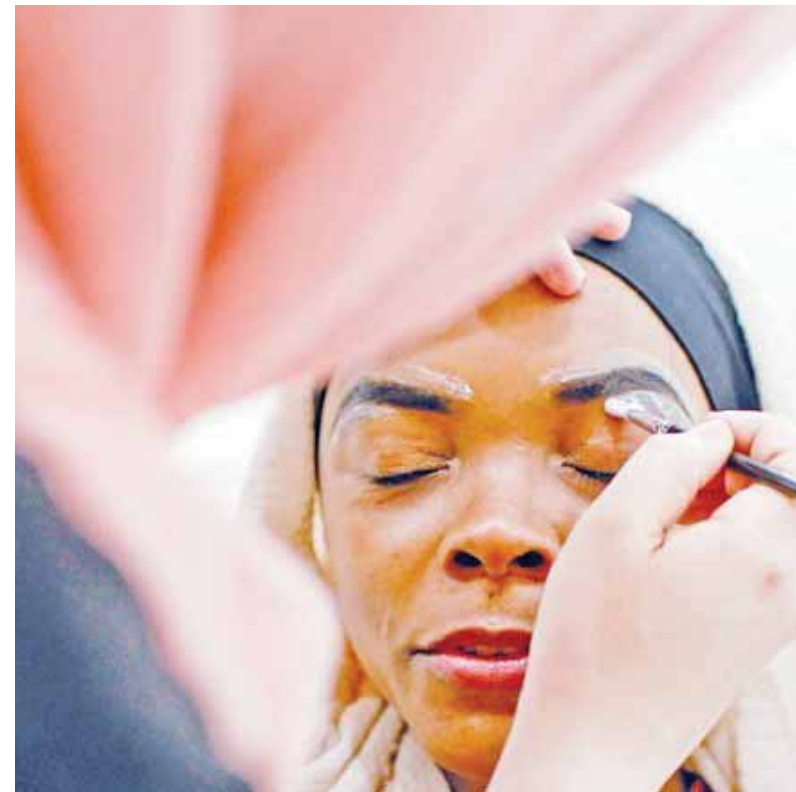
A new set of guidelines for hairdressing or beauty salons in the capital has been issued by Muscat Municipality.

These requirements have to be met before businesses start offering services. Among the requirements are, waiting area, makeup room, a toilet, a view cutter to prevent viewing inside, and enough towel baskets to collect used towels.

At least three waiting seats must be provided for each service seat. In four-and-five star hotels, this requirement can be ignored if the services are limited to hotel visitors with a pre-booking system.

The hairdressing area must not be less than 16 sqm and must have space of 1.5 metres between seats. A hand wash basin with a hot water supply is needed, and for shops in tourist complexes and hotels, the need for a toilet may be ignored provided women's toilets are not more than 20 metres away from the shop.

Only women workers will be permitted in shops while in four-star hotels or higher, or tourist complexes, men can be employed provided they undertake annual medical examinations for infectious diseases.



Workers must be given uniforms and must be able to prove their qualifications.

Activities that have been prohibited include attached workers' housing, use of laser devices, intense pulsed light (IPL) without a licence, sale of chemicals without authorisation, Botox, Restylane, Perlane or other injections, medium or strong depth skin peeling procedures, sale and use of recipes for therapeutic purposes, perform liposuction or fat-removal procedures, offering

tattooing or body-piercing services, any operations that require medical intervention or supervision, any skin penetrating procedures, bringing pets, installing cameras in facilities and admission of men during work hours.

"Owners and workers of these businesses must comply with the health requirements before establishing the business and while providing the services. They have to adhere to the Covid-19 protocols," the Muscat Municipality said.



Sultan Qaboos University

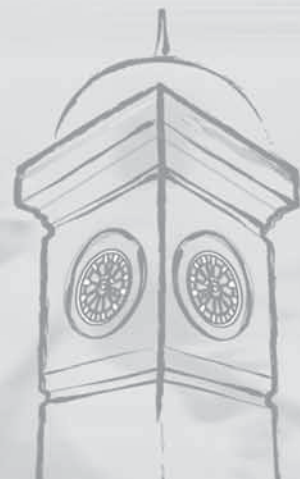
ANNOUNCEMENT

Sultan Qaboos University and Sultan Qaboos University Hospital announce their desire to sell used furniture in sealed envelopes. Those wishing to enter the auction must adhere to the following conditions:

- Interested parties can view the used furniture in auction stores and receive the bidding on Sunday 28/02/2021 and Monday 01/03/2021, from 03:00 pm to 05:00 pm.
- Deposit of (200) Omani riyals in cash as an insurance. This amount will be refunded to the unsuccessful bidders.
- Submitting the offer in a sealed envelope after viewing the used furniture, entitled by the name of the head of the committee for selling used furniture, and put the envelope in bid box.
- The presented offer is binding on its owner if it is placed on it, and in the event that the buyer does not pay the purchase price on time, the insurance amount will be forfeited, and the sale will be awarded to another applicant.
- Those who win the bidding will be contacted. They must pay the remaining sum, and they are responsible for moving their items on Wednesday and Thursday 03-04/03/2021.
- The used furniture is sold in their current condition, and SQU and SQUH are not responsible for any loss or damage to the sold material if the moving is not completed after the end of the sale, and (10) Omani riyals will be imposed for each day after 07/03/2021.

Notes:

- Prices are sorted according to groups and the higher price is taken.
- Funds will be collected electronically through visa cards.
- Commitment to Precautionary measures and wearing a mask and only one person is allowed to enter auction's location with the buyer.
- Entering the auction stores through Gate No. (2).
- For more information, please contact: 92907117 - 99324848



Notice

With reference to the announcement of Tender No. (04/2021) and Tender No. (05/2021) issued on 18/02/2021 AD, we would like to remind all specialized institutions and companies that there is an **amendment in the degree of companies** that can participate in the tender, which we explain as follows:

Tender No.	Tender Subject	Grade	Last date for obtainment of Tender Document	Last date for Tender Submission	Tender Document Price (non-retundable)
4/2021	Providing Catering Service for Dar Al Aman building at Al Khoud	Excellent, First, Second, Third, & Forth	Tuesday 9-3-2021 02:00 PM	Monday 29-3-2021 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=
05/2021	Providing Laundry Service for Dar Al Aman building at Al Khoud	Excellent, First, Second, Third, & Forth	Tuesday 9-3-2021 02:00 PM	Monday 29-3-2021 10:00 AM	R.O. 25/=

Where companies and institutions that fall under the required ranks can participate in the two tenders, starting from the date of this notification.

❖ For inquiries about electronic tenders, please contact the phone number (24402222) or e-mail (reg@tenderboard.gov.om) technical support (24166670).

www.mosd.gov.om

Yemen warns against second Covid wave

DUBAI: Hospitals should prepare for a possible second wave of Covid-19 and take steps to prevent the disease spreading, health authorities in the government-controlled part of Yemen said on Wednesday.

Testing and reporting are limited because of Yemen's more than six-year war but the number of confirmed new cases has risen in the past 10 days, after levelling off since September to just a couple a day.

Thirty-four new cases were reported on Wednesday by the supreme national emergency committee for the internationally recognised government — the highest daily number since July. Yemen is divided between the government temporarily based in the south and the Ansar Allah movement that ousted it from power in the capital Sanaa, in the north, in late 2014. A military coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened in early 2015 to return the government to power.

Yemen's government has reported 2,187 coronavirus infections, including 620 deaths. The rebel fighters, who control most large urban centres, have not provided figures since May when they said there were



A member of the Ansar Allah military police checks his telephone as he rests following the funeral of fighters in Sanaa's al Saleh mosque, on Wednesday. — AFP

four cases and one death. The official figures vastly underestimate the spread of the virus, according to the United Nations and aid agencies, which have been preparing for months for a possible second wave.

The health ministry has called for preventive measures by hospitals and medical centres such as isolating suspected cases, reporting confirmed cases, launching epidemiological investigations and evaluating isolation centres, laboratories and PCR test centres, the supreme committee said on Twitter.

Last year, the UN warned that Covid-19 would be a 'catastrophe' for Yemen.

— AFP

Germany convicts Syrian in landmark torture trial

KOBLENZ: A German court on Wednesday convicted a former Syrian intelligence service agent for complicity in crimes against humanity, in the first court case worldwide over state-sponsored torture by Syrian President Bashar al Assad's government.

Eyad al Gharib, 44, was found guilty over his role in helping to arrest protesters and deliver them to a detention centre in Damascus in autumn 2011.

"The accused is sentenced to four years and six months for aiding and abetting a crime against humanity in the form of torture and deprivation of liberty," judge Anne Kerber said.

Gharib hid his face from the cameras with a folder as the verdict was read out, arms folded and wearing a medical mask.

Almost 10 years since the Arab Spring reached Syria on March 15, 2011, the judgement is the first in the world related to the brutal repression of protesters by the regime in Damascus.

Gharib, a former low-ranking member of the intelligence service, is accused of helping to arrest at least 30 protesters and deliver them to the Al Khatib detention centre in Damascus after a rally in Duma.

He is the first of two defendants on trial since April 23 to be sentenced by the court in Koblenz, after judges decided to split the



An official removes the handcuffs of Syrian defendant Eyad al Gharib, accused of crimes against humanity in the first trial of its kind to emerge from the Syrian conflict, as he waits to hear the verdict in the court room on Wednesday in Koblenz, Germany. — AFP

proceedings in two. The second defendant, Anwar Raslan, 58, is accused directly of crimes against humanity, including overseeing the murder of 58 people and the torture of 4,000 others. Raslan's trial is expected to last until at least the end of October.

The two men are being tried on the principle of universal jurisdiction, which allows a foreign country to prosecute crimes against humanity, including war crimes and genocide, regardless

The two men are being tried on the principle of universal jurisdiction, which allows a foreign country to prosecute crimes against humanity, including war crimes and genocide, regardless of where they were committed

of where they were committed.

Other such cases have also sprung up in Germany, France and Sweden, as Syrians who have sought refuge in Europe turn to the only legal means currently available to them to due to paralysis in the international justice system.

Prosecutors in Koblenz had been seeking five and a half years for Gharib, who defected in 2012 before finally fleeing Syria in February 2013. — AFP

Iraqi Christians prepare for pope's visit

ERBIL: Iraqi Christians are busy scrubbing churches, practising hymns and preparing for mass ahead of the first ever papal visit to the country, a four-day trip next month that is going ahead despite the coronavirus pandemic and security risks.

The minority community of several hundred thousand was decimated first by al Qaeda's rise in the early 2000s and later by IS, the extremist group that brutally persecuted them and other minority faiths and sects from 2014-2017.

For many of those who remained, or have returned to Iraq where free worship is again possible, Pope Francis' visit from March 5-8 is welcome recognition of how they have suffered for their beliefs.

"We hope that after the pope's



Volunteers decorate streets with the pictures of Pope Francis, ahead of his March visit to Qaraqosh, Iraq, on Monday. — Reuters

visit, the situation of Christians will improve," said Amer Abdelahad, a Christian in Erbil, as he registered to attend a mass for 10,000 people in the northern city on Sunday, March 7.

"Christians in Iraq suffered a lot over the past years, they are emigrating. The pope will come and see this reality on the ground," he added, accompanied by his wife and daughter who will

also be at the gathering.

The trip by the 84-year-old leader of the world's Catholics was announced in December, and will take in the capital Baghdad, as well as Ur, a city linked to the Old Testament figure of Abraham, and Erbil, Mosul and Qaraqosh in the plain of Nineveh.

A twin suicide attack in Baghdad killed at least 32 people in January, a reminder of Iraq's ongoing security risks despite the defeat of IS and a general reduction in militant violence. The pope condemned the bombing.

Although some of Iraq's Christians, who include Catholics and Orthodox, have moved back to homes they fled during the upheaval of the last two decades, others foresee further problems and are looking to leave. — AFP

Tunisia mogul gets bail

TUNIS: Controversial Tunisian media mogul and former presidential candidate Nabil Karoui (pictured) was released on bail Wednesday after spending two months in custody on money laundering and tax evasion charges, a judicial source said.

"The judge decided to release Nabil Karoui on bail of 10 million dinars (more than three million euros). He must remain at the disposal of the courts," assistant chief prosecutor Mohsen Dali said.

Karoui, now 57, was first arrested in August 2019 after being indicted on tax evasion and money laundering charges stemming from a 2017 investigation. The business tycoon came second in the first



round of Tunisia's presidential polls despite being in prison. He was released days before the runoff in October 2019. He was rearrested on December 24 over the same affair.

Karoui founded the Qalb Tounes party, which came second in last year's parliamentary elections but now holds 30 of the chamber's 217 seats after a series of defections. It is an ally of the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, which holds the most seats.

Karoui founded Tunisia's main private channel Nessma TV and has presented himself as a candidate for the poor.

He had burnished his reputation in recently with a charity show on Nessma in which he distributed appliances to needy families. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

ISTANBUL

Three get jail over Ghosn escape from Japan

An Istanbul court on Wednesday sentenced three Turks to four years and two months in prison for helping smuggle former Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn in a musical instrument case from Lebanon to Japan.

The court jailed two pilots and an employee of a small private airline who moved the former auto industry giant while he was out on bail facing financial misconduct charges in December 2019.

The pilots — Noyan Pasin and



Bahri Kutlu Somek — and MNG Jet employee Okan Kosemen had faced a maximum 12 years in prison when charged last month with involvement in a conspiracy to smuggle a migrant.

BEIRUT

In Lebanon, thieves go for manhole covers

Lebanon's economic meltdown is not just leaving gaping holes in state coffers, with thieves now plucking Beirut's manhole covers for scrap.

Governor Marwan Abboud said on Wednesday that soaring poverty had led to a spike in the theft of manhole covers, because "they are made out of cast iron which has become much more expensive".

Lebanon is in the grips of its worst economic crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war, and Abboud



said the thefts started rising after the devastating August 4 port explosion sowed more misery.

ROME

At least 41 feared dead in Mediterranean

At least 41 migrants are feared dead following a weekend shipwreck on the Mediterranean Sea route from Libya to Italy, two UN agencies said on Wednesday.

They were among the 120 passengers of a dinghy that left Libya on February 18, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said.

The dinghy started taking in water after about 15 hours at sea, and eight people died before a merchant vessel came to help, a



statement said.

"Many [more] people lost their lives at sea" during a "difficult and delicate [rescue] operation", during which only one body was recovered. — Agencies

In brief

AHMEDABAD



CRICKET STADIUM NAMED AFTER MODI

India renamed the world's largest cricket stadium after Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday, a move that drew immediate praise and criticism. The name change to the Narendra Modi Stadium was unveiled at the 132,000-seat venue formerly known as Sardar Patel Stadium in Ahmedabad, in Gujarat. "World's largest stadium dedicated to the world's largest personality!", Priti Gandhi, a BJP spokeswoman, said in a tweet.

Others said the decision reflected a cult of personality surrounding Modi. "The people of Gujarat will not bear this insult to Sardar Patel", said Hardik Patel, president of the opposition Congress party in the state.

DAR ES SALAAM



COUGHING MINISTER GIVES PRESS CONFERENCE

A distressing video of Tanzania's finance minister coughing and gasping as he gave a press conference to defend the state of his health, was widely condemned on Wednesday.

Finance Minister Philip Mpango, who did not reveal what he was suffering from, appeared at the press conference outside a hospital in Dodoma, after rumours that he had died of Covid-19.

Tanzania has come under fire for downplaying the seriousness of the coronavirus. President John Magufuli has insisted for months that Covid-19 had been fended off by prayer, but last week conceded it was still circulating after the vice-president of Zanzibar was revealed to have died of the virus.

MANILA



'UNDECIDED ON FUTURE OF US TROOP DEAL'

Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte said he has not made a decision yet on the future of the two-decade-old Visiting Forces Agreement (with the US, leaving the fate of the pact hanging in the balance.

Duterte has said the United States should pay more if it wants to maintain the VFA, which he unilaterally cancelled last year in an angry response to an ally being denied a US visa.

The withdrawal period has been twice extended, however, to create what Philippine officials say is a window for better terms to be agreed.

"I have not yet decided on what to do, to abrogate or renew", Duterte said.

North Korean defector undetected for hours after swimming to South

SEOUL: A North Korean defector wore a diving suit and fins during a daring six-hour swim around one of the world's most fortified borders, a Seoul official said, and was caught only after apparently falling asleep.

Bungling South Korean forces did not spot the man's audacious exploit despite him appearing several times on CCTV after he landed and triggering alarms, drawing heavy criticism from media and opposition MPs. Even after his presence was noticed, the man — who used diving gear to make his way by sea around the Demilitarized Zone that divides the peninsula — was not caught for another three hours. The man, reportedly in his 20s, landed north of the town of Goseong on the east coast. "He presumably had swum for about six hours, wearing a padded jacket inside a diving suit and fins. His clothing appeared to have kept him warm and allowed him to stay afloat", an unnamed Joint Chiefs of Staff official was quoted as saying by Yonhap news agency on Tuesday.

Tidal currents worked in his favour, the official said, and he abandoned most of his equipment before making his way through a drainage channel under the barbed-wire fences that run along the coast.

Over more than three hours surveillance cameras caught him eight times, audible alarms sounding twice, but border guards

Over more than three hours surveillance cameras caught him eight times, audible alarms sounding twice, but border guards did not notice. Eventually a manhunt was launched, and troops found him three hours later, apparently asleep, his facemask hanging on a tree

did not notice. Eventually a manhunt was launched, and troops found him three hours later, apparently asleep, his facemask hanging on a tree.

Officials say the defector, presumed to have been a civilian in the North, has expressed a desire to defect.

The military acknowledged troops had "failed to abide by due procedures" and vowed to strengthen border security.

And in a parliamentary hearing on Tuesday, Defence Minister Suh Wook acknowledged that surveillance systems in the area were "malfunctioning and outdated". Only a handful of Northern defectors ever directly cross the DMZ or swim past the maritime border — although the last such publicly known incident was in November, when questions about security were also raised.

— AFP



Indonesia's FM Marsudi meets with Myanmar's and Thailand's counterparts in Bangkok. Indonesia's Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi talks with Myanmar's Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin, as Thailand's Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai listens during their meeting in Bangkok on Wednesday. — Reuters

Myanmar in talks with neighbours to end unrest

BANGKOK: The Myanmar junta's foreign minister visited Thailand on Wednesday as regional powers tried to broker an end to three weeks of deadly unrest triggered by a military coup.

The talks came as an anti-coup protester died in detention, a local rescue organisation said. Four others have been killed in the crackdown.

Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin held talks with his counterparts from Thailand and Indonesia in what was the first known face-to-face meetings between a senior junta member and foreign government officials. The military has weathered a storm of international condemnation for ousting civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi from power in a February 1 putsch, while dissent within its borders has been vociferous with daily nationwide protests.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said she expressed concerns about the safety and welfare of Myanmar citizens and

reiterated a need for an "inclusive democratic transition process".

"We ask all parties to exercise restraint and not use violence to avoid casualties and bloodshed", she told reporters in Jakarta.

Marsudi has been on a "shuttle diplomacy" mission over the past two weeks discussing the Myanmar crisis during visits to Brunei and Singapore as well as phone calls with other Southeast Asian counterparts.

She had hoped to travel to Naypyidaw after her visit to Bangkok to directly convey messages from Indonesia and other countries but confirmed the visit had to be postponed.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Indonesian Embassy in Myanmar's commercial hub Yangon saw hundreds of protesters gather for the second consecutive day.

Angered that Jakarta was talking with the junta government — officially named the State Administration Council — demonstrators carried signs reading: "Stop negotiating with

them" and "Indonesia, don't support dictator".

"The Military's State Administration Council is not our legitimate government", said participant Seinn Lae Maung, who had a Myanmar flag painted on her face.

"Please respect our votes and do hear our voices."

Marsudi later hit back at the criticism, warning: "To do nothing is not an option."

Since the February 1 coup, Myanmar has seen a torrent of anger and defiance from hundreds of thousands of protesters nationwide demanding the release of Suu Kyi.

The military has justified its actions by alleging widespread electoral fraud in November's elections, which Suu Kyi's party had won in a landslide.

Since taking power, the junta has ordered nightly internet blackouts and arrested hundreds of anti-coup protesters, while security forces have steadily stepped up enforcement tactics to quell demonstrations. — AFP

Singapore trials phone app offering mini check-ups

SINGAPORE: Each morning before work at a Singapore construction site, Gunasekar Udayakumar, 41, gets his vital signs checked, without going to a clinic, or even seeing a nurse.

All he needs is his smartphone, which in just 45 seconds can tell him his heart rate, oxygen levels and even his stress levels.

It can also tell him if he should see a doctor.

The application, developed by Singapore start-up Nervotec, is what construction firm Kajima considers its first line of defence against another outbreak of the coronavirus in Singapore.

The city-state has kept a tight lid on its infections and wants to avoid a repeat of last year, when a series of clusters emerged in migrant worker dormitories.

Kajima staff at various sites have used the application since December as part of a government-initiated programme that provides companies with trial-stage technology to help them adjust to the new pandemic-era norms. It offers a diagnosis of the user's health condition, relying solely on a smartphone camera that can



Nervotec founder Jonathan Lau shows the comparison in vital signs readings between his company's app and a pulse oxygen monitor, in Singapore. — Reuters

measure heart rate by picking up changes in the reflectivity of light on the user's skin between heart beats according to blood flow underneath.

Nervotec founder Jonathan Lau said Singapore's government was very interested in the technology.

"We see the most traction coming from healthcare providers, both private and public", he said.

Lau's initial inspiration came from his experiences as an air

force pilot, when he underwent constant check-ups.

He eventually founded a company that used wearable devices to monitor pilots. But when the pandemic hit, Lau broadened the focus.

The app is still undergoing local review and Chwee Teck Lim, Director of the National University of Singapore's Institute of Health Innovation and Technology, said it could have a big impact if approved by regulators.

— AFP

India to vaccinate over-60s from March 1

NEW DELHI: India plans to expand its vast but faltering coronavirus vaccination programme from March 1 by offering jabs to the over 60s, the government said on Wednesday.

The country began vaccinating its 1.3 billion population last month and plans to inoculate 300 million people by July, but so far the rollout has been limited to healthcare workers and other frontline staff.

However, from Monday people over 60 and those over 45 with multiple medical conditions can be vaccinated for free at 10,000 government hospitals and nearly 20,000 private clinics for a charge.

"Those who want to get vaccinations from private hospitals will have to pay. The amount to be paid will be decided and declared by the health ministry within the next three to four days", Union Minister Prakash Javadekar said after a cabinet meeting.

The vaccination pro-

gramme, one of the world's largest, has so far seen 12.2 million shots administered, according to the health ministry.

But at the current pace it will take several years to inoculate 300 million people.

The vaccines being used are the AstraZeneca jab, made domestically by Indian giant the Serum Institute, and the homegrown Covaxin developed by Bharat Biotech, which is yet to complete trials.

The makers of Russia's Sputnik V have also applied for emergency use approval.

The head of Serum, which other poor countries are relying on for supplies of the AstraZeneca vaccine, said on Sunday it had been "directed to prioritise the huge needs of India".

Some regions of the country have seen an uptick in infections in recent weeks including in the western state of Maharashtra, which has imposed new restrictions on gatherings.

— AFP

Ghana first to get free Covax doses

ACCRA: Ghana on Wednesday became the first country to receive vaccines from Covax, a global scheme to procure and distribute Covid inoculations for free for poorer countries.

Launched last April, Covax said it planned to ship two billion doses by year's end.

"The next phase in the fight against this disease can begin — the ramping up of the largest immunisation campaign in history," UNICEF Executive Director Henrietta Fore declared in a statement.

"At last!" World Health Organization (WHO), Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, whose organisation also backs the Covax initiative, said in a tweet. "A day to celebrate, but it's just the first step."

The 600,000 doses delivered to Ghana are the Oxford/AstraZeneca formula, made under licence by the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, the Serum Institute of India.

They are part of an initial tranche of deliveries headed to several low and middle-income countries.

An Emirates flight carrying the vaccines touched down at Accra's Kotoka International Airport shortly after 0740 GMT, where a government delegation led by the Minister for Health Designate Kwaku Agyeman Manu received them, in images broadcast on television.

Ghana's food and drug authority has already authorised the use of the Indian-made vaccines as well as Russia's Sputnik V, according to local media.

The West African nation has recorded 80,759 Covid-19 cases and 582 deaths since the start of



Workers transport shipment of Covid-19 vaccines at the Kotoka International Airport in Accra on Wednesday. — AFP

the pandemic, although the true figure is believed to be higher because of lack of testing.

Vaccinations are scheduled to start on Tuesday in Accra, Kumasi and Obuasi.

They will begin with health workers and other frontline staff, adults over 60 and people with underlying health conditions, Information Minister Kojo Oppong Nkrumah said.

The first who will get the vaccines also include "frontline executive, legislature, judiciary and their related staff, frontline security personnel, some religious leaders, essential workers, teachers and other personalities," he said.

The government said it was making "frantic efforts" to acquire enough vaccines to inoculate all of Ghana's 30 million people and urged people to take part in the drive.

New variants of Covax, led by Gavi the

Covid-19

World toll Wednesday February 24, 1100 GMT

Deaths	New	Cases	New
2,486,116	11,665	112,079,233	415,997
New: 24-hour increase on Tuesday February 23			

Hardest-hit countries

	Deaths	New (latest report)	Cases
UNITED STATES	502,681	2,306	28,261,619
BRAZIL	248,529	1,386	10,257,875
MEXICO	181,809	1,273	2,052,266
INDIA	156,567	104	11,030,176
UNITED KINGDOM	121,305	548	4,134,639
ITALY	96,348	356	2,832,162
FRANCE	85,070	431	3,629,891
RUSSIA	84,430	383	4,200,902
GERMANY	68,740	422	2,402,818
SPAIN	68,079	443	3,161,432
IRAN	59,736	73	1,598,875
COLOMBIA	59,118	144	2,233,589

Increases over 24 hours may not tally exactly with previous day's total due to inavailability or late publication of data or corrections made by authorities

Sources: AFP tallies based on official tolls



— AFP

— Reuters

IATA plans Covid-19 travel pass in March

LONDON: Global airline industry body IATA said it would launch a Covid-19 travel pass at the end of March, bringing into use a digital system for test results and vaccine certificates which will help facilitate international travel.

IATA said on Wednesday that it was essential that governments start issuing their citizens with digital vaccination certificates which can then feed into its travel pass.

IATA warned that the outlook for airlines had weakened since its December forecasts, and due to tightening travel restrictions it now expected the sector to still be bleeding cash by the fourth quarter of this year.

IATA raised its forecast for total airline cash burn for 2021 to between \$75 billion and \$95 billion, up from the \$48 billion it had forecast in December.

While many countries have started rolling out vaccines to tackle the novel coronavirus, the emergence of more infectious variants in countries such as Britain, Brazil and South Africa has forced many governments to ban all but essential travel.

This summer is make-or-break for many airlines and holiday companies which are struggling to survive with close to a year of almost no revenue due to pandemic restrictions.

Amnesty strips Navalny of 'prisoner of conscience' status

MOSCOW: Amnesty International said on Wednesday that it no longer recognises jailed Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny as a prisoner of conscience because of past "advocacy of hatred" comments but vowed to still push for his release.

Navalny's arrest at a Moscow airport in January sparked widespread condemnation from rights groups in Russia and abroad as well as from Western leaders who are expected to impose sanctions on Moscow in response.

But Amnesty said it took the decision to rescind his status

of prisoner of conscience "in relation to comments he made in the past."

The London-based activist group did not cite any specific remarks made by Navalny, but he triggered criticism with anti-immigrant statements at the beginning of his political career more than a decade ago.

"Some of these comments, which Navalny has not publicly denounced, reach the threshold of advocacy of hatred, and this is at odds with Amnesty's definition of a prisoner of conscience," it said.

Amnesty added however that it would continue to demand Navalny's release. — AFP

12th-century hammam found in Spain bar

SEVILLE: They had only just begun renovating the bar in Seville when they made a startling discovery: the building housed a perfectly preserved 12th-century hammam, its walls covered with beautiful paintings.

What tipped them off was a star-shaped skylight that emerged within the first few blows of a hammer when the work first began inside Giralda, a bar in the heart of this southern Spanish city.

The discovery was "completely unexpected", explained Alvaro Jimenez, the archaeologist assigned to monitor all such renovation works undertaken near Seville's Cathedral, a



The counter of the Giralda Bar where an Islamic 12th-century bathhouse was uncovered during renovations works. — AFP

protected area. In total, they uncovered 88 skylights, star-

shaped and octagonal, in the roof of this Moorish-styled bar with

tilled walls that takes its name from La Giralda — once the minaret of the Great Mosque that now serves as the Cathedral's bell tower.

And there was more to follow, with workers uncovering beautiful artworks on the walls of the room, which measures 200 square metres (2,100 square foot), as well as the former hammam's warm, hot and cold rooms.

More than 800 years old, the thermal baths along with their artwork, sculptures and wall fittings were perfectly preserved.

That was thanks to the work of an early 20th-century architect called Vicente Traver who carefully hid it away when installing two extra floors. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

LONDON

Masters degree in The Beatles at British university

A British university has launched the first master of arts degree which studies The Beatles and the legendary band's wider impact on music and society.

The University of Liverpool, based in north-west England, said on Wednesday it had begun accepting applications for a course called The Beatles: Music Industry and Heritage course.

The institution said the degree will appeal to people currently working or considering a career in the arts and across the tourism



and leisure sectors.

The study material involves analysing the role the band plays in music, creative industries and then in wider fields such as tourism and heritage.

NEW YORK

Facebook to invest \$1bn in news industry

Facebook on Wednesday pledged to invest at least \$1 billion in the news industry over the next three years, days after a high-profile stand-off with the Australian government over paying news outlets for content.

The social network's commitment to the news industry follows Google's \$1 billion investment last year.

Facebook on Tuesday restored Australian news pages, ending an unprecedented week-long blackout after wringing concessions



from the government over a proposed law that will require tech giants to pay traditional media companies for their content.

The brief blackout shocked the global news industry.

ATHENS

Lead shot poisoning flamingos in Greece

Dozens of flamingos in a northern Greek lagoon have died in recent days after ingesting lead shot illegally used by hunters, a wildlife group said on Wednesday.

The Action for Wildlife group said it had located 26 dead flamingos in the Agios Mamas lagoon in Halkidiki peninsula, and had been told of several other sightings in nearby wetlands.

"We estimate the overall number is much higher," they said by e-mail.



The group said it had recovered 10 live birds from the broader Halkidiki area, seven of whom had subsequently died. The remaining three are "in very bad shape", it said. — Agencies

Does your nose grow? Pinocchio Paradox

Lying comes naturally to many people. Have you thought about the lies one writes on their social media profile or the photos used in their bio? What about the lies in a job interview or to be promoted at work?

Lying in public or private life is everywhere. What a man has never lied to his wife or a healthy person that fakes to be sick in order not to attend an event that had been invited to? Saying the phone battery was down or saying that everything is going well when in fact is not true. Who has never exaggerated a bit more than necessary?

Throughout the Middle Ages, into and beyond Renaissance lies had reached 'never-before proportions'. From people in power to scientists lies have been told. The Cuban Missile crisis, the Watergate Scandal, the Pentagon Papers, Iraq's Weapon of Mass Destruction are some of the examples in which lies took central stage. These, among another dozen, are the lies we are aware of...

Even the person who denies it is actually a liar. The interest in the art of lying goes back centuries ago. As a theoretical and sociological study, it can be dated from the time of Saint Augustine, a fourth-century philosopher. Aurelius Augustinus,



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THE
MOTIVATIONS
BEHIND TELLING
LIES AND WHAT
THEY GET BY
TELLING LIES
ARE OF GREAT
IMPORTANCE

also a theologian and prolific writer, devoted two treatises to the issue: De mendacio (On lying) and Contra mendacium (Against lying), written in 395 DC and 420 DC, respectively. For Saint Augustine, lying is intentional. But the reasons can vary broadly.

The motivations behind telling lies and what they get by telling lies are of great importance — not that we will solve or even fully understand one of the topics that have been addressed for thousands of years. Interesting, nowadays there is this struggle with falsehood, rumours, and lies that nobody solved before but on the contrary just made it more sophisticated.

A real situation pushed me to look into this topic. As if in a low budget movie, a security guard in one of these fancy locations not only fabricated a claim but also unshamefully lied to his supervisor right there in front of me. I could not believe my ears. What an irony!

I, one of those constantly emphasising the need for communication transparency, media literacy, understanding sources of information, use of clear words, was tasting the poison of a scorpion. It popped to my mind that the popular idea that liars avert direct eye contact

proved to be wrong. The liar was looking straight into my eyes while making his claim. He knew he was lying — and that I knew it — still he chose to continue with his lie while I was sitting duck. I thought about this man's family. I thought about the type of education his children get at home. Also, I thought about how damaging it can be, besides the moral and ethical questions that can arise from the situation.

This is not philosophy; it is real life. His nose didn't grow! While a big number of white lies are likely to be trivial, others can have serious consequences.

Lying starts to be a problem when from an occasional 'little white deceive' turns to be a habit and then it becomes a routine in a person's character. It comes to the point that people do make a conscious choice to lie. Have you thought about the use of filters on social media to look more attractive, toned? The bios? Perception, image and manipulation in visual communication are just lies and we are accepting these lies as normal. Worst of all is when those who claim that lying is freedom of expression. We are elevating the art of fabrication by normalising lies. However, can we handle the truth?

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

GAS TO GAZA?

The pipeline that might give a lifeline

ARI RABINOVITCH AND
NIDAL AL MUGHRABI

Talks on a gas pipeline that would cross political faultlines and deliver reliable energy to the impoverished Gaza Strip have moved from the abstract to the concrete in recent weeks, three officials with knowledge of the process told Reuters.

For years the project was a distant prospect because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — peace talks between the two sides broke down in 2014 and never resumed, amid mutual suspicion and outbreaks of violence.

But Israeli, Palestinian, Qatari and European interests have converged in recent weeks with the aim of getting gas flowing to Gaza in 2023, say the officials. The plan would see natural gas from the deepwater Leviathan field operated by Chevron in the eastern Mediterranean flow through an existing pipeline

“We are talking about Gaza having 24 hours of electricity, providing a basis for major economic growth and a contributor to peace and stability”

ARIEL EZRAHI
Director of Energy

into Israel, and from there into Gaza through a proposed new extension.

Under the arrangement, which has yet to be finalised, the Israeli side of the planned pipeline would be funded by Qatar and the section in Gaza paid for by the European Union, the officials said.

If successful, the pipeline project would for the first time in years provide a steady energy source to the Gaza Strip, ending rolling blackouts that have helped cripple the economy of the blockaded Palestinian enclave.

“We are talking about Gaza having 24 hours of electricity, providing a basis for major economic growth and a contributor to peace and stability”, said Ariel Ezrahi, Director of Energy for the Office of the Quartet, a group promoting peace efforts between the Palestinians and Israelis which reports to the US, UN, European Union and Russia.

“Recent events have constituted a real breakthrough”, said Ezrahi, who chairs the Gas for Gaza task force that has been funded by the Dutch government since 2015.

The Quartet office sees the Palestinians initially buying about 0.2 billion cubic metres (BCM) of gas a year, perhaps rising to 1 BCM as the plant expands and other consumers join.

The European Union last week committed an initial 5 million euros to fund the Gaza portion of the pipeline, which will run about 4 km and cost around 20 million euros.

Qatari envoy to the Gaza Strip Mohammed al Emadi said that his country would fund the Israeli segment of the pipeline, which officials say will stretch some 45 km.

— Reuters

OMAN-JAPAN RELATIONS

A cultural heritage with better prospects

Every passing day, Omani-Japanese relationship is getting more and more important at all levels, from political and economic spheres to social and cultural arena. These ties were established over a passage of many years.

During this period, there has always been close bilateral relationships and cooperation in all areas. This became possible due to the highly realistic and logical political visions the leadership of the two countries displayed while dealing with bilateral, regional and international developments.

Both the countries focus their efforts on achieving the objective of better life for the entire humanity. With this goal in mind, they strengthen and consolidate international values and principles as it has been the legacy of the two ancient countries and the two civilisations. This requires better utilisation of their relations, more stimulation of areas of investment and opening up more avenues of cooperation between the two friendly countries.

At the political level, both countries enjoy the respect of the countries of the world for adopting a balanced and neutral policy based on mutual respect and non-interference in the internal affairs of others and advocating good causes in the world. These common political denominators are coupled with the two countries' contributions to the efforts for peace and stability in the Middle East and the world. This is due to their policies; they are consulted on many world issues which



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THE TWO
COUNTRIES'
RESPECT FOR
INTERNATIONAL
COVENANTS,
TREATIES AND
AGREEMENTS HAS
EARNED THEM
INTERNATIONAL
APPRECIATION

have implications on the people of the two friendly nations.

The two countries' respect for international covenants, treaties and agreements has earned them international appreciation. This was also recognised by many countries of the world at various international forums.

Oman and Japan have used their positive political relations to defuse many of the conflicts flared up in the region and the world. This is because of their strong faith in the importance of achievement of global peace and security. The two countries are constantly striving to calm down spots of tension. They prefer that the opposing parties use language of dialogue, regardless of how tricky the problems are.

Oman and Japan have adopted principles of peace in their relations with the countries of the world. They are of the firm view that it is important to spread peace between nations and peoples.

Japan found in Oman a country which has a genuine long-standing historical legacy of serving human relations and its ancient civilisational connections. This is its historical legacy on which its relations with countries are based. It speaks the language of cultural relationship and has rightful positions on the world issues. This close approach of the two countries have helped in strengthening and consolidation of relations between them.

The relations between the two

countries have been strengthened over the past several years with the continuous support of late Sultan Qaboos and Emperor Naruhito of Japan. Both have strong faith in bilateral relationships. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik is also following the same approach in the Sultanate's relations with the world, particularly with Japan as a friendly country.

At the economic level, Japan is one of the trading partners of the Sultanate. Japan benefits from our exports of oil, gas, minerals, fishery and agricultural products. The value of Omani exports to Japan in 2018 was estimated at about \$2 billion, while Japanese exports to the Sultanate amounted to be \$2.5 billion. Japan's purchase of oil production from the Sultanate is about 10 per cent and 30 per cent of liquefied natural gas. Japanese projects have lots of prospects for larger economic cooperation. Japanese companies produce 60 per cent of the Sultanate's electricity through well-known independent energy projects.

Also there is cooperation in the area of tourism. Japanese tourist delegations keep coming to the Sultanate. There are also students and educational exchanges. Like them, there are many other areas of cooperation which strengthen the bilateral relationship and take it to another heights. In this, the role played by the Oman-Japan Friendship Association cannot be underestimated.

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BAUSHER STUN AL NASR TO GO TOP

AHLI SIDAB MOVE TOP OF GROUP A WITH SECOND WIN



Bausher and Al Nasr players in action. -- MOHAMMED MAHJOUB

ANUROOP ATHIPARAMBATH
MUSCAT, FEB 24

Bausher stunned defending champions Al Nasr by a solitary goal in a keenly-fought Group B match of His Majesty's Cup hockey championship final round at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher on Wednesday.

Indian recruit Songeet Singh netted the all-important goal in the 50th minute after a brilliant move.

Final ten minutes saw good pressure from Al Nasr to find the

equaliser but Bausher defence survived the period to triumph 1-0.

With their back-to-back wins in two days, Bausher took the top spot of the group with six points. Al Nasr are second with three points from two matches.

Al Nasr opened their points tally with a 1-0 win over neighbours Dhofar through a 50th minute goal by Arman Qureshi on Monday.

AHLI SIDAB BLANK SOHAR

Ahli Sidab blanked Sohar 3-0 in a Group A match of the final

round at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex on Tuesday night.

Salah al Saadi put the 11-time champions ahead in the 16th minute and four minutes later, he made it 2-0 with another field goal.

Sohar who tried to organise some attacks in between could not get past the Ahli Sidab goalkeeper and tight defence.

Yusuf Afan struck from a penalty corner in the last minute of the match to complete a 3-0 domination of Ahli Sidab.

This is the second win of Ahli Sidab and they have six points

from two matches. They had thrashed Nizwa 4-0 in their opening match on Monday.

Sohar are third in Group A with three points from two matches. Sohar's win came against Majees by a 4-2 margin on Monday.

MAJEES SINK NIZWA

In another match on Tuesday night, Majees drubbed Nizwa 8-1 in a completely one-sided affair at the SQSC.

With the good margin victory, Majees moved to the second position in Group A leapfrogging Sohar on goal average.

HM CUP FINAL ROUND RESULTS

On Wednesday
Group B
Bausher 1 (Songeet Singh 50')
bt Al Nasr 0

On Tuesday
Group A
Ahli Sidab 3 (Salah al Saadi (16, 20),
Yusuf Afan 60') bt Sohar 0
Majees 8 bt Nizwa 1



Sultanate of Oman

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

TENDERS ANNOUNCEMENT

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH, Muscat, hereby give notice of tenders for the following projects:-

Tender No.	Project Category	Location	Fees R.O	Grade In Tender Board Registration
Re-Tender 18/2019	Supply	CONSTRUCTION AND DESIGN OF BOWLING ALLEY FACILITIES TO MUSCAT SPORTS CLUB	25/-	Excellent & First Grade
1/2021	Services	CLEANING SERVICES TO ENTIRE CAMPUS AND FACILITIES TO MINISTRY'S VARIOUS BUILDINGS AT MUTTRAH WILLAYAT FOR THE PERIOD OF 1ST MAY 2021 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2021	25/-	Excellent Grade
2/2021	Services	CLEANING SERVICES TO ENTIRE CAMPUS AND FACILITIES TO MINISTRY'S VARIOUS BUILDINGS AT BAUSHER & SEEB WILLAYATS FOR THE PERIOD OF 1ST MAY 2021 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2021	25/-	Excellent Grade
3/2021	Services	MAINTENANCE OF LANDSCAPING WORKS TO MINISTRY'S CAMPUS AT RUWI FOR THE PERIOD OF 1ST MAY 2021 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2021	25/-	First Grade
4/2021	Services	MAINTENANCE OF LANDSCAPING WORKS TO MINISTRY'S CAMPUS AT AL KHUWAIR FOR THE PERIOD OF 1ST MAY 2021 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2021	25/-	First Grade
5/2021	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	MAINTENANCE OF ELECTRO-MECHANICAL AND AIR-CONDITIONING UNITS TO MINISTRY'S FACILITIES AT MUTTRAH WILLAYATS FOR THE PERIOD OF 1ST MAY 2021 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2021	25/-	First Grade
6/2021	Electromechanical and Telecommunications Contracting and Maintenance	MAINTENANCE OF ELECTRO-MECHANICAL AND AIR-CONDITIONING UNITS TO MINISTRY'S FACILITIES AT BAUSHER & SEEB WILLAYAT FOR THE PERIOD OF 1ST MAY 2021 TO 31ST DECEMBER 2021	25/-	First Grade

Companies, which are registered with the Tender Board and engaged in same category with experience in and same Grade as noted above, can obtain the Tender Documents at the Tender Board E-tendering digital portal link (<http://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>) until 13/03/2021.

The last date of tender submission on above E-tendering site at 10:00am 05/04/2021.

A Tender Bond equivalent to 1% of the tender sum issued from a registered bank, in the prescribed form, in Sultanate of Oman and valid for 90 days should enclosed with the tender.

Any tender without the bond will be reject and the tender committee is not bound to accept the lowest or any tender received.

INTERNAL TENDER COMMITTEE OF MINISTRY OF CULTURE, SPORTS and YOUTH

Any participants have doubt in adopting e-tendering can contact over the phone 24166670 or through email etenderhd@ita.gov.om

Man Utd boss Solskjaer 'keeps in touch' with hotshot Haaland

LONDON: Manchester United Manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer has said he is still in contact with former charge Erling Braut Haaland and has not ruled out a future move for the Borussia Dortmund star.

The 20-year-old striker has established himself as one of the hottest prospects in world football during goal-laden stints with Austrian side Salzburg and Dortmund.

Solskjaer coached Haaland, the son of his former Norway international team-mate Alf-Inge, at Molde and had hoped to persuade the frontman to link up with him again at Old Trafford last season. But the striker opted for a move to Dortmund in December 2019.

Haaland's agent, Mino Raiola, has said only 10 clubs in the world can afford him, with



four of those teams in England.

Asked if the forward was somebody he would like to see one day at Old Trafford, Solskjaer replied: "I think when you have had kids and players through as a coach, you follow them, of course, and I keep in touch with Erling.

"So it's great to see him become the player he has

become and I know he'll work to improve all the time.

"He's a Dortmund player. We just wish him well there and then let's see what life will bring later on."

"Who wasn't interested in him a year ago?" he added. "Because everyone would say you'd take the best players in the world and Erling is a top

Who wasn't interested in him a year ago? Because everyone would say you'd take the best players in the world and Erling is a top player"

Solskjaer was speaking on the eve of Thursday's Europa League round-of-32 return leg against Real Sociedad, which United approach all but assured of progress following last week's 4-0 win in Turin. — AFP



Australia, Qatar pull out of 2021 Copa America

Australia and Qatar, the two non-South American sides due to take part in this year's Copa America, have pulled out of the tournament, the secretary-general of the South American Football Confederation said on Tuesday. The two teams were set to join 10 others from South America in Argentina and Colombia in June and July.



Murray knocked out in Montpellier first round

Andy Murray was dumped out of the ATP event in Montpellier on Tuesday after suffering a straight-sets defeat in the opening round against Belarusian Egor Gerasimov. The former world number one squandered a set point in the opening set before losing 7-6 (10/8), 6-1 to the 83rd-ranked Gerasimov.



I didn't have the crowd on my side today but I still loved playing in front of so many fans. It just makes it such a fun atmosphere

DANIELLE COLLINS

US player

COLLINS STUNS BARTY IN ADELAIDE

ADELAIDE INTERNATIONAL RESULTS

ROUND TWO

Anastasija Sevastova (LAT) bt Christina McHale (USA) 6-4, 6-1; Jil Teichmann (SUI) bt Wang Qiang (CHN X8) 3-6, 6-3, 6-3; Belinda Bencic (SUI X2) bt Misaki Doi (JPN) 6-1, 6-3; Coco Gauff

(USA) bt Petra Martic (CRO X6) 5-7, 6-3, 6-4; Storm Sanders (AUS) bt Yulia Putintseva (KAZ X7) 6-4, 5-7, 6-1; Danielle Collins (USA) bt Ashleigh Barty (AUS X1) 6-3, 6-4; Iga Swiatek (POL X5) bt Maddison Inglis (AUS) 6-1, 6-3



Belinda Bencic

ADELAIDE, Australia: Unseeded American Danielle Collins sent an out of sorts Ashleigh Barty crashing out of the Adelaide International in the second

round on Wednesday.

Collins seized on some poor serving from the world number one to claim a convincing 6-3, 6-4 win in just 65 minutes.

It was Collins' first win over Barty in three encounters and her first win against a current world number one.

Barty started strongly, breaking Collins' first service game and opening up a 3-1 lead, but the Australian's first serve deserted her and Collins got back on terms, then broke Barty twice to claim the first set.

Barty broke again at the start of the second, but once again Collins came back, then broke at 4-4 before holding her own serve to reach the quarterfinals, where she will play Poland's reigning French Open

champion Iga Swiatek.

"I feel really comfortable playing here," Collins said.

"I didn't have the crowd on my side today but I still loved playing in front of so many fans. It just makes it such a fun atmosphere."

Swiatek was untroubled against Australian qualifier Maddison Inglis, winning 6-1, 6-3.

BENCIC CRUISES

Second seed Belinda Bencic cruised into the quarterfinals with a 6-1, 6-3 win over Japan's Misaki Doi.

The Swiss world number 12 dominated throughout to reach her first quarterfinal since Doha in February 2020. "I felt really good on the court," Bencic said.

Bencic takes on Australian surprise packet Storm Sanders in the last eight.

The left-handed Sanders entered the tournament as the world number 292 but outlasted seventh seed Yulia Putintseva in three sets 6-4, 5-7, 6-1.

American teenager Coco Gauff caused an upset when she came from a set down to beat sixth seed Petra Martic of Croatia 5-7, 6-3, 6-4. In another upset, Swiss player Jil Teichmann beat China's eighth seeded Wang Qiang 3-6, 6-3, 6-3 to set up a quarterfinal against Latvia's Anastasija Sevastova, who downed American lucky loser Christina McHale 6-4, 6-1.

McHale was a late entry when fourth seed Elise Mertens withdrew with a shoulder injury. — AFP

Mohit stars in Al Turki win



Mohit Patel of Al Turki NMC

MUSCAT: Mohit Patel's superb 3 for 13 was the highlight of Al Turki NMC's solid 8-wicket victory against winless AER in a Premier Division T20 League game under floodlight at OC Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Tuesday.

AER failed to capitalise on its decision to bat first, folding up for a dismal 80 in the 19th over as Mohit, Mehran Khan (2 for 16) and Viren Patel (2 for 16) bowled exceptionally well to plot its demise.

It took Al Turki only 12.3 overs to surpass the total, scoring 84 for 2 for a comfortable win. Ajay Lalcheta (27) and Kail Khalid (22 not out) were its main scorers.

BRIEF SCORES (Premier Division T20): AER 80 all out in 18.4 overs (Afzal Khan 23 – 1x4, Mohit Patel 3-13, Mehran Khan 2-16, Viren Patel 2-16) lost to Al Turki NMC 84 for 2 in 12.3 overs (Ajay Lalcheta 27 – 5x4, Kail Khalid 22 not out – 1x4, 2x6) by 8 wickets.

LOCAL FLAVOUR

Bank Muscat supports Sayyid Abbas golf tourney



In line with its commitment to promoting sports and community activities, Bank Muscat extended strong support to the prestigious Sayyid Abbas Golf Tournament, which was recently held at the Ghala Golf Club.

The tournament, which is now held annually in memory of the club's former chairman, the late His Highness Sayyid Abbas bin Faisal, saw the participation of some of the top golfers in the country. As many as 115 players took part in the tournament across different categories in the championship, which was first started in 1979.

Abdulnasir al Raisi, Deputy General Manager — Premier Banking, Bank Muscat, gave away prizes to the winners in dif-

ferent categories. Bank Muscat has been a strong supporter of the tournament for many years now and this partnership follows its strategy of encouraging sports and commitment to building the capabilities of Omani youth across a wide spectrum of activities.

Abdulnasir al Raisi said: "Bank Muscat is very happy to partner with Ghala Golf Club to support the Sayyid Abbas Golf Championship, which is one of the oldest sports tournaments in the country. The bank attaches great importance to supporting initiatives that contribute to the country's progress and development in all areas. It places particular emphasis on sports activities especially for the youth."

AdLife joins hands with ARTT cricket team

AdLife Hospital has joins hands with Team ARTT for the season 2020-21 and 2021-22 as the official health partner for the team. AdLife will be constantly monitoring the health of the players in these two seasons. They will also be consulting and advising on helping the players choose the right lifestyle. Finally, AdLife will also be managing the player injuries and the recovery process; along side immediate first aid facilities.

ARTT are impressive in the A Division circuit of the 50 over league. ARTT play ACT on Saturday and on winning they will lead the table with all teams have played equal games. Pranav Mehta, co-owner of Team ARTT, said, few years back we lost a player while playing a match.



Since then, we are always concerned about health and safety of our players, who give in everything for the team at the grounds. "We would also get the benefit of their brilliant state of art facilities, highly qualified doctors and surgeons, which are just on a two minute drive from the ground."

Aadil Thomas Alexander, MD of AdLife, said: "We have strategically positioned to provide the best possible medical facilities to the people of Oman."

ARTT are currently dominating the A Division 50 overs league and their last match on March 19 against Zawawi Powertech is said to be the championship match, since it's the last match of the tournament. Sarco are another team who have an outside chance.

OC to receive condolences till March 2



Mourning the death of Kanak Khimji, its late chairman who died on February 18, Oman Cricket (OC) will continue to receive condolence messages at its head office in Al Amerat till March 2 and has placed a condolence book at the reception.

People from all walks of life, including founding OC members, have been coming to OC office to pay their respects and offer condolences to OC officials.

"We have kept a condolence book for anyone wishing to record their final condolences for our late chairman during office hours (9 am to 5 pm) till Tuesday, March 2, 2021. Ambassadors of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have already visited our office while many more dignitaries

ies from public and private sectors are expected to arrive in the coming days," said an OC official.

Apart from being one of the most renowned business leaders in Oman, Khimji was known and respected for his outstanding contribution to the game of cricket since 1979 when he became the founding chairman of Oman Cricket along with other founding members.

Recognising his efforts, International Cricket Council awarded him the ICC Award for Lifetime Service in 2011. Having made remarkable progress under his leadership, Oman is now ranked among the top 20 nations in T20 Internationals and One-Day Internationals with top class cricket infrastructure.

England collapse to 112 all out

AXAR PATEL CLAIMS SIX WICKETS ON DAY ONE OF DAY-NIGHT TEST

AHMEDABAD, India: Spinner Axar Patel claimed six wickets as India skittled out England for 112 on day one of a crucial day-night third Test in Ahmedabad on Wednesday.

Patel, who recorded his second haul of five or more wickets in just his second Test, combined with Ravichandran Ashwin to end England's innings in 48.4 overs in the world's biggest cricket stadium.

India's innings witnessed a power cut with most of the new LED lights at the revamped stadium going off for two minutes after which play resumed.

India reached five for no loss at dinner with Rohit Sharma, on five, and Shubman Gill at the crease.

Gill survived a scare when he was caught at second slip off fast bowler Stuart Broad but replays suggested that Ben Stokes had grassed the ball while taking the catch.

Earlier, Zak Crawley top-scored with 53 after England elected to bat first. Captain Joe Root (17) Ben Foakes (12) and Jofra Archer (11) also got into double figures.

The England batting fell apart after fast bowler Ishant Sharma, playing his 100th Test, struck first with the wicket of Dom Sibley for nought in the third over of the day.

Crawley put on 47 runs with Root for the third wicket to put up some resistance but Ashwin claimed the England captain with his off spin.

Root reviewed the call but replays showed the ball would have hit the top of leg stump and he left the field to the loud cheers of the home crowd.

England took tea at 81 for four and wickets kept falling in the second session.

Foakes stood guard for 58 balls before Patel bowled the wicketkeeper-batsman to wrap up the innings. Ashwin took three wickets.

England, looking to bounce back from a 317-run defeat, have brought back their pace duo of James Anderson and Archer in the team. The four-match series is level at 1-1. — AFP



SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND

Z Crawley lbw Patel	53
D Sibley c R Sharma b I Sharma .0	
J Bairstow lbw Patel	0
J Root lbw Ashwin	17
B Stokes lbw Patel	6
O Pope b Ashwin	1
B Foakes b Patel	12
J Archer b Patel	11
J Leach c Pujara b Ashwin	3
S Broad c Bumrah b Patel	3
J Anderson not out	0
Extras (b1, lb2, nb3)	6
Total (48.4 overs, all out) . 112	
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-27, 3-74, 4-80, 5-81, 6-81, 7-93, 8-98, 9-105	
Bowling: I Sharma 5-1-26-1, Bumrah 6-3-19-0, Patel 21.4-6-38-6, Ashwin 16-6-26-3	



Woods ‘recovering’ after surgery following roll-over car crash

LOS ANGELES: US golf legend Tiger Woods was recovering in a hospital on Tuesday after surgery for serious leg injuries sustained in a car crash that law enforcement officials said he was lucky to survive.

Woods was driving in a Los Angeles suburb on a road notorious for fatal accidents when his car crashed, rolling several times.

“He is currently awake, responsive, and recovering in his hospital room,” his representatives said in a statement on Woods’s Twitter account late on Tuesday.

In the same statement, Harbor-UCLA Medical Center chief medical officer Anish Mahajan said Woods underwent surgery to repair “significant orthopaedic injuries” to his lower right leg and ankle.

This included the insertion of a rod into his tibia and the use of “a combination of screws and pins” to stabilise his foot and ankle, the statement read.

Woods did not appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol during the early-morning incident, said Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva.

No other vehicles or passengers were involved in the crash, which occurred on a steep stretch of road known as an accident “hotspot,” where Woods was travelling at “a greater speed than normal,” the sheriff added.

“Apparently the first contact was with the centre median, and from there (the car) crossed into the opposing lane of traffic, hit the curb, hit a tree, and there was several rollovers during that process,” said Villanueva. He did not say what caused the crash.

The car ended up several hundred feet from the initial impact, lying on its side on a patch of grass some distance off the road, with its hood badly damaged.

Deputy Carlos Gonzalez, the first officer to arrive at the scene, said it was “very fortunate that Mr. Woods was able to come out of this



The vehicle driven by Tiger Woods lies on its side in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, after a rollover accident. — AFP

alive.”

Gonzalez found Woods trapped in his vehicle but conscious, appearing “calm and lucid” and able to identify himself to the deputy as “Tiger.”

“It is my understanding that he had serious injuries to both legs,” said Los Angeles County fire chief Daryl Osby.

Firefighters and paramedics

extricated Woods from the wreckage of his SUV and transported him with a neck collar and backboard to a local hospital via road.

Woods, one of the most successful golfers of all time, has won 15 major championships.

He recently underwent his fifth back surgery, and said he was uncertain if he would be

able to complete his latest injury comeback in time to play at April’s Masters.

“On behalf of the PGA Tour and our players, Tiger is in our prayers and will have our full support as he recovers,” PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan said in a statement.

‘TRUE CHAMPION’

Woods was in the Los Angeles area for his annual Genesis Invitational golf tournament at the Riviera Country Club, and was driving a courtesy car on the morning of the crash.

The crash happened near the hilly Palos Verdes peninsula, at the bottom of a stretch of road which has runaway truck ramps for drivers who lose control going downhill.

The section has become notorious for fatal accidents over the years.

News of the crash spread rapidly around the sports world and beyond, with figures inside and outside golf swift to send their

prayers and best wishes.

Skier Lindsey Vonn, Woods’ former girlfriend, tweeted: “Praying for TW right now.”

“Sending my prayers to @TigerWoods and his family tonight — here’s to a speedy recovery for the GOAT of golf,” said former US president Barack Obama.

Fellow ex-president Donald Trump, speaking to Fox, urged Woods to “get better and get out there because we all miss him.”

‘DEEPLY CONCERNED’

Woods is the winner of 82 US PGA titles, level with Sam Snead for the all-time record.

In 2000-01, while aged just 25, Woods became the first man to hold the US Open, British Open, the USPGA and the Masters titles at the same time.

“We want to offer him our heartfelt support and prayers at this difficult time,” tweeted Nicklaus.

“Please join us in wishing Tiger a successful surgery and all the best for a full recovery.” — AFP

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Workshop on draft SME Law

MUSCAT: The Public Authority for SME Development (Riyada) hosted a workshop to garner the feedback of key stakeholder institutions on the draft of a proposed new SME law aimed at better regulating small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The goal of the workshop was to ensure better coordination between the different stakeholders in the delivery of services and mentorship support to SMEs.

The goal of the proposed SME law is to ensure that legislations, regulations, incentives and programmes targeted at the SME sector are implemented in the letter and spirit of the law.

Taking part in the seminar were experts and officials representing as many as 21 different government agencies, including Ministry of Interior; Ministry of Defence; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Education; Royal Oman Police; Ministry of Labour; Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning; Ministry of Economy; Ministry of Commerce and Industry for Promotion and Investment; Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation; State Audit and Administrative Institution; the Omani Investment Authority, the General Secretariat of the Tender Board; the Follow-up Unit for the Implementation of The Oman Vision 2040; Central Bank of Oman; Capital Market Authority; the Tax Authority; The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn); Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology; and Omani Technology Fund.

— ONA

Contract awarded for major produced water treatment facility in Oman

SUSTAINABLE PROJECT:
PDO selects Suez-led consortium to implement natural and environmentally friendly water treatment system at Rima

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 24

A consortium led by leading international water and environmental services giant Suez has been awarded a contract by Petroleum Development Oman, the majority state-owned oil & gas exploration and production company in the Sultanate, to develop and operate a major produced water treatment project at Rima in the south of the Sultanate.

The project, based on a Design Build Own Operate and Maintain (DBOOM) contract, will support the treatment of 40,000 m3 each day of produced water coming from oil fields located in Rima. This 20-year contract is worth €120 million (RO 56 million approx) in total revenues, Suez



said in a statement. This contract aims at implementing alternative techniques to treat and dispose produced water, which is the oily wastewater generated during the extraction and recovery of oil.

A large quantity of produced water is being generated from oil fields, depending on oil fields, one barrel of oil produces five to ten barrels of water.

To ensure that this water is treated and disposed safely without harming the environment, Suez will implement an innovative treatment system to avoid deep well aquifers contamination, reduce energy consumption and enhance biodiversity.

This contract aims at implementing alternative techniques to treat and dispose produced water, which is the oily wastewater generated during the extraction and recovery of oil

Within this contract, Suez, main shareholder with 51 per cent and its partners, Merit National Investments (LLC) and Al Shawamikh Oil Services (SAOG), with a 24.5 per cent stake each, will be financing, constructing and operating for 20 years large wetland system and evaporation ponds over a surface of more than 400 hectares, using a technology designed by Wolf-Dieter Rausch, CTO of SusTeco (Sustainable Technology LLC).

A series of basins will be built over a period of two years, seeded with different species of algae. The produced water will be circulating through these basins and purified

by biological actions which consist of biodegradation by microalgae and bacteria. The succession of varying wetland environments, with different flow speeds and depths of water develops these different mechanisms for pollutant absorption and will naturally treat the produced water. Once cleaned, the produced water will be disposed into 300 hectares ponds to be naturally evaporated beneath the Omani desert sun.

This natural and environmentally friendly treatment system will avoid the disposal of hydrocarbon-polluted produced water in the deep well aquifers. It will also significantly reduce the oilfield's carbon footprint with 180 T of avoided carbon dioxide emissions equivalents (CO2e) per day, or

65.7 KT per year.

It will also generate 82 GWh savings in energy per year, compared to the conventional, energy-intensive disposal method of pumping the water into deep aquifers under high pressure.

Additionally, this project will enhance biodiversity in the desert and create a habitat for wildlife species providing sustainable living conditions for flora and fauna.

“We are very proud of this innovative project which strengthens our position in the Middle-East in the Industrial Market. This contract is in line with Suez's strategy in the region to seize growth opportunities with industries and particularly in the Energy sector.

It is also reflecting the Group's new value proposition to offer our customers a portfolio of high added-value solutions that are 100 per cent sustainable with positive impact on environment, biodiversity and climate,” commented Ana Giros, Senior Executive Vice-President of Suez in charge of the APAC (Asia, Australia and India) and AMECA (Africa, Middle East, Central Asia) Regions and Industrial Key Accounts.

Dutch economic delegation plans virtual mission next month

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 24

Sigrid Kaag, the Netherlands' Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, will be leading a virtual economic mission to Oman and other Gulf states from March 22 to April 1,

2021. A large delegation of Dutch companies and organisations has enrolled for this mission. “During this mission, we aim to bring together interested parties from the Gulf region and the Kingdom of the Netherlands to discuss how we can join forces to



secure water, energy and food and safeguard a sustainable future for

all,” said the Dutch Ministry in a statement.

“We offer a digital environment to meet, exchange knowledge and ideas and build international networks, so that in spite of Covid-19 we can continue to strengthen ties between our countries. Let's go forward

together on the road towards the first world exhibition in the Gulf region, Expo 2020.” Minister Kaag will kick-off the mission on March 22, followed by sectoral kick-offs, webinars, information sessions and individual networking and match-making sessions.

PDO taps Belgian firm to study ‘green hydrogen’ pilot

SUSTAINABLE FUEL:
The seven-month-long study will delve into the feasibility of pilot-scale ‘green hydrogen’ production centring on two possible locations: (1) PDO's solar-panelled car park at its Mina Al Fahal headquarters, and (2) the site of 100 MW Amin Solar Renewable Energy Project

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Petroleum Development Oman (PDO), the largest producer of hydrocarbons in the Sultanate,



has tapped Belgium-based consultancy firm Hinicio to study the feasibility of developing a ‘green hydrogen’ pilot within its expansive Block 6 license.

According to a high-level official of the majority state-owned energy firm, the seven-month-long study will delve into the feasibility of pilot-scale ‘green hydrogen’ production centring on two possible locations: (1) PDO's

PDO's pursuit of green hydrogen is driven by a desire to reduce its dependence on natural gas for its energy requirements while, at the same time, exploring low or zero carbon fuel alternatives as part of a commitment to reducing greenhouse gases (GHG) responsible for global warming

solar-panelled car park at its Mina Al Fahal headquarters in Muscat Governorate, and (2) the site of 100 MW Amin Solar Renewable

Energy Project in the south of PDO's concession.

Dr Zakiya al Azri, Corporate Research and Development

Advisor at PDO, said the pilot will help PDO evaluate the efficacy and viability of ‘green hydrogen’ technologies before they can be rolled out as commercial scale projects.

Speaking during a recent webinar, Dr Zakiya said PDO's pursuit of green hydrogen is driven by a desire to reduce its dependence on natural gas for its energy requirements while, at

the same time, exploring low or zero carbon fuel alternatives as part of a commitment to reducing greenhouse gases (GHG) responsible for global warming.

While green hydrogen produced from the Mina al Fahal based pilot will help power passenger buses, car and trucks, the green energy resource from the Amin Solar site is proposed to be injected into the gas pipeline, as well as used as an alternative to diesel in generators currently installed at remote sites, among other applications.

Brussels-based Hinicio specialises in providing sustainable energy and transport solutions to governments, public sector authorities, industrial groups and entrepreneurs. The company has also developed a competence centre in the field of hydrogen and fuel cells in Brussels.

Dealing with energy challenges amid freezing weather

GCC governments are very keen to see international oil prices lifted to help reverse the trend in revenue losses incurred by their oil-dependent economies since mid-2014.

Economic diversification in the region has been slow, while trade has been affected by the negative effects of the Covid-19 pandemic both on businesses and the general economic environment.

The current severe cold wave in America and some other countries of the world has contributed to an increase in global oil prices, at a time when green energy projects

cannot serve as an alternative amid the bad weather conditions.

Officials in some US states, for example, warn of catastrophes due to this historical cold weather that has left millions of people without heating as a result of the power supply cuts.

This wave has also disrupted much of the drinking water supply to the homes of millions of American families, at a time when they have lost half the electricity generation capacity in the affected states due to the freezing of oil wells, natural gas lines and wind turbines.

Some nuclear power plants and coal-fired stations are the



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PRODUCTIVITY AND WORK EFFICIENCY, ALONG WITH PROPER MANAGEMENT OF TIME, ARE PIVOTAL FACTORS FOR THE SUCCESS OF ANY ORGANISATION

only ones in operation.

The severe weather conditions have impacted businesses in cold countries due to the closure of shops and retail stores, which has a knock-on effect on land and air freight and other economic sectors. All these factors are pushing global oil prices to rise. Consuming countries are procuring more quantities of oil fearing that the cold weather may disrupt US oil production.

Indeed, some US states have issued decisions banning the export of quantities of natural gas until supplies to domestic power plants is fully restored. The recent rise in global oil prices

is also attributed to the big cuts in production agreed by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other producers allied with this organisation.

The measure reduces output for an agreed period. An uptick in oil prices, together with the rollout of vaccination campaigns, will help promote economic growth and the revival of stalled businesses in the tourism and hospitality fields, and spur the movement of tourists and people.

Faced with power cuts in the face of freezing cold weather, people cannot turn to renewable sources, such as wind

and solar, because they cannot provide enough energy in the circumstances.

Consequently, huge investments will be required in projects to meet the energy need of the population facing such exceptional circumstances.

On the flipside, heat waves linked to global warming can also cause disasters for humanity similar to the cold wave that is currently being witnessed in the United States.

Thus, everyone must be prepared to respond to weather-related challenges and invest in projects designed to mitigate such impacts in the future.

Issuance of Oman’s first Perpetual Sukuk completed

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, FEB 24

Sohar Islamic — Sohar International’s Islamic Window — has successfully completed the issuance of RO 6 million Perpetual Sukuk al Mudaraba Trust Certificate by Takaful Oman Insurance SAOG, a leading Takaful company in Oman. The Perpetual Sukuk has an initial yearly profit rate of 8.5 per cent, payable semiannually through Takaful Sukuk Specialized Purpose Company (SPC) established by Takaful Oman for this specific programme.

As the issue managers and financial adviser, Sohar Islamic played a pivotal role in ensuring



the successful issuance and completion of the entire activity.

The placement of the issue was done through a private placement to select investors whilst receiving a strong interest from institutions, fund managers, and wealth management clients of the bank.

The transaction represents a first-of-its-kind perpetual Sukuk programme established by a takaful company. Unfamiliarity with Mudaraba structures in the Oman Sukuk market and the way the deferment of profit payments is structured under

the programme added significant complexity to the transaction.

Together with the support of Capital Market Authority (CMA) and Trowers & Hamlins as legal advisers, the issue was initiated and completed with immense success on all fronts. This transaction will boost CMA’s strategy to upgrade various sectors and maximise domestic and foreign investors’ confidence in the local market.

The net proceeds of the Certificates shall be used by Takaful Oman to strengthen the quality of its capital and for general corporate purposes. The securities are listed and admitted to trading on the Muscat Securities Market (MSM).

PRESS RELEASE

RENAISSANCE GETS ISO 27001 INFORMATION SECURITY ACCREDITATION



Renaissance Services has announced that it has secured the ISO/IES 27001:2013 certification for its robust and state-of-the-art Information Security Management System.

After successfully implementing all the stringent requirements, Renaissance has been officially certified with this accreditation by SGS, the world’s leading inspection, verification, testing and certification firm. Renaissance is the first company in the IFM industry in Oman to gain this accreditation, which demonstrates that the company has identified the risks, assessed the implications, and put in place systemised controls to secure information.

Vishal Goenka, Group CFO and Deputy CEO, Renaissance, said, “This achievement marks yet another milestone in our journey and commitment to adopt global standards in all aspects of our business. Information Security and maintaining a robust risk management framework is pivotal to our approach and underlines the trust we maintain with our customers and vendors.”

MALABAR GOLD & DIAMONDS LAUNCHES ‘THE ELEGANCE COLLECTION’



Malabar Gold & Diamonds, one among the largest jewellery retailers globally with a strong retail network of over 250 outlets spread across 10 countries, unveiled its latest diamond jewellery collection named ‘The Elegance’.

Specifically curated for the modern and elegant woman of today, ‘The Elegance Collection’ houses a range of dazzling diamond jewellery set in pure gold which serves as the perfect adornment to celebrate every moment and occasion.

“There has been a change in the way women buy jewellery, especially diamonds. Women these days aspire to own an exquisite piece of diamond jewellery that resonate their unique persona, and ‘The Elegance Collection’ is our ode to those independent women who prefer to reward themselves or their loved ones with diamonds to celebrate their own achievements or create priceless memories,” said Shamal Ahmed, MD – International Operations, Malabar Gold & Diamonds.

Emerging market debt outlook for 2021



BRETT DIMENT

At the start of 2021, we are cautiously optimistic on the outlook for emerging market bonds. Two key positives for the asset class are an expected strong rebound in global economic growth and a more predictable US presidency.

However, prices have already rebounded significantly in anticipation and there are some important risks for the outlook. As such, we think a selective approach will be more important than ever.

On the economic front, a very strong recovery is anticipated, with the IMF forecasting emerging market growth of +6 per cent from an estimated contraction of -3.3 per cent in 2020.

A key driver of this will be broader global economic normalisation, helped by increasing vaccine dissemination. The economic outlook for China is particularly important for emerging markets because it is such a huge source of demand, not least for commodities.

Expected Chinese economic growth of around +8 per cent in 2021, from an estimated contraction of -2.0 per cent in 2020, is a key positive.

When growth picks up,



When growth picks up, inflation usually rises too, which normally tends to push central banks to raise interest rates

inflation usually rises too, which normally tends to push central banks to raise interest rates. However, current conditions are far from normal.

Even before Covid-19 struck, inflation across the world had been unusually low for a long time. With the pandemic severely hitting global demand, many countries are experiencing negative prices or ‘deflation’.

This suggests that interest rates aren’t likely to be raised by much, if at all, from current historically low levels. Along with continuing support from government spending, this certainly entails a helpful backdrop for emerging market bonds.

While interest rates are extremely low globally, emerging market bonds still offer among the best yields available. For example, 10-year government bond yields of +6 per cent and +5

per cent in Indonesia and Mexico respectively are multiples of the current +1 per cent 10-year US treasury yield.

Of course, the large difference is for a reason, but the key point is that the size of the gap should continue supporting demand for emerging market bonds. This will apply particularly to ‘yield-hungry’ income-focused global investors.

One other quite important development is the recent change of US leadership. Under President Biden, US foreign policy will be more familiar and more predictable. The return to ‘normality’ will be most noticeable in trade policy. Although trade tensions certainly won’t disappear, our base case is that the new Biden administration will use tariffs less frequently.

This is positive for export-intensive emerging markets,

HAYA WATER ORGANISES BLOOD DONATION CAMPAIGN



Haya Water organised a blood donation campaign in cooperation with the Blood Bank at the Ministry of Health. This initiative comes as a response to the calls of saving life with a drop of blood and to enhance the culture of giving among employees and besides being part of its social responsibility towards the community.

About this annual campaign and its objectives, Hanan al Balushi, Corporate Communication Manager at Haya Water, said: “This campaign is an integral part of Haya Water’s initiatives in supporting the community as well as encouraging its employees to be part of this campaign. “Haya Water used to host a mobile blood bank at the company’s headquarter, however, due to the current circumstances and in compliance with precautionary measures to prevent the spread Covid-19, the campaign has been held at the Blood Bank headquarter in Bausher,” she added.

Mohsen bin Saif al Sharyani, Head of Donors Affairs Department at the Central Blood Bank, appreciated Haya Water’s initiative and he emphasised that employees donation is an important addition to the Blood Bank’s stock, and called on all citizens and residents to donate due to the urgent needs of blood across the Sultanate’s hospitals to save the lives of those who are in need of blood drops. In addition, he highlighted that those in charge of the Bank follow all necessary precautions to ensure the donors’ safety and donated blood samples are stored properly and protected.

**Thailand increases debt plan**

Thailand's cabinet approved a higher debt management plan of \$51.32 billion for the current fiscal year to help facilitate borrowing for coronavirus relief measures. — **Reuters**

**Hyundai to recall Kona EV**

Hyundai Motor Co will recall 26,699 electric vehicles including Kona EVs in South Korea due to potential fire risks, South Korea's transport ministry said on Wednesday. — **Reuters**

**Gold rises on dollar weakness**

Spot gold rose 0.2 per cent to \$1,808.01 per ounce, having hit its highest at \$1,815.63, hovering close to a one-week high, as a weaker dollar boosted bullion's appeal. — **Reuters**

Heathrow sinks to \$2.8 billion loss during pandemic

Passengers are seen at UK border control in Heathrow Airport. — **AFP**

LONDON: Britain's Heathrow Airport plunged to a £2 billion (\$2.8 billion) annual loss after passenger numbers collapsed to levels last seen in the 1970s during the pandemic.

Heathrow called on the government to agree a common international travel standard to allow passengers to start flying again in the summer and to provide business tax breaks for airports to help them ride out the crisis.

The airport, west of London, is hopeful that travel markets will reopen from mid-May after a government announcement on easing lockdown on Monday.

Still Britain's biggest airport, Heathrow last year lost its title as the busiest in Europe to Paris as its flight schedules contracted more than its rival's.

The airport said on Wednesday that during 2020 passenger numbers shrunk 73 per cent to 22 million people, with half of those people having travelled during January and February before Covid-19 shut down global travel.

The airport sunk to a 2 billion loss before tax on revenues which were down 62 per cent to £1.18 billion, but Heathrow said it had £3.9 billion of liquidity and that could keep it going until 2023.

The airport is owned by Spain's Ferrovial, the Qatar Investment Authority and China Investment Corp, among others.

Meanwhile, the head of London's Heathrow Airport urged British Finance Minister Rishi Sunak to offer airports the same exemption from business rates property taxes that has been given to other sectors hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic.

"We want a level playing field so we don't have to pay that either", John Holland-Kaye, Heathrow's Chief Executive, told BBC television.

"That is just fair."

— **Reuters**

Hong Kong lowers budget deficit as economy expected to recover

HONG KONG: Hong Kong plans to run a much lower budget deficit in the coming fiscal year as the economy is expected to recover from its longest recession on record, Finance Secretary Paul Chan said on Wednesday.

The Chinese-ruled city's recovery hopes are now pinned on coronavirus vaccines. Often-violent protests and US-China trade tensions in 2019 had plunged the global financial hub into recession even before the pandemic hit.

Chan told legislators he expected the budget deficit for the upcoming year to hit HK\$101.6 billion (\$13.10 billion), smaller than the record HK\$257.6 billion expected for 2020/21.

The deficits followed a 15-year period of accumulating surpluses. Kevin Lai, Chief Economist for Asia ex-Japan at Daiwa Capital Markets, said the budget signalled that Hong Kong was trying to revert to living within its means.

"The overall budget appears generous, but it is tightening in fact", Lai said. "Overall spending is actually a reduction as compared to last year." Pandemic relief measures, including cash handouts to residents and tax breaks and other benefits to businesses, left the city with a much deeper deficit last year than the planned HK\$139.1 billion.

"With the epidemic still lingering, our economy is yet to come out of recession", Chan said in his budget speech. "This year's budget focuses on stabilising the economy and relieving people's burden."

To support a recovery in



Finance Secretary Paul Chan delivers the annual budget address at the Legislative Council in Hong Kong. — **Reuters**

Hong Kong usually runs balanced budgets or surpluses, since its pegged currency system commits it to fiscal prudence. Its fiscal reserves are expected at HK\$902.7 billion at the end of March 2021 and fall to HK\$775.8 billion by end-March 2026

consumer and business activity, spending in the coming year includes HK\$5,000 vouchers to residents, cuts in the profits and salaries tax, and a waiver on business registration fees. The

tourism and technology sectors will also receive some support.

On the revenue side, the government will increase the stamp duty for stock trading to 0.13 per cent from 0.1 per cent — a surprise move which has sent the shares of the operator of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange tumbling.

Hong Kong usually runs balanced budgets or surpluses, since its pegged currency system commits it to fiscal prudence. Its fiscal reserves are expected at HK\$902.7 billion at the end of March 2021 and fall to HK\$775.8 billion by end-March 2026.

The city's economy was expected to expand by 3.5 per cent to 5.5 per cent this year and run at an average growth rate of 3.3 per

cent annually from 2022 to 2025. Gross domestic product (GDP) shrank 6.1 per cent in 2020, its worst annual performance on record since 1962.

US-China tensions and uncertainty related to how a game-changing national security law introduced last year could affect non-Chinese investment appetite in the global financial hub remain significant risks for the recovery, analysts say.

Hong Kong has allocated HK\$8 billion for "safeguarding national security", more than 10 times as much as the money earmarked for boosting the barely-breathing tourism sector and almost two times the amount to be injected in the Innovation and Technology Fund. — **Reuters**

Trading on India's largest stock exchange halted by telecom breakdown

MUMBAI: Telecom disruptions forced India's National Stock Exchange to shut all trading on Wednesday, leaving investors stranded ahead of the crucial expiry of monthly derivative contracts.

The NSE is the world's largest derivatives bourse by volume and the third-largest stock exchange globally in terms of the number of equity trades, according to its annual report here.

The stock exchange had faced a similar systems glitch in 2017 that led to a five-hour-long shutdown here, prompting the market regulator to call for a review of the bourse's contingency plans.

"(Trading in) all the segments have been closed at 1140 IST and will be restored as soon as issue is resolved", the NSE said in a statement on Wednesday.

— **Reuters**



The National Stock Exchange is seen in Mumbai. — **Reuters**

FAA orders inspections of Boeing 777 engines



People inspect the damaged starboard engine of United Airlines flight 328 after it caught fire over Denver. — **Reuters**

WASHINGTON: The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) said on Tuesday it was ordering immediate inspections of Boeing 777 planes with Pratt & Whitney PW4000 engines before further flights after an engine failed on a United flight on Saturday.

Operators must conduct a

thermal acoustic image inspection of the large titanium fan blades located at the front of each engine, the FAA said.

The National Transportation Safety Board said on Monday that a cracked fan blade from the United Flight 328 engine that caught fire was consistent with

metal fatigue.

"Based on the initial results as we receive them, as well as other data gained from the ongoing investigation, the FAA may revise this directive to set a new interval for this inspection or subsequent ones", the FAA said.

The engine that failed on the

Based on the initial results as we receive them, as well as other data gained from the ongoing investigation, the FAA may revise this directive to set a new interval for this inspection or subsequent ones

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

26-year-old Boeing 777 and shed parts over a Denver suburb on Saturday was a PW4000.

The engines are used on 128 planes, or less than 10 per cent of the global fleet of more than 1,600 delivered 777 widebody jets.

In March 2019, after a 2018 United engine failure attributed to fan blade fatigue, the FAA ordered inspections every 6,500 cycles. A cycle is one take-off and landing.

South Korea's transport ministry said on Tuesday it had told its airlines to inspect the fan blades every 1,000 cycles following guidance from Pratt after the latest United incident.

An airline would typically accumulate 1,000 cycles about every 10 months on a 777, according to an industry source familiar with the matter.

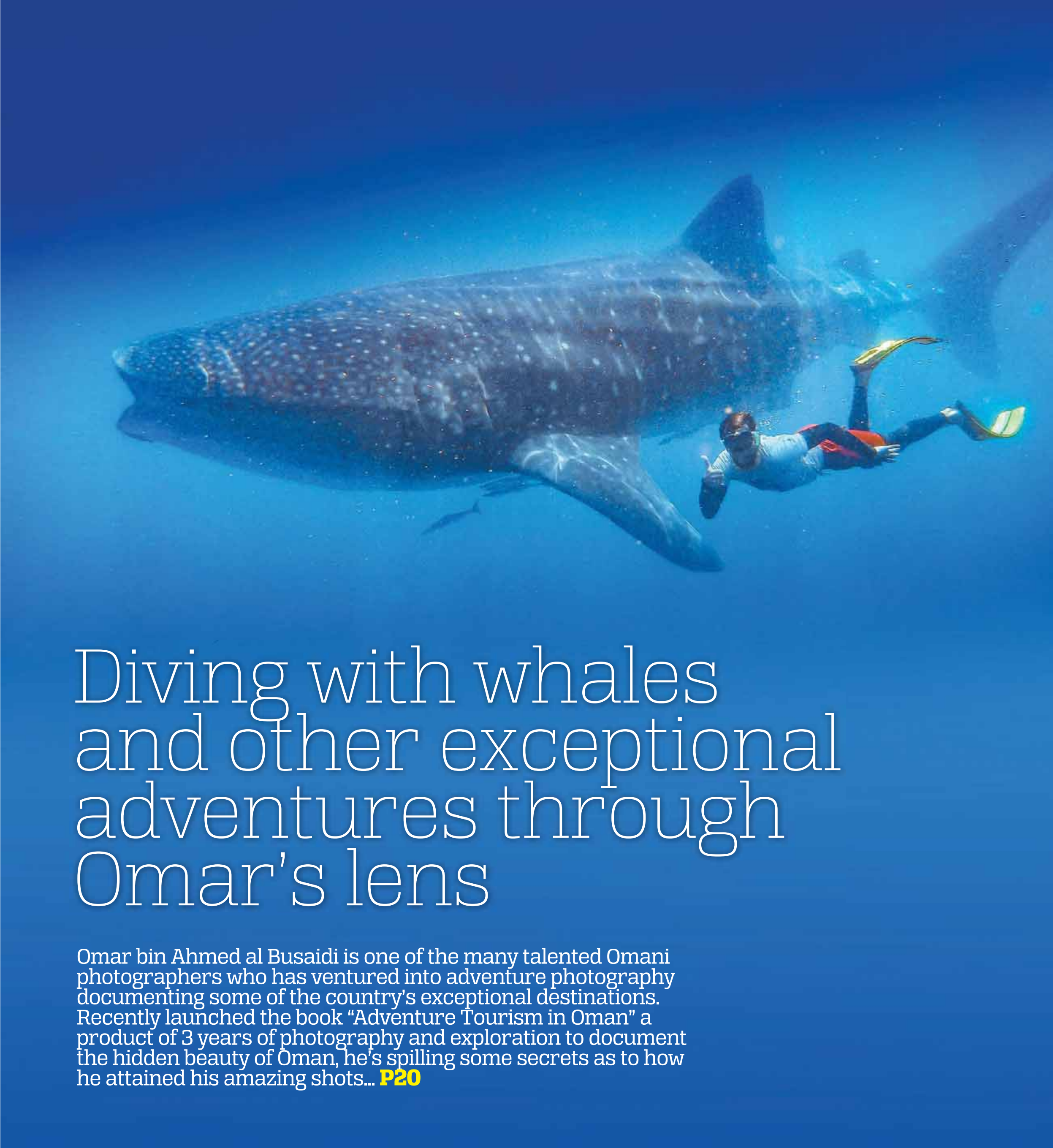
The FAA said in 2019 that each inspection was expected to take 22 man-hours and cost \$1,870. It did not provide updated estimates on Tuesday.

A spokeswoman for Pratt, owned by Raytheon Technologies, said fan blades would need to be shipped to its repair station in East Hartford, Connecticut, for the fresh inspections, including those from airlines in Japan and South Korea.

South Korea's transport ministry did not respond immediately to a request for comment after the FAA's order. Korean Air and Asiana Airlines said they would comply with the relevant authorities' directives.

— **Reuters**

features



Diving with whales and other exceptional adventures through Omar's lens

Omar bin Ahmed al Busaidi is one of the many talented Omani photographers who has ventured into adventure photography documenting some of the country's exceptional destinations. Recently launched the book "Adventure Tourism in Oman" a product of 3 years of photography and exploration to document the hidden beauty of Oman, he's spilling some secrets as to how he attained his amazing shots... **P20**

INSIDE STORIES

WILDLIFE



TRIUMPH THE KOALA CLIMBS AND RUNS WITH PROSTHETIC FOOT MADE BY AUSTRALIAN DENTIST

Triumph, a male koala born without a foot, has been climbing and running since he was fitted with a prosthetic one made by a neighbourhood dentist, an Australian wildlife carer said on Monday... **Story on Page 19**

DISCOVERY



WORLD'S OLDEST DNA SEQUENCED FROM MILLION-YEAR-OLD MAMMOTHS

Teeth from mammoths buried in the Siberian permafrost for more than a million years have yielded the world's oldest DNA ever sequenced, according to a study published on Wednesday, shining the genetic searchlight into the deep past... **Story on Page 19**

READ



ALL OF ME
BY CHRIS BARON

"Beautifully written, brilliant, and necessary, here is a body-positive book about how a boy deals with fat-shaming."

FASHION



THE LOST FREEDOM TO EXPLORE INSPIRES BURBERRY'S TISCI

Burberry's Riccardo Tisci said the dream of being able to explore – a freedom denied during Covid-19 lockdowns - had inspired his first menswear-focused collection for the British luxury label... **Story on Page 18**

CHANGING WORLD

WARMER WINTERS THREATEN CANADA'S SEASONAL ICE ROADS

Canadian Gilbert Cardin worries about the future of the ice road he maintains every winter on a frozen river west of Montreal... **Story on Page 18**





Warmer winters threaten Canada's seasonal ice roads

Canadian Gilbert Cardin worries about the future of the ice road he maintains every winter on a frozen river west of Montreal.

"At some point, it is certain that we will no longer be able to open if these mild winters continue," he says.

Since February 14, the 900-metre-long path, cleared of snow and marked with fir trees, has allowed motorists to travel between two villages on opposite sides of the Ottawa River without having to drive 40 kilometres (25 miles) roundtrip to the nearest bridge.

Such ice roads — or "winter crossings" as they're called by Quebec locals — were once commonplace in these parts.

In the 1800s, one even carried the weight of locomotives on a temporary rail line across the Saint Lawrence River between the island of Montreal and South Shore communities on the mainland — although one steam engine sank into the river.

In southern parts of Canada, seasonal ice roads are now increasingly scarce due to wide swings in winter temperatures — from deep freeze to balmy — that make it harder to maintain them.

Only a few dozen of these vestiges of winters of yesteryear remain today in all of Canada and just a handful in Quebec.

Cardin's ice road between Pointe-Fortune and Saint Andrew d'Argenteuil is the only one of three in the Montreal area to open this year.

"This winter we opened a month late," he laments, pointing to global warming and a very mild start to winter this year as the cause.

14 INCHES THICK

Under a bright blue sky, the 54-year-old big rig truck driver plunges a chainsaw into the ice in the middle of the frozen river. A stream of ice shavings burst

out as he cuts out a block of ice and measures its thickness against markings on the blade: 14 inches (35 cm).

It is thick enough to allow cars to drive across the frozen river, but not trucks. In past winters the ice has usually been as much as one metre (three feet) thick.

"At this time of year, we should be seeing 26 inches (65 cm) of ice," he says.

He doesn't expect to make a profit this year, given his late start and forecasts of an early spring, which will likely force him to close the ice road in a few weeks.

In the meantime, he must continually plow it over, as snow cover would keep the ice from thickening (acting as insulation from the cold) at a rate of about an inch per day in cold weather, Cardin explains.

"Having an ice bridge open for two months would be an excellent operating season, one month would be very good," comments Claude Desjardins, owner of another ice road further downstream on the river.

He was unable to open his two-kilometre (1.25-mile) ice road between Hudson and Oka this year, he says, due to "really unsafe" ice conditions. The situation was the same in 2017 and 2018.

PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS CURB TRAVEL

"Each year, it's different and you never know what to expect," comments Cardin. His crossing, which he's been operating for 25 years, also remained closed in 2018.

The last decade has seen more frequent warm spells, reducing the average length his ice road is open to an average of five weeks, down from a record



12 weeks in 1997.

He hopes a recent Arctic cold snap will stretch into early March so he can stay open a bit longer, but acknowledges it's a long shot with the current ice thickness at the bare minimum.

"If the ice is not thicker than that, as soon as the warm weather comes, it's all over," he said.

Compounding his weather woes, he said there have been fewer drivers on Canadian roads this year due to public health restrictions to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

"Customers haven't been there because of Covid-19. There's no one on the highways, everyone who can has been teleworking," he explains.

"Who's using the bridge? Construction workers and housekeepers going from place to place, that's it," he said.

These days, barely 30 motorists per day use it, down from 100 normally.

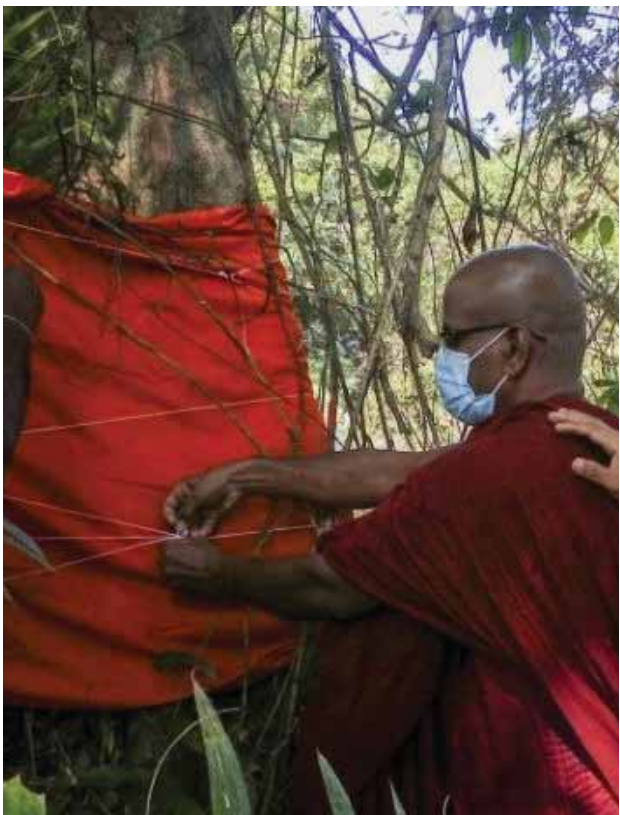
"When I found out it was open today... I said to myself, this is where I'm going," says regular ice road user Eric Deschamps.

He paid Can\$7 (\$5.55) to use Cardin's ice road, avoiding adding 50 kilometres (31 miles) to his trip. "It costs less than gasoline, especially with a pickup," he concludes. — AFP



CONSERVATION

Sri Lanka saves last legume from expressway axe



SRI LANKAN authorities on Wednesday agreed to save the world's only known wild specimen of a species of tree that was due to be chopped to clear the way for a four-lane expressway.

The Sri Lanka Legume (*Crudia zeylanica*) — a flowering tree from the legume family whose pods are not known to be eaten by humans — was first classified in 1868 and last found in 1911.

In 2012, it was declared extinct until the surprise discovery in 2019 of a lone tree near Colombo.

But the eight-metre (26-foot) plant was set to be felled this month to allow the construction of a motorway, sparking uproar from environmentalists as well as politicians and the country's influential Buddhist clergy.

On Wednesday, Wildlife and Forest Conservation Minister C B Rathnayake said construction workers were told to spare the plant.

"The tree will not be cut and the work will go ahead by passing it by," Rathnayake told reporters in Colombo.

Giving a major boost to efforts to save the



plant, a group of Buddhist monks last week "ordained" it, tying a saffron robe around the trunk and declaring it a "sin" to cut it down.

Buddhism enjoys widespread respect in the island nation of 21 million people, where it is the majority religion, and the clergy a major backer of the controversial government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

A top forestry expert welcomed the government decision and said the case underscored the need for proper environmental impact assessments before undertaking major construction.

"We now have a chance to study this tree as well as its environment and step up conservation," said Hiran Amarasekera, professor in Forestry and Environment Science at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura.

— AFP



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AROUND THE WORLD

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Triumph the koala climbs and runs with prosthetic foot made by Australian dentist

Triumph, a male koala born without a foot, has been climbing and running since he was fitted with a prosthetic one made by a neighbourhood dentist, an Australian wildlife carer said on Monday.

Veterinarian nurse Marley Christian had rescued the joey koala in northern New South Wales in 2017, after she found him next to his dying mother with only three feet and a protruding bone in place of the fourth.

"Once I put the little boot on him and he did this little jump, then he was running around and climbing, I actually cried," she said, explaining how Triumph became a whole new koala once the prosthesis was attached.

"It's the best thing that ever happened, I would do absolutely anything for this boy."

Christian had become Triumph's primary carer at the Friends of the Koala centre in Lismore, a town 136 km (84.51 miles) south of Brisbane, while searching for a solution to his birth defect.

A US company specialising in animal prostheses tried to create a foot for Triumph, but was unsuccessful after several attempts.

Eventually Christian found an answer closer to home. Dental prosthetist Jon Douman had heard of Triumph's dilemma and volunteered to take on the case.

The resulting prosthetic is pink, with a velcro strap to help keep it on Triumph's leg and a tread on the bottom to help the marsupial grip while walking and climbing.

"It was certainly different," Douman said. "It required a bit of lateral thinking in so far as coming up with the design ... but it was a great feeling to be able to help him."

Douman is currently in the process of improving his design for Triumph, but said that the koala "seems to be quite comfortable wearing it."

Triumph, who is nearly five years old, will need to spend the rest of his life in captivity, most likely under Christian's care. — **Reuters**

World's oldest DNA sequenced from million-year-old mammoths



TEETH FROM mammoths buried in the Siberian permafrost for more than a million years have yielded the world's oldest DNA ever sequenced, according to a study published on Wednesday, shining the genetic searchlight into the deep past.

Researchers said the three specimens, one roughly 800,000 years old and two over a million years old, provide important insights into the giant Ice Age mammals, including the ancient heritage of the woolly mammoth.

The genomes far exceed the oldest previously sequenced DNA — a horse dating between 780,000 to 560,000 years ago.

"This DNA is incredibly old. The samples are a thousand times older than Viking remains, and even pre-date the existence of humans and Neanderthals," said Love Dalen, a professor of evolutionary genetics at the Centre for Palaeogenetics in Stockholm, senior author of the study published in Nature.

The mammoths were originally discovered in the 1970s in Siberia and held at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow.

Researchers first dated the specimens geologically, with comparisons to other species, like small rodents, known to be unique to particular time periods and found in the same sedimentary layers.

This suggested that two of the mammals were ancient steppe mammoths more than a million years old.

The youngest of the trio is one of the earliest woolly mammoths yet found.

DNA JIGSAW

They also extracted genetic data from tiny samples of powder from each mammoth tooth, "essentially like a pinch of salt you would put on your dinner plate," Dalen told a press briefing.

While it had degraded into very small fragments, scientists were able to sequence tens of millions of

chemical base pairs, which make up the strands of DNA, and conduct age estimates from genetic information.

This suggested that the oldest mammoth, named Krestovka, is even older at approximately 1.65 million years old, while the second, Adycha, is around 1.34 million years old, and the youngest Chukochya is 870,000 years old.

Dalen said the discrepancy for the oldest mammoth could be an underestimation in the DNA dating process, meaning the creature was likely around 1.2 million years old, as suggested by the geological evidence.

But he said it was possible the specimen was indeed older and had thawed out of the permafrost at one point and then become wedged in a younger layer of sediment.

The DNA fragments were like a puzzle with millions of tiny pieces, "way, way, way smaller than you would get from modern high quality DNA", said lead author Tom van der Valk, of the Science for Life Laboratory, Uppsala University.

Using a genome from an African elephant, a modern relative of the mammoth, as a blueprint for their algorithm, researchers were able to reconstruct parts of the mammoth genomes.

The study found that the older Krestovka mammoth represents a previously unrecognised genetic lineage, which researchers estimated diverged from other mammoths around two million years ago and was ancestral to those that colonised North America.

The study also traced the lineage from the million-year-old Adycha steppe mammoth to Chukochya and other more recent woolly mammoths.

It found gene variants associated with life in the Arctic, like hairiness, thermoregulation, fat deposits and cold tolerance in the older specimen, suggesting mammoths were already hairy long before the woolly mammoth emerged. — **AFP**



The lost freedom to explore inspires Burberry's Tisci

Burberry's Riccardo Tisci said the dream of being able to explore — a freedom denied during Covid-19 lockdowns — had inspired his first menswear-focused collection for the British luxury label.

"Enclosed indoors, I dreamt of the outdoors and its beauty, fuelled by the thought of the creativity that comes when we are together," Tisci said on Monday.

"With this dream in mind, I became fascinated by the widespread British craft and outdoor movements of the early 20th century, when people escaped to explore the unknown countryside."

Outerwear was a focus in the Autumn/Winter 2021 collection, filmed at Burberry's flagship Regent Street store in central London before being released on social media channels on Monday.

Burberry's traditional trenches were reimagined with pleats, panels and fringes, while the colour palette centred on tonal shades of beige, bark brown, oxblood burgundy and city greys.

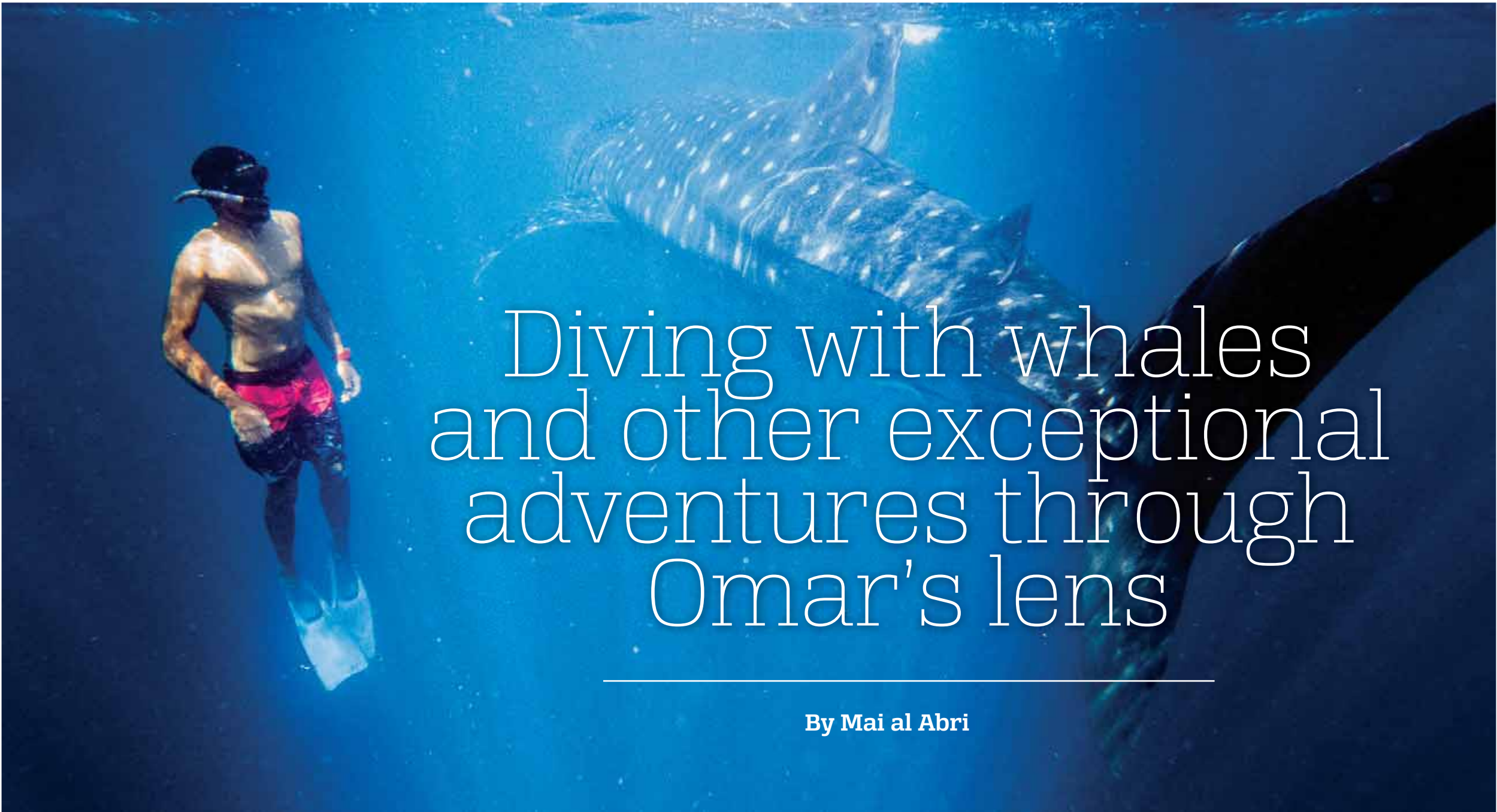
Tisci joined the 165-year-old brand in 2018 to give creative direction to chief executive Marco Gobbetti's re-positioning of the house further upmarket.

His designs have attracted new younger customers, particularly in the important Chinese market.

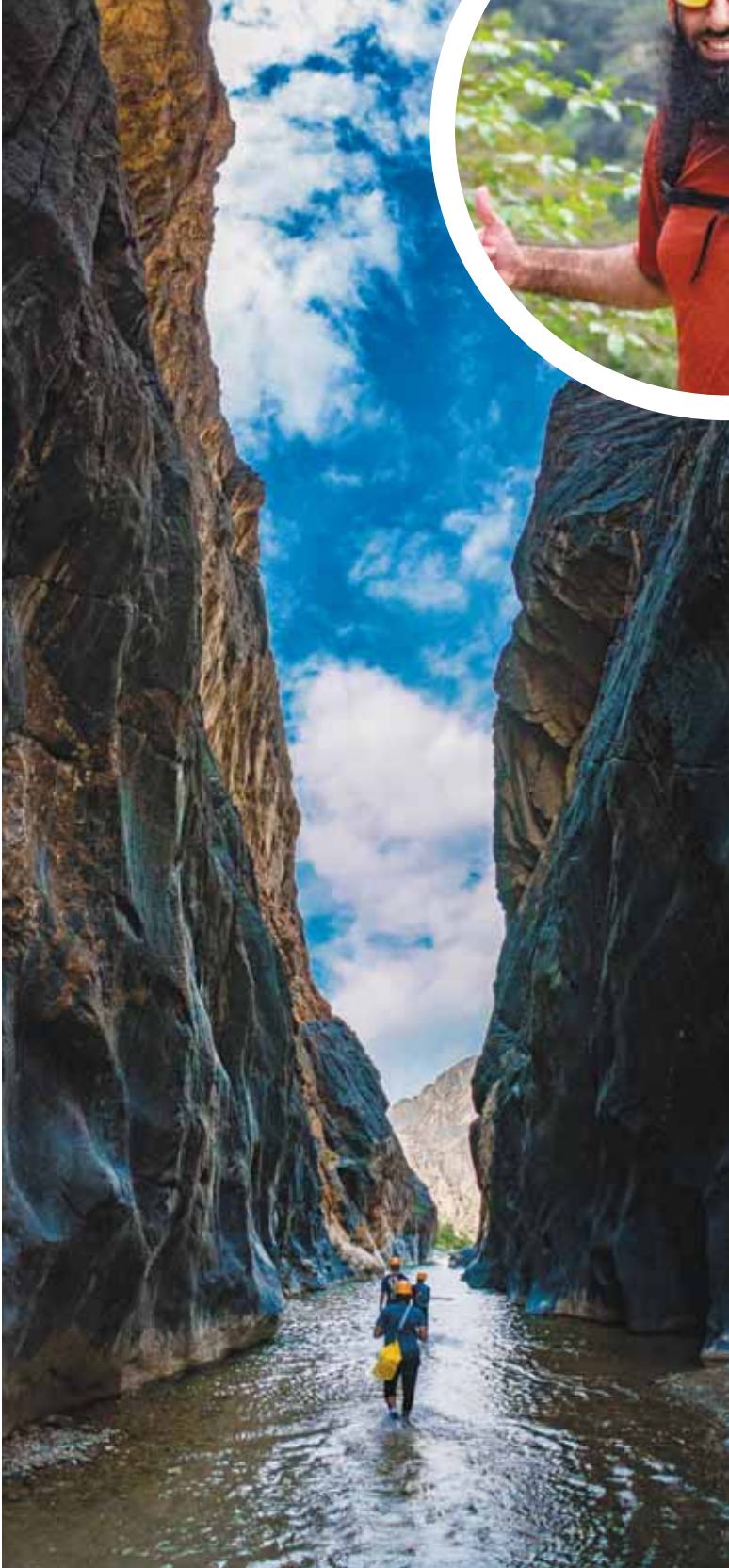
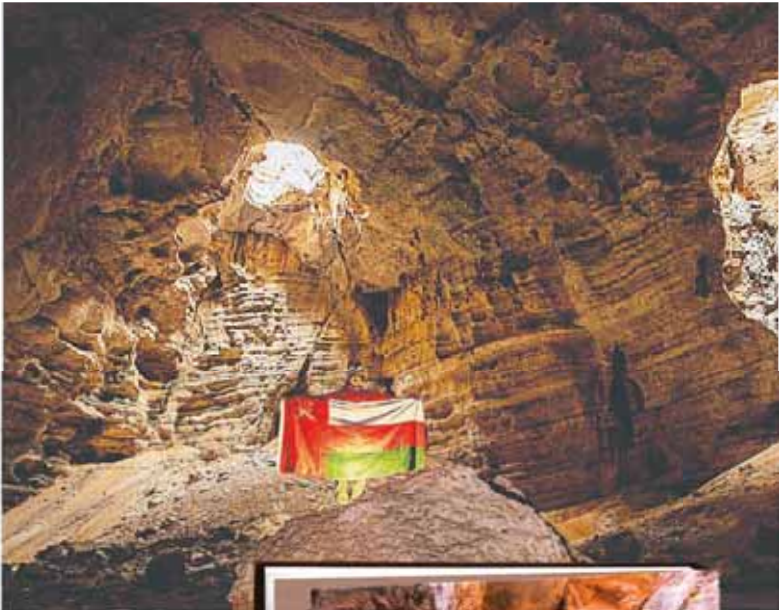
Like other labels, Burberry has been hit hard by global restrictions on shop opening and travel and tourism.

It reported a 9 per cent decline in sales in its third quarter, a bigger drop than the 6 per cent in the second quarter.

The company said last month trading would be remain susceptible to regional disruptions but it was confident of rebounding when the pandemic eased given the brand's resonance with customers. — **Reuters**



By Mai al Abri



Adventure photography is a b o u t telling a story, believes talented Omani photographer Omar bin Ahmed al Busaidi.

"When shooting, I tell the events as an interesting story so that people get enthusiastic both while viewing the photos and also to try the adventure themselves. I become more intimately involved and tuned into possible dramatic events as the adventure proceeds. Shooting great adventure photography requires balancing photography with participation, and combining solid camera technique with a keen observation of unfolding events. Your reward will be powerful photos that clearly illustrate the story of your adventures", he shared.

Every photographer is an adventurer who seeks to discover new destinations and new styles to document people's lives, and each photographer has a unique way of dealing with the potentials of places", he said.

Omar added, "In recent years, the field of adventure tourism in the Sultanate has contributed to the emergence of a different type of documentation, which is documenting adventures, whether by video or photograph. Young Omani adventurers and photographers have contributed to showing the hidden beauty of Oman in its deep valleys, deep caves or the hiking tracks, which made this wonderful movement in introducing the tourism potentials of our beloved country, Oman".

"When you go out adventuring, you will come across many situations that will require special planning for the equipment you carry and the strategy for shooting. For many of these outdoor photo pursuits, first, determine environmental hazards to yourself and your equipment. Safety, for both you and the people you are photographing, is your highest priority", he advocated.

"Photography is very costly in cameras, equipment, photography processes, montage, etc. adventure photography needs special equipment such as ropes and equipment for ascending and descending, while cave photography requires special lights and equipment, underwater photography needs special cameras and tools. The use of modern technologies in photography, such as drones, 360-degree cameras and go pro cameras for adventures that are attached to the helmet, all are means that contribute greatly to convey the scene to the recipient with clarity and ease", he said.

A photographer cannot enhance his skills unless he acquires knowledge, they are two sides of the same coin, Omar shares. Knowledge of the conditions of the place, nature and peoples leads the photographer to produce intellectual and artistic pickups. The photo is a mirror of every culture or civilisation, and it must be communicated to the recipient truthfully.

Adventure tourism is very enjoyable in terms of physical health and exploring new hard-to-reach places, and on the other hand, it is a change to the usual daily routine, moving away from the hustle and bustle of the city and wandering in the beauty of nature, seeing the environments and terrains, Omar said.

He added, "This experience has added to me during the past five years a lot of knowledge, activity and love for the experience, especially in places that contain a psychological and physical challenge. Descending 200 metres from high heights of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar or swimming inside Al Houta Cave in a pool of water that extends for a distance of 1,200 metres, swimming with a whale shark at the Daymaniyat Islands, are all exceptional experiences that could shape one's character".

Omar expounded that swimming with whales is an exceptional experience unlike any other, as it contains various experiences, including freediving, underwater photography, and the lovely companionship of these gentle giants of the



sea. This type of experience requires prior knowledge in dealing with these creatures, knowing their behaviours and not touching them, as well as the seasons in which they visit the shores of the Sultanate.

Omar believes that knowledge should be circulated and must be transferred between individuals.

He said, "We try as much as possible to support the amateurs in the field of photography, guide and educate them, as well as take their hand towards the development of their abilities and capabilities by holding workshops and lectures in the Photographic Society of Oman. I believe that part of being a human being is to help and support others."

Speaking of his book, "Adventure Tourism in Oman", Al Busaidi said that the book sheds light on the most important touristic sites for lovers of adventure and exploration, and it is the product of 3 years of photography, exploration, effort and work to document the hidden beauty of Oman.

Omar said that the book can be considered as a documentary, promotional and artistic book at the same time, as it contains pictorial documentation with full information, coordinates and maps for 15 special adventure places, including eight wadis, four mountain paths, and three caves.