

Crises and challenges provide an opportunity to test readiness of nations

Oman will remain a source of power, pride and dignity for all of us

Renaissance consolidated the pillars of the State of Law and Institutions

The mainstay of the future stage was defined by Oman Vision 2040



Steps under way to revise the legislative and auditing measures

The regulatory foundation of local system has been laid

World is undergoing unprecedented situations under twin impacts

# WE WILL MARCH FORWARD CONFIDENTLY

**MUSCAT:** His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on Wednesday gave a speech on the occasion of the glorious 50th National Day reading as follows:

In the name of the Almighty Allah, the Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Praise be to the Almighty Allah in volumes as many as His bounties might be. Praise and thanks be to Allah as great as His mighty, as His realm and infinite power. Peace be upon the finest of His creations, Prophet Mohammed — the most truthful, most honest — upon his revered family and companions and all those who follow their suit sincerely till

Judgment Day.

We address you on this auspicious day marking one of Oman's eternal days, the 50th anniversary of Oman's modern Renaissance, when countrywide celebrations were scheduled to prevail in a manner that reflects the greatness of the glorious event, but current exceptional conditions undergone by the Sultanate and the whole world intervened otherwise. So, we decided that the scope of celebrations this year will be limited to suit precautionary health measures aimed to protect the health and safety of all.

Oman, by the will of the

Despite these challenges posed to our economy, we are certain that the Fiscal Balance Plan and its related procedures will undoubtedly steer our economy to the shores of safety

Almighty Allah's, has been able to overcome the challenges posed over the past decades wisely and tactfully through the leadership of its late monarch, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and the sacrifices of its people. Oman will remain a source of power, pride and dignity for all of us and for future generations. It has been able to set up a modern renaissance that placed Omani citizen on top of its priorities. Our deep-rooted history and our role in human civilisation formed a strong cornerstone for the establishment of the development process that covered all parts of the Sultanate and across its vast geographical

area, so that the achievements could reach every family and every individual on this benign land. The renaissance consolidated the pillars of the State of Law and Institutions, whose perfection and empowerment will be among the features of the forthcoming stage.

**CORE PRINCIPLES**

We will continue to consult the same core principles and values in laying the foundation of the new stage, in which our dear country, God willing, will march confidently forward towards the lofty status it desires to achieve.

TURN TO P2

## HM greeted by leaders on National Day

**MUSCAT:** In the overwhelming celebrations of the Sultanate's 50th National Day of the Blessed Renaissance and while the Omani citizens renew loyalty and allegiance to the renovator of Oman's modern renaissance His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and recalling eternal deeds of the dearest and finest of men late Sultan Qaboos bin Said who cemented the pillars of the modern state, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received cables of greetings on the occasion of the 50th National Day of the Renaissance from leaders of countries, as well as heirs apparent and heads of governments and senior officials of the sisterly and friendly countries.

DETAILS ON P6

# We will march forward



FROM PAGE 1

It is the goal which we all aspire for, utilising all our resources and capabilities in the quest to protect our national interests, considered the mainstay of the future stage whose tracks and goals were defined by Oman Vision 2040, with the prime aim of transforming all aspects of life. It is a true embodiment of collective national willpower.

The success of this vision is the responsibility of us all, dear citizens, without exception, with everyone acting from his position and within the scope of his abilities and responsibilities.

Within the context of supporting the government's

ability to meet the requirements of Oman Vision 2040, we embarked on developing the State's Administrative Apparatus, restructured the Council of Ministers and entrusted to it the responsibility of implementing the forthcoming development plans, along with their enabling resources and in accordance with the prerogatives accorded to each department. The overall aim is to enhance government performance and competence.

**AUDITING MEASURES**

Meanwhile, steps are under way to revise the legislative and auditing measures and develop instruments of questioning and accountability so that they

might constitute a cornerstone for future action in Oman. We hereby underscore the great significance of these steps in protecting the rights of citizens, as well their role in consolidating justice and decency. This justice system will be accorded our special attention.

We have also laid down the regulatory foundation of local administration through a system of decentralisation of services and development in the governorates. We will regularly follow up progress in the administrative system with the aim of supporting and developing it to empower society to shoulder its responsibility in

nation building.

Dear citizens,

Nowadays the world is undergoing unprecedented situations under the twin impacts of global financial crisis (caused by the slump in international oil prices that hit record-low levels) and the spread of coronavirus pandemic.

Since we are a vital part of this interconnected world, with which we share interests and destiny, rejoicing for its pleasures and saddened by its calamities, we have accorded special attention to this global scenario. We follow up its developments and its implications at national, regional and international levels.

We have taken all precautions to accommodate these circumstances and alleviate their negative impacts in all sectors of the state, with priority given to health, social and economic sectors. We reiterate our support to these sectors so that health and education services, of all types, could continue to be rendered in the best manner to all citizens of this dear country.

In this context, we would like to express our appreciation for all your support, as individuals and institutions, including all initiatives and tasks. We take pride in this support and value all your efforts and your noble endeavours. You have proved,

dear citizens of Oman, your originality that was attested by history. You have realised, beyond doubt, the ability of this great country to stand the test of time.

**LOYAL CITIZENS OF OMAN,**

Crises, challenges and difficulties provide an opportunity to test the readiness of nations and their abilities. The current crisis has opened wide vistas for national cadres to contribute to solutions based on innovation and creativity. They accelerated the pace of transformation into digital work and the use of technology in government and private sector



# confidently: His Majesty

Despite these challenges posed to our economy, we are certain that the Fiscal Balance Plan and its related procedures, as endorsed by the government recently, will undoubtedly steer our economy to the shores of safety

The economy will witness, during the next five years, rates of growth that meet the expectations of all citizens of this dear country

We will continue to consult the same core principles and values in laying the foundation of the new stage, in which our dear country, God willing, will march confidently forward towards the lofty status it desires to achieve



domains of action in a manner that was unthinkable before. The national cadres' response was prompt and proper.

We appreciate your response and your positive reaction to government measures under these financial and economic conditions undergone by the Sultanate with the purpose of rationalising spending and shrinking fiscal deficit and general state debt. The aim of these procedures and plans is to achieve the State's Fiscal Sustainability and to establish grounds for the execution of strategic developmental projects in all parts of the Sultanate.

Despite these challenges

posed to our economy, we are certain that the Fiscal Balance Plan and its related procedures, as endorsed by the government recently, will undoubtedly steer our economy to the shores of safety. The economy will witness, during the next five years, rates of growth that meet the expectations of all citizens of this dear country.

To reaffirm the attention that we accord to the protection of citizens, we gave directives to establish a Social Security Scheme to ensure that the state honours its duty to provide decent living for citizens and spare them the impacts of measures entailed by financial policies. We will also accord attention to channelling

some of the output of financial policies to the Social Security Scheme so that it becomes, God willing, an overarching canopy of social protection.

#### LOYAL CITIZENS OF OMAN,

On the occasion of the 50th National Day of Oman's Renaissance, and as you exert your efforts in the workplace, we would like to express our thanks and commendation of all that you do to safeguard the gains of this renaissance.

We hail all personnel of the Armed Forces and security services across all their formations. We appreciate your efforts in protecting the sovereignty of this

country and in defending the safety of its lands. We reiterate our support to you, all the time.

We pray to the Almighty Allah to have mercy on the soul of late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, to reward him plentifully, and to enable us to follow his footsteps in establishing the next stage of development in a manner that meets the aspirations of citizens of this dear homeland and reflects the gloriousness of its history, hoping for a brighter future to unveil, God willing.

May the Almighty Allah grant us all success to honour the custody and shoulder the responsibility towards the loyal citizens of this country. — ONA



Total confirmed COVID-19 cases stand at 121129

MUSCAT: The total number of positive COVID-19 cases in the Sultanate reached 121,129, while the number of recoveries stood at 112,014, comprising 92.5 per cent.

Meanwhile, the total number of COVID-19 related death cases stood at 1,360, the Ministry of Health said.

The ministry also pointed out that 29 cases were hospitalised over the past 24 hours, adding that the total number of current hospitalised COVID-19-infected patients stands at 274, of them 128 are in intensive care units (ICU). — ONA

Negative PCR test results must at UAE border

SAMUEL KUTTY  
@samkutytyp

A COVID-19 negative PCR test result from an accredited laboratory is mandatory at the land border for those visiting the UAE.

This clarification was issued by Dr Saif Al Dhaheri, spokesman of the National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority, following “numerous inquiries from Omani citizens on how they could enter the UAE following the opening of land borders”.

“There are requirements that

must be followed before entering the UAE to ensure the application of preventive measures and provide the highest standards of health and safety for all residents”, he was quoted by Dubai media.

Oman and UAE announced last week that they were opening the land borders in a move to relax restrictions on travel as part of its plan to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

“Those coming from Oman must present a negative PCR test result at the land borders,” clarified Dr Al Dhaheri, stressing the need to conduct the test in accredited laboratories in Oman and that the validity period of the test should not exceed 48 hours.

According to the report, UAE’s Ministry of Health and Prevention has provided the General Authority for Security of Ports, Borders and Free Zones with a list of accredited laboratories in Oman which is constantly updated.

For the DPI blood test, said the report, the necessary test will be performed at the border, and in the event of a positive result a PCR test will be performed with the individual returned to Oman until a negative result is given.



RECALL CAMPAIGN  
FOR CADILLAC ESCALADE, CHEVROLET SILVERADO, GMC YUKON  
AND GMC SIERRA MODEL VEHICLES



Date of Recall: 19/11/2020

Campaign Type: Safety

Recall Segment: Brakes

Product Description: Cadillac Escalade and Escalade ESV 2018 / Chevrolet Silverado 2018 / GMC Yukon and Yukon XL 2018 / GMC Sierra 2018

| Model Year | Division  | Vehicle Model             | Affected Vehicle Vin Range             | No. of Affected Vehicles in Oman |
|------------|-----------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2018       | Cadillac  | Escalade and Escalade ESV | 1GYS47KJ0JR109111 to 1GYS48KJXJR117058 | 7                                |
| 2018       | Chevrolet | Silverado                 | 3GCUK9EJ0JG141715 to 3GCUK9EJ9JG162286 | 0                                |
| 2018       | GMC       | Yukon and Yukon XL        | 1GKS27KJ0JR109013 to 1GKS28KJXJR116203 | 4                                |
| 2018       | GMC       | Sierra LD                 | 3GTU29EJ0JG133503 to 3GTU29EJXJG166508 | 7                                |

**DESCRIPTION:**  
Some of these vehicles may have a condition in which the engine-mounted mechanical vacuum pump output may decrease over time, decreasing the amount of vacuum/power brake assist. If the vacuum level drops, customers may experience increased brake pedal effort, hard brake pedal, and/or potentially increased stopping distance. The Driver's Information Center (DIC) "Service brake assist" alert will activate 2-5 minutes after the vacuum level drops, and a Diagnostic Trouble Code (DTC) will also be set. The condition is more prevalent at low speed when softly applying the brakes.

**PROCEDURE:**  
Dealers will reprogram the Electronic Brake Control Module.

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

**CONTACT DETAILS:**  
Toll free number for OTE 80050002 on all working days between 8.00am - 1.00pm and 2.00pm - 5.30pm.  
Toll free number for MARH 80076200 on all working days between 8.30am - 1.00pm and 4.00pm - 6.30pm.

Mala'a Centre announces soft launch

MUSCAT: Oman Credit and Financial Information Centre (Mala'a) on Wednesday announced the soft launch of its pilot operations.

The Official Launch of the Centre's operations will commence on January 1, 2021 for the Banking & SME sectors.

The Centre has been established as part of Central Bank of Oman's three-year Strategy (2019-2021), that aspires to constitute a National Databank for Credit and Financial Information in Oman and contribute in transforming the country into a knowledge-based economy.

— ONA

On the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> National Day of the Renaissance,  
**The Dawoodi Bohras of Oman**  
are honored to extend their sincere congratulations to  
**His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the people of Oman**



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# His Majesty receives 50th National Day greetings

**MUSCAT:** In the celebrations of the Sultanate’s 50th National Day of the Blessed Renaissance and while Omani citizens renew loyalty and allegiance to the renovator of Oman’s modern renaissance, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and recalling eternal deeds of the dearest and finest of men the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimour who cemented pillars of the modern state, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received cables of greetings on the occasion of the 50th National Day of the Renaissance from leaders of countries, as well as heirs apparent and heads of governments and senior officials of the sisterly and friendly countries.

In the cables, they expressed their sincere greetings and best wishes of good health, happiness and a long life to His Majesty. They prayed to the Almighty Allah to perpetuate welfare on Oman, and progress and prosperity on the Omani people under the wise leadership of His Majesty the Sultan. They also prayed for the return of this auspicious and similar occasions on His Majesty and the Omani people for many years to come while they realise all aspirations. His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received greetings cables from the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King

Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, King Hamad bin Issa al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, Shaikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Jabir al Sabah, Emir of the State of Kuwait, King Mohammed VI of the Kingdom of Morocco, Gen Abdel Fattah Burhan, Chairman of the Sovereignty Council of the Republic of Sudan, President Abdel Fattah el Sisi of the Arab Republic of Egypt, President Field Marshal Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi of the Republic of Yemen, Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei Darussalam, Sultan Abdullah Ibn Sultan Ahmad Shah, King of Malaysia, President Mohammed Ashraf Ghani of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, President Joko Widodo of the Republic of Indonesia, President Dr Arif Alvi of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the Republic of Turkey, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan, King Felipe VI of the Kingdom of Spain, Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Head of the Commonwealth, King Philippe of the Kingdom of Belgium,

King Maha Vajiralongkorn of the Kingdom of Thailand, King Carl XVI Gustaf of the Kingdom of Sweden, King Willem-Alexander of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Emperor Naruhito of Japan, General David Hurley, Governor General of Australia, President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, President Sergio Mattarella of the Italian Republic, President Sahle-Work Zewde of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, President Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the Federal Republic of Germany, President Donald Trump of the United States, President Patrice Talon of the Republic of Benin, President Cyril Ramaphosa of the Republic of South Africa, President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation, President Klaus Iohannis of Romania, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, President Halimah Jacob of the Republic of Singapore, President Simonetta Sommaruga of the Swiss Confederation, President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China, President Rodrigo Duterte of the Republic of the Philippines, President Dr Nguyen Phu Trong of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, President Zoran Milanovic of the Republic of Croatia, Julie Payette,

Governor General of Canada, President Miguel Diaz-Canel of the Republic of Cuba, President Moon Jae-in of the Republic of Korea, President Kim Jong Un, First Secretary of the Workers’ Party of Korea, Chairman of the National Defence Commission and the Supreme Commander of the Korean People’s Army, Dr Janos Ader of the Republic of Hungary, President Daniel Ortega of the Republic of Nicaragua, President Ram Nath Kovind of the Republic of India, Shaikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, Vice-President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Prime Minister, Ruler of Dubai, Shaikh Dr Sultan bin Mohammed al Qasbi, Member of the UAE Supreme Council, Ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, Shaikh Humaid bin Rashid al Nuaimi, Member of the UAE Supreme Council, Ruler of the Emirate of Umm Al Quwain, Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al Saud, Crown Prince, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Shaikh

Mishal Al Ahmad Al Jaber al Sabah, Crown Prince of Kuwait, Shaikh Abdullah bin Hamad al Thani, Deputy Emir of the State of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed bin Sultan al Qasbi, Heir Apparent, Deputy Ruler of Sharjah, Sheikh Ammar bin Humaid al Nuaimi, Heir Apparent of Ajman, Shaikh Rashid bin Saud bin Rashid al Mualla, Heir Apparent of Umm Al Quwain, Sheikh Abdullah bin Salim bin Sultan al Qasbi, Deputy Ruler of Sharjah, Sheikh Nasser bin Rashid al Nuaimi, Deputy Ruler of Ajman, Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz al Thani, Prime Minister, Minister of Interior of the State of Qatar, Mustafa al Kadhimi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Iraq, Muhyiddin Yassin, Prime Minister of Malaysia, Prayuth Chan-ocha, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, Viktor Orban, Prime Minister of Hungary, Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of the Republic of India, Dr Hussein Mwinyi of Zanzibar, Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary- General. His Majesty also received greetings cables from senior international figures, their

Highnesses, ministers, advisors, commanders of the Sultan’s Armed Forces (SAF), Royal Oman Police (ROP) and other security units, members of the State Council and Majlis Ash’shura, under-secretaries, Omani ambassadors, heads of the diplomatic corps in the Sultanate, representatives of the international organisations and bodies, shaikhs, dignitaries and citizens. In the cables, the well-wishers expressed their sincere greetings along with best wishes of good health and happiness to His Majesty the Sultan, praying to Allah the Almighty to protect His Majesty and grant him a long life, and for the return of happy occasions on him and the Omani people for many years to come while the Omani people enjoy further aspirations under His Majesty’s wise leadership. His Majesty the Sultan replied to the well-wishers on this glorious occasion. His Majesty expressed his utmost thanks and appreciation for their sincere greetings, best wishes and noble feelings. His Majesty prayed to Allah the Almighty to perpetuate health and well-being on them, and for the return of happy occasions on them to achieve aspirations of progress, prosperity and welfare for peoples of their countries. — ONA

## Royal address highlighted pride, appreciation

**MUSCAT:** **Khalid bin Hilal al Maawali**, Chairman of Majlis Ash’shura, said that Majlis Ash’shura highly values the content of the Royal address delivered by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on the occasion of the 50th National Day of the Renaissance.

He said that His Majesty explained several significant points and messages all of which charge our souls with pride and appreciation. The chairman of Majlis Ash’shura said that His Majesty, in his address, specified important determinants inspired by the essence of the principles and values drawn up by late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said since onset of the blessed Renaissance.

In his address, His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik affirmed that the Sultanate advanced with steady steps towards the lofty status every Omani has yearned for.

His Majesty emphasised in his address that the success of the Oman Vision 2040 is a responsibility that should be undertaken by all, Al Maawail said adding that Majlis Ash’shura confirms to His Majesty that its members are moving ahead with confident steps toward realising the goals of Oman Vision 2040.

Confirming what was stated by His Majesty in his Royal address regarding the importance of revising laws and legislations and activating accountability, Al Maawali said that Majlis Ash’shura is keen on performing its monitoring and legislative roles.

**Engineer Said bin Hamoud al Maawali**, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology said that the Royal address of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik highlighted the essential pillars of the modern state that have been reinforced as well as the achievements that took

place over fifty years. His Majesty affirmed that these principles will inspire the complementation of the Renaissance march initiated by late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, and the transformation to a new stage the goals of which have been drawn up by the Oman Vision 2040 which targets to attain further progress and development.

Al Maawali added: “The Royal address of His Majesty has reinvigorated our determination by his confirmation that the crises and challenges are an opportunity for unleash the national potentials and contribute to enhancing creativity and innovation in all fields. We in the Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology feel the depth of the responsibility which was underscored by His Majesty emphasized as essential for the success of the Oman Vision 2040, and we will move ahead in taking our responsibility to make it successful.”

**Dr Mohammed bin Mubarak al Araiimi**, Editor-in-Chief of Oman News Agency (ONA), Chairman of Oman Journalists’ Association upbeat about the Royal address noting that it invites optimism.

He added: “It is promising that His Majesty has sent signs of optimism despite the current situation, however optimism is manifested in the Sultanate’s ability to overcome the current stage with all its challenges”

Al Araiimi said that His Majesty in his address displayed the national saga led by late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos over the past five decades which will be continued during this flourishing era. He added that His Majesty underscored the pillars and determinants of the state during

the upcoming period drawn up by the Oman Vision 2040, as well as laid down the government’s work during the next five years through some plans including Oman Tawazun (Offset) Programme.

His Majesty also specified the duties and responsibilities attached to every individual in this country adding that the Oman Vision 2040 won’t succeed and bear fruition unless everyone from all society segments takes part in its implementation, Al Araiimi noting said that the Royal address focused on the laws and legislations noting that they will witness amendments and updates during the upcoming period and these amendments are important in the building of a modern state.

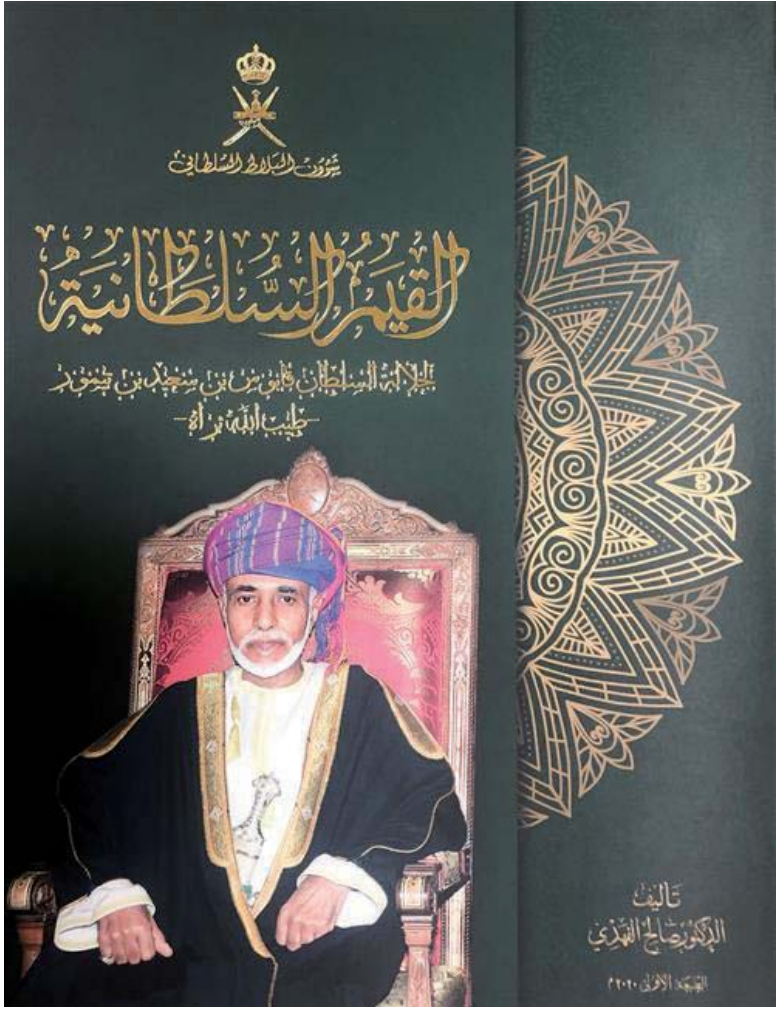
**Dr Abdullah bin Ali al Amri**, Chairman of the Environment Authority, said: “The Royal address of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik carried plenty of optimism and determination for the next stage of the firm renewed Renaissance led by His Majesty. The Omani citizens are feeling upbeat about the Royal address being the basis and the inexhaustible resources of development. His Majesty has fulfilled what he promised at the start of his reign by restructuring the state administrative apparatus.

In his speech, His Majesty affirmed that the march is moving on and the work continues to revise the laws and legislations activate the principle of accountability which will undoubtedly contribute to developing the country and preserving its resources to be efficiently tapped in the sustainable development of various sectors.”

Al Amri affirmed that the Environment Authority will immediately embark on the implantation of the Royal directives of His Majesty.



## RCA issues book titled ‘Sultanic Values’



**MUSCAT:** As part of celebrations marking the 50th National Day of Renaissance and, in perpetuation of values established by the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the Royal Court Affairs (RCA) has issued a book titled ‘Sultanic Values of Sultan Qaboos bin Said’, authored by Dr Saleh bin Mohammed al Fahdi.

The book seeks to highlight the Royal values of government as established by the late monarch on different occasions. It also includes speeches of the

late Sultan and adds analysis of insights enshrined by the Royal speeches which, the author said, were in harmony with the Sultanate’s approaches and civilised history. ‘Sultanic Values’ will enrich the Omani library and constitute depth for researchers and students interested in the character of the late Sultan Qaboos. It will also set the stage for a new tradition of Royal thought to be documented. — ONA



# Vision 2040: Blossoming future for Oman

SAMUEL KUTTY

@samkuttyvp

Developed in line with the Royal Directives of late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, Oman's Vision 2040 is the gateway for the Sultanate to join the orbit of advanced nations under the astute leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

And the Vision 2040 is a guide and key reference for planning activities in the next two decades. And the strategy in the vision is based on inputs from Omani individuals, businesses and stakeholders representing all facets of the society.

The recent restructuring of the government apparatus through the promulgation of different Royal Decrees has been identified as a requirement for the implementation of Vision 2040.

"This year, the Sultanate of Oman has taken important steps to restructure and modernise its administrative apparatus, in support of its current phase of economic development, within Oman Vision 2020-2040", said Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, during the 75th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Royal Decree 100/2020 promulgated the establishment of the Implementation of Vision 2040 and Follow-up Unit which falls under the purview of the Council of Ministers. The unit replaces the Implementation Support and Follow-up Unit which was within the remit of the Diwan.

The move to have the newly created Unit falling under the Council of Ministers allows for closer oversight on the implementation of the Vision 2040 and demonstrates the seriousness with which the Vision 2040 project is being taken.

Oman has been an active participant in international and regional fora that produced the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. The Sultanate of Oman has sought to translate its commitments into key components of the ninth five-year development plan and Oman Vi-



sion 2020 to 2040.

"Oman intends to continue to work to achieve the economic, social and environmental dimensions of Sustainable Development Goals within the specified time frame", Sayyid Badr said.

While foreseeing the future progress and development aligned with an ambitious work system, the blueprint targets a number of economic indicators including a commitment to raise Real GDP per capita by 90 per cent and Real GDP Growth by five per cent annually during the next 20 years.

It also targets to enhance the contribution of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to GDP to 10 per cent. Furthermore, it envisions the share of non-oil activities to grow

to more than 90 per cent of GDP, as well as a 40 per cent contribution to job creation by the private sector.

For this, the non-oil sectors are expected to contribute to 93 per cent of GDP, by focusing its diversification strategy on shifting its economy towards five critical sectors: tourism, logistics, manufacturing, fisheries and mining, as identified in the Ninth Five-Year Development Plan.

Achieving the strategic directions and goals of Oman Vision 2040 is not the responsibility of the government alone. Citizens, private sector and civil society organisations also have a role to play.

Community participation was present throughout the stages of the Vision development, across the

**Community participation was present throughout the stages of the Vision development, across the different governorates of Oman, thus embodying the consensus between the political leadership and all segments of the community to create gradual transformation across the board**

different governorates of Oman, thus embodying the consensus between the political leadership and all segments of the community to create gradual transformation across the board.

In the Vision, a favourable environment will be created to attract talents in the labour market.

This Vision lays down the foundations for an empowered knowledge-based society whose members are creative, proud of their identity and culture.

They are also committed to their civic duties and values and living in dignity and sustained well-being. It also aims at creating a society endowed with a leading healthcare system having an active lifestyle.

The members of the society

should also have inclusive education for lifelong learning to develop skills for the future, promote scientific research, build national capabilities and achieve economic growth and social well-being.

The vision also foresees a society with flexible yet strong agencies, all-encompassing governance, effective supervision, swift justice, efficient performance, and active and ever renewing media, aided by an empowered civil society that participates in all aspects of life, towards higher levels of human development.

Smart and sustainable cities are built with advanced IT infrastructure; and socio-economic prosperity and social justice are nurtured in urban and rural communities.

## Balancing development and environmental conservation

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH

@patkaushal

Oman has always been at the forefront of environmental conservation. It's commitment to the environment has been recognised internationally, as it has been listed as one of the top 10 countries that work for conserving nature and its resources.

Setting up of the Unesco-Sultan Qaboos Prize for Environmental Protection in 1991, not only raised the high standards of Oman's commitment in the field, it emerged as the first such effort in the Arab world on an international level. The first recipient of the award was an environmental institute in the State of Filakroze in Mexico in the same year.

The Sultanate derives its energy to conserve the environment from the late His Majesty Sultan Qaboos, who was an environmentalist by heart and always considered conservation of the environment while doing large scale development of the country. Despite having world-class infrastructure and very high development standards, the country still has value for sustainable devel-



opment, which many developed and developing countries aspire to achieve.

The late Sultan's speech at the 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil summarises the country's environmental policy and its commitment towards conservation.

"As human beings co-existing on this planet, we have gravely

neglected the vital necessity of conserving the environment and natural resources due to the lack of collective coordination. Indeed, we have taken a potentially opposing course of luxury and industrial progress, regardless of the resulting imbalance between development and the environment, and without taking into account the

dire consequences of the effects upon the atmosphere and the ozone layer, rivers, and seawater, the extermination of certain species, the destruction of forests, and the contamination of once fertile soil. Should this continue, humanity will court collective suicide. The conservation of the environment is the responsibility of all of

us, a responsibility that knows no political boundaries. Therefore, man, wherever he lives, must order his life accordingly. This must be done in a planned, rational way and taking into consideration the numerous causes of pollution, whether natural, biological, industrial, chemical, or physical.

"We, in the Sultanate of

Oman, through our deep personal interest and the directives we have given our government to act in concert with neighbouring countries, are making energetic efforts to protect our environment and territorial waters from pollution and other problems," he said while focusing on being sustainable while doing development which is necessary for day-to-day living.

Oman is home to diverse natural beauties like mountains and sea, greenery, and desert. It makes beautiful landscapes and vegetation, which is rare in countries situated in the arid zone. The country has seen massive development in all the sectors in the recent past. The policymakers in the country have struck a beautiful balance between development and conservation of nature.

It has a dedicated Environment Authority that looks after all the spheres of the environment, including preservation and protection of the environment. With policies and community engagements the authority is in constant touch with the environmental issues and awareness among the masses.

WILAYAT OF IZKI WAS CONSIDERED AS A MEETING POINT FOR VARIOUS TRADE CARAVANS

# WHERE TALES WAIT TO BE TOLD

## WILAYAT OF IZKI



Home to 35,000 people, Wilayat of Izki lies 130 kilometres south of Muscat.

The wilayat borders Samayil in the north, Manah and Adam in the south, Nizwa in the west and Al Mudhaibi in the east.

The history of this wilayat dates back to pre-Islamic era as it was founded by Malik bin Fahm al Azdi.

It was considered as a meeting point for various trade caravans.

Izki comprises many villages; notable among them being Al Yemen, Al Nizar, Imty, Quareet, Saima and Maqzzah.

Al Nizar is regarded as the biggest and oldest dwelling vil-lage in the Sultanate.

The wilayat is an old settle-ment that embraces several tow-ers used as cemeteries of the by-gone era.

The archaeological sites stand witness to the heritage of this an-cient wilayat.

It has about 142 towers and three castles; one of them is Al Aw-wamer, and the other two are lo-cated in the village of Al Qaraytin. The wilayat includes a number of archaeological houses, including Harat Al Nizar and Al Yemen.

There are hundreds of histori-cal and archaeological landmarks in Izki.

There are ancient mosques in the wilayat, such as the grand mosque in Al Yemen, which is an important Islamic edifice.

The old walled town of Izki is situated on a bluff overlooking Wadi Halfayn, with mountains on either side.

The old town is an extensive warren of disintegrating mud brick buildings, enclosed within a huge rectangle of solid walls.

The walls are still standing strong, unlike many of the dilapi-dated buildings inside.

Falaj al Maliki, most famous water canal in the wilayat which runs as far as the Wilayat of Adam, was named by Malik bin Fahm al Azdi.

Jarnan cave is the most im-portant natural attraction in the wilayat and several stories and fables are told about it.

This cave lies at the foot of Wadi Halfayn, below Nizar vil-lage in Izki. Other aflajs are Al Marwa and Al Gabba.

The wilayat is famous for a number of traditional industries and crafts like tanning, spinning and weaving.

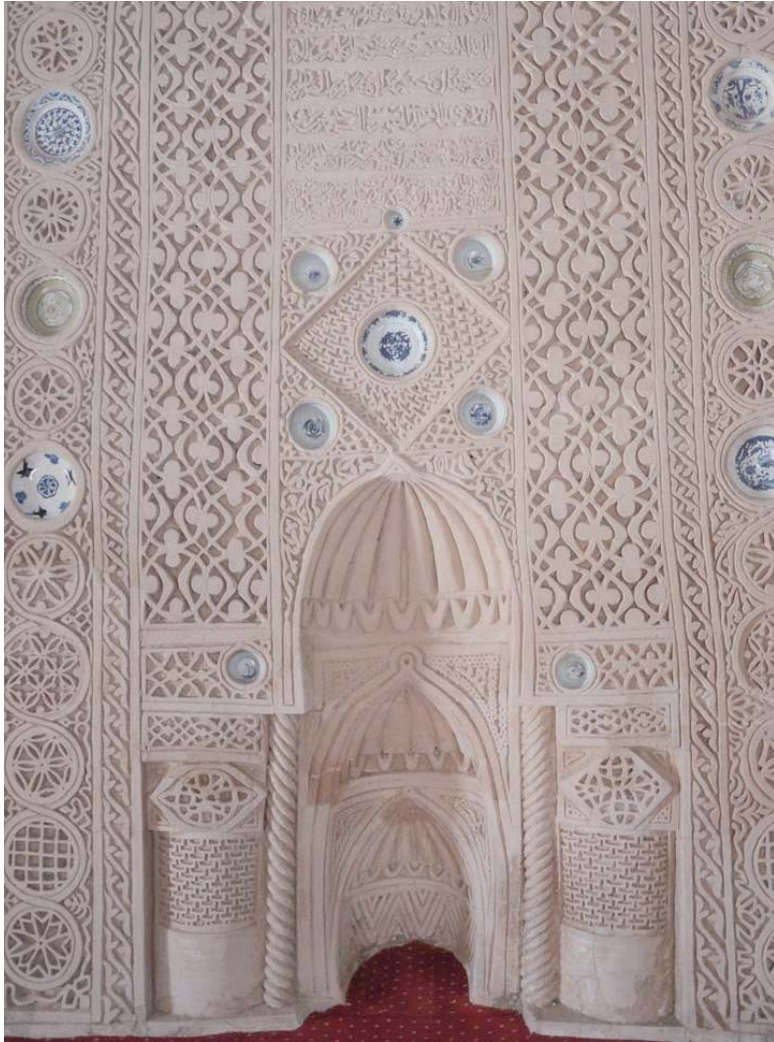
The most prominent tradi-tional folk arts in Izki are Razfah, Al Azi and women's art of Yaoob.

Izki has gained its modern facilities during Omani renaiss-ance.

Over those years, the wilayat consists of 20 schools and gov-ernment offices that provide services for the people.

Izki Public Park is one of the major recreational area of the wilayat.

One of the oldest in Oman, the Izki Souq opens only for a few hours, when the traders and the customers come to the mar-ket after the noon prayers and continue to trade their com-modities till the call for the af-ternoon prayers.



# United for a better future...

I always wanted to be here for the 50th Oman's National Day. I had envisaged celebrations with people dancing in the streets, parties, and schoolchildren performances: a contagious festive atmosphere.

Instead, there is this big shadow of uncertainties. Looking a little below the surface into where the country came from and where it stands, the cheerfulness warms my soul. Then, I feel energised, and turn my attention to the buildup process of the nation. A clear sense of purpose led the country to admirable progress. Unifying and inspiring with passion was the foundation for the achievements.

Yet, as past readings reveal, everything has its time and season. We can romanticise history but we cannot stay away from realities. The new world stipulates resolute priorities. It calls for examining old models' situations; it questions needs, and it demands difficult decisions.

The commemorations for the 50th anniversary come with profound implications in many areas. Yes, it is repeating the rhetoric that the coronavirus pandemic brought unthinkable changes - not merely a weird social order. The average individual has no idea where life is taking him.

The country's young population is in search of confidence and real purposes.



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IT IS A NEW  
RENAISSANCE  
FOR OMAN WITH  
BIGGER AND  
MULTIFACETED  
GOALS AHEAD

It is at this point when I feel that people have the right to be better informed. We cannot toss the media accomplishments into the air. We can talk about growth, inflation, jobs or debt but if there is no context, citizens might not grasp how these big words can affect their lives. It is ok to talk about domestic economic contractions. Most countries are facing the same circumstances. Business either are closed or waiting for customers to return, lower tourism earnings, and falling exports are just some of the situations countries are facing. These are transforming the path of life known so far.

Educating people about the needs of a country, its governance, and fiscal adjustments are part of transparency and institutions' existence. Raising taxes and allocating spending become a life or death sentence for governments but also the population. Taxes are to fund expansions and development projects, and other services. However, how the average citizen will understand these thorny concepts if they are not taught enough on topics such as savings, the use of credit cards, or bank loans.

Looking ahead to build a better future needs planning and courage. So, restoring dynamism implicates in responding to a fast-changing landscape. Without the right skills and realistic foundation, people end up on the margins of society.

To avoid alienation, critical issues need to be addressed before they become chronic diseases in society. We just have to remember that cooperation is a prerequisite for any successful initiative.

That is when observing the use of ceiling on the flow of information, or information without context can contribute to false perceptions. The home media are apt to disseminate and explain debatable issues. Informed citizens can be a strong ally, and our media professionals are mindful. We should not have to be schooled by news articles filled from somewhere else.

It is a new Renaissance for Oman with bigger and multifaceted goals ahead. Technologies, sciences, economic and geopolitical implications are becoming greater. A visionary approach is not out of the card. The country has been reaping on the harvest of solid foundations for the past decades - but with the major transitions happening here and around the world, it is time to turn to other commitments while keeping the groundwork protected.

This is the perfect occasion to inspire, motivate, and realign the country's objectives. With a strong force of remarkable young men and women full of urges and determination, we can only foresee success. Happy National Day Oman and congratulations to the people that contribute to the glory of this nation.

## WAR ON COAL

### The next climate battle has just begun

**SAMMY ROTH**

The night Barack Obama claimed victory in the Democratic presidential primaries in 2008, he predicted future generations would look back and say, "This was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal."

That turned out to be wrong. Earth kept getting hotter, the oceans kept rising, and Donald Trump spent four years undoing many of the clean energy policies adopted by his predecessor. Tackling the climate crisis will once again take centre stage under Joe Biden, but with an important shift.

Although the energy politics of the last dozen years were defined by coal - with President Obama working to accelerate its decline and President Trump trying and failing to revive it - the fiercest battles of the Biden era are likely to revolve around another fossil fuel, natural gas.

The president-elect campaigned on 100 per cent climate-friendly electricity by 2035, a timeline that could squeeze natural gas - currently the nation's largest power source - off the power grid in the next 15 years.

The short list of climate priorities on Biden's transition website also includes "direct cash rebates and low-cost financing to upgrade and electrify home appliances," which could mean replacing gas furnaces, water heaters and stoves with electrical alternatives.

It's an ambitious agenda that's sure to expose fault lines in the Democratic Party, between renewable energy advocates who see natural gas as no better than coal and establishment figures who say the fuel still has a role to play in reducing pollution.

“This was the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow and our planet began to heal

**BARACK OBAMA**  
Former US President

## VOICING HOPES

# Can first COVID-19 vaccines bring herd immunity?

**LUDWIG BURGER AND KATE KELLAND**

Governments and officials are voicing hopes that COVID-19 vaccines could bring "herd immunity", with some calculating that immunising just two-thirds of a population could halt the pandemic disease and help protect whole communities or nations.

But the concept comes with caveats and big demands of what vaccines might be capable of preventing. Some experts say such expectations are misplaced.

For a start, figuring out what's needed to achieve herd immunity with COVID-19 vaccines involves a range of factors, several of which are unknown.

What is the rate of the spread of the COVID-19-causing virus? Will the first vaccines deployed be able to stop transmission of the virus, or just stop people getting ill? How many people in a population will accept a vaccine? Will vaccines offer the same protection to everyone? "Herd immunity is sometimes wrongly understood as individual protection," said Josep Jansa, an expert in health emergency preparedness and response at the Stockholm-based European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

"It's inappropriate to think 'I will not be affected myself because there is herd immunity'. Herd immunity refers to community protection, not to how an individual is protected."

The ECDC uses an estimated herd immunity threshold of 67 per cent for its models, while Chancellor Angela



A woman holds a small bottle labelled with a COVID-19 Vaccine sticker and a medical syringe in this illustration. – Reuters

FIGURING OUT  
WHAT'S NEEDED  
TO ACHIEVE  
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Merkel said this month that COVID-19 restrictions in Germany could be lifted if 60 per cent to 70 per cent of the population acquired immunity, either via a COVID-19 vaccine or through infection.

World Health Organization experts have also pointed to a 65-70 per cent vaccine coverage rate as a way to reach population immunity through vaccination.

"The idea of herd community is to protect the vulnerable," said Eleanor Riley, a professor of immunology and infectious disease at the University of Edinburgh.

"And the idea behind it is that if, say, 98 per cent of a population have

all been vaccinated, there will be so little virus in the community that the 2 per cent will be protected. That's the point of it."

Central to the public health calculations on this concept for COVID-19 is the reproduction rate, or R value, of the virus that causes it. This is a measure of how many other people an average infected person passes a pathogen on to in "normal", or restriction-free, circumstances.

Assuming complete vaccine efficacy, herd immunity percentage thresholds for infectious diseases are calculated by dividing 1 by the R value, deducting the result from 1, and multiplying by 100. — Reuters

# sport

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Manchester City forward Torres was the star for Spain, who were as brilliant as Germany were bad. The result raises further questions about Germany coach Joachim Loew, who was already under pressure coming into this game

## Stunning Spain hit Germany for six as Giroud stars for France

**PARIS:** Ferran Torres grabbed a hat-trick as Spain condemned Germany to their worst defeat in 89 years on Tuesday, winning 6-0 in Seville to qualify for the UEFA Nations League finals and join France, who came from behind to beat Sweden 4-2.

Manchester City forward Torres was the star for Spain, who were as brilliant as Germany were bad. The result raises further questions about Germany coach Joachim Loew, who was already under pressure coming into this game.

“This has been a black day for us,” admitted Loew after Germany’s heaviest defeat since losing 6-0 to Austria in 1931.

They came into their final game in League A, Group 4 on top, a point clear of Spain, and so only needed a draw at an empty La Cartuja to qualify for the finals in

October next year.

But Alvaro Morata headed Spain in front in the 17th minute before Torres crashed in the second on 33 minutes after Dani Olmo’s header hit the bar.

His City team-mate Rodri headed in another to make it 3-0 for Spain before the end of a first half in which they lost Sergio Canales and skipper Sergio Ramos to injury, with the latter coming off feeling his hamstring.

Germany’s defence was posted missing as Jose Gaya burst through and squared for Torres to get the fourth on 55 minutes, and Fabian Ruiz teed up the 20-year-old Torres to complete his hat-trick.

Serge Gnabry hit the bar for Germany before substitute Mikel Oyarzabal completed the rout.

“It was one of the best and most complete matches of the Spanish



Spain’s midfielder Ferran Torres scores his third goal during the UEFA Nations League match against Germany in Seville. – AFP

national team,” said Spain coach Luis Enrique.

Germany now have several months to reflect on this loss before the start of 2022 World Cup qualifying in March and then the

delayed Euro 2020 in June and July.

Spain, meanwhile, become the second side to qualify for the Nations League finals after France clinched their place by beating Portugal at the weekend.

**PORTUGAL WIN WITH LATE GOAL**

The World Cup holders finished off their League A, Group 3 campaign, by beating Sweden behind closed doors at the Stade de France as Olivier Giroud continued his remarkable scoring record for Les Bleus with a brace.

Viktor Claesson’s deflected early strike gave Sweden the lead, but Giroud soon equalised and Benjamin Pavard put France ahead before half-time.

Giroud then headed in Kylian Mbappe’s cross to make it 3-1 before the hour mark, and Kingsley Coman scored France’s final goal at the death after Robin Quaison had netted Sweden’s second.

Having recently overtaken Michel Platini’s tally of 41 goals for Les Bleus, Giroud is now on 44 and is closing in on Thierry Henry’s

overall record mark of 51.

The 34-year-old remains a key player for France despite being on the periphery with his club Chelsea, for whom he has started just once this season, in the League Cup.

Sweden finish bottom of the group behind Croatia and are relegated to the second-tier League B for the next edition of the competition. That is despite 10-man Croatia losing 3-2 at home to Portugal in Split, with Manchester City defender Ruben Dias getting a 90th-minute winner for the 2019 Nations League champions.

Chelsea’s Mateo Kovacic had scored twice for Croatia, either side of Dias’s first of the night and a Joao Felix effort for Portugal, who featured Cristiano Ronaldo wearing the captain’s armband.

— AFP



World Cup hero Hurst supports ban on children heading ball

**LONDON:** England's 1966 World Cup hat-trick hero Geoff Hurst says children should be banned from heading the ball due to so many of his generation suffering from dementia. Several of Hurst's 1966 team-mates have been diagnosed with dementia, the most recent Bobby Charlton.



Bosz labels tackle 'madness' as injuries mount

**BERLIN:** Bayer Leverkusen coach Peter Bosz has described the challenge on Argentina and Leverkusen player Exequiel Palacios last week as "madness". The 22-year-old, who joined Leverkusen in January, suffered a vertebra fracture in his back in Argentina's 1-1 World Cup qualifying draw against Paraguay last Thursday after Romero's tough tackle.

# National swimmers at Tishreen International Swimming and Open Water Championship

ADIL AL BALUSHI  
MUSCAT, NOV 17

In its first presence at the international events after non-action period of tournaments due to the pandemic, Oman national swimmers team took part at the Tishreen International Swimming and Open Water Championship (for a distance of 5 km) which was held in Syria at Latakia city on Monday.

Oman's swimmer Ayman al Qasmi finished in fifth place with best personal time in open water while Oman's Abdulrahman al Kulaibi was in the sixth place and Naif al Qasmi ended in eighth place.

More than 40 swimmers participated in the event representing the following countries: Sultanate of Oman, Iraq, Palestine, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Macedonia and the hosts Syria.

The Syrian Saleh Mohammed claimed the title of the first award as he completed swimming the distance of 5 km in 8 minutes and



25 seconds with a difference of five seconds from the runner up of Russian swimmer Alexandar Shemin. The third place was taken by the Syrian Laith Laqmoosh. The competition was for 90 minutes divided into five rounds and each round was for one km.

The Sultanate head coach of the national swimming team, Srdan Filipovic, said to *Oman*

*Daily Observer* from latakia city that the domestic swimmers had registered good performance in the friendly event. "It is great that our swimmers were returned back to the action and the events. It is necessary that the swimmers re-interact in competitions after the historic stopping period due to the outbreak. I am happy with the national swimmers results at the



Tishreen International Swimming and Open Water Championship," he added.

"We are gearing up for the forthcoming events including the GCC swimming tournament (short course for 25 metres) in Qatar in next February and GCC Games in Kuwait in next March," he said.

In September, the national team

swimmers had completed the domestic camp at the Al Rustaq Sports Complex. The preparatory camp began on September 20 and ended on September 30 featured more than 17 training sessions.

As many as twelve players took part in the domestic camp at the Olympic swimming pool in Al Rustaq Sports Complex. All the swimmers had got the chance for

**Oman's swimmer Ayman al Qasmi finished in fifth place with best personal time in open water while Oman's Abdulrahman al Kulaibi was in the sixth place and Naif al Qasmi ended in eighth place**

two-time training sessions daily in morning and evening sessions under the supervision of the Coach Srdan Filipovic.

The national swimming team probables featured the following: Noaf al Qasmi, Aiman al Qasmi, Naif al Qasmi, Abdulrahman al Kulaibi, Shihab Aladyn, Mo-hannad Auladthani, Omar al Balushi, Nasser al Kindi, Hamis al Hassani, Bashar al Kulaibi and Adam al Raisi.

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Coffee-fans in Muscat can receive their Starbucks beverage from anywhere through talabat

Talabat, the region's leading food and grocery delivery platform, now delivers Starbucks to its customers across Muscat. As the world's largest chain and beloved coffeehouse, Starbucks offers a wide variety of blends including lattes, macchiatos and frappuccinos, along with other signature beverages and food. Following a few simple taps on talabat, customers can now enjoy a freshly brewed cup of coffee - brought right to their doorstep in no time!

Customers will not only have their coffee delivered quickly, but also receive their orders sealed meticulously into suitable bags to ensure it arrives in perfect condition. This also takes into account all the strict safety measures put in place by talabat during this pandemic.

**Tatiana Rahal, Managing Director of talabat Oman**, said: 'I would first like to pass on our congratulations to His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tariq, and to the people of Oman on the occasion of the Sultanate's 50th anniversary. Delivering to our customers in Oman is something we take so much pride in, and the passion we have in operating across the Sultanate will always be second to none. Having said that, we are extremely thrilled to offer Starbucks on our platform in Oman, and to offer delivery to our customers right to their doorstep. We're glad to be the very first, and the only platform to carry Starbucks - a brand inherently part of many of our customers. We cannot wait to be able to bring warm cups

of coffee to those who choose to enjoy them from the comfort of their home and eventually, from their workplace.'

**Andrew Simmonds, Senior Operations Manager, Starbucks Oman**, 'At Starbucks, we are committed to offering an unmatched customer experience. Part of this is finding new and easy ways to bring the Starbucks Experience to the homes and workplace of our customers. We want to connect with customers where they are, and through our partnership with talabat, we have made an important step towards providing a coffee at home experience. Through a few taps on a phone, customers can finally enjoy their favorite Starbucks products wherever, and whenever!'

While a new normal settles in, talabat has been focusing its efforts to help maintain a certain level of comfort and normalcy for their customers, and are working hard as their trusted sidekick during the pandemic when it comes to delivering their food, groceries and flowers.

In addition to this exciting launch, talabat wishes the public and all of its inspiring citizens a happy 50th National Day, and is very proud to have been part of the community since 2012!

Consumers can order Starbucks through talabat, by downloading the talabat app through iOS Appstore or Google Play.

## National Day horse race to commence today



120 HORSES TO TAKE PART AT THE EIGHT ROUNDS RACE

**MUSCAT:** The Royal Horse Racing Club will organise the 50th edition national day trophy on Thursday at Al Rahba Racecourse. The race will feature eight rounds including five rounds for the top purebred Arabian horses and three rounds for thoroughbred horses. The total number of horses that will take part in the race is 120 from different part of the Sultanate.

Brig Abdul Razaq bin Abdul Qadir al Shahwarzi, Commander of the Royal Cavalry, Supervisor General of Horse Races in the Sultanate affirmed that the Royal Horse Racing Club raise the cash prizes for the top rounds of the race including the sixth round which is specified for the 50th National Day trophy for thoroughbred horses while the

seventh round is specified for the 50th National Day trophy for purebred Arabian horses. "The eighth round is dedicated also for the competition under the 50th National Day trophy for the domestic production horses.

The race is classified as one of the classic races in the Sultanate as it feature different types of the horses," he added.





# FIREWORKS

MARK NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS

As part of the Sultanate's 50th National Day celebration, fireworks were held in Salalah, Al Seeb and Al Amerat on Wednesday. PHOTOS BY FAISAL AL BALUSHI AND ONA

# business

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## \$196m flood protection projects to secure Muscat

**SENTINEL PROJECTS:** Leading contractor set to kick off construction work on dams at Al Jifnain and Al Jufainah in Muscat Governorate

**CONRAD PRABHU**  
@conradprabhu

Construction work is set to shortly commence on two major flood protection schemes in Muscat Governorate, which when completed by around 2023-end will help stave off the kind of devastation visited upon the capital city in previous severe flood events.

Leading civil construction firm Strabag Oman LLC has announced that it has been selected by the Omani government to build a pair of flood protection dams at a total cost of around \$196 million. The client is the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The bigger of the two dams is planned upstream of Wadi Al Jifnain and aimed at securing Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) and other urban districts and surrounding infrastructure from catastrophic flooding caused by peak wadi runoff.

According to Strabag, the flood protection scheme planned at Al Jifnain centres on the construction of a 6.5 kilometre-long, U-shaped rockfill dam structure rising up to 20 metres in height. It will include three spillways and a spillway tower in addition to a number of flood protection walls.

An equally sizable flood protection scheme is also planned upstream of Wadi Adai to help



safeguard a growing array of neighbourhoods mushrooming along the Al Amerat-Qurayat carriageway.

Formally known as Al Jufainah Dam project, it consists of two rockfill dams extending a total distance of about 2.4 kilometres to create a reservoir up in the hills overlooking Al Amerat. Also envisaged are five small saddle dams, spillways and flood protection walls.

Plans for flood protection schemes at the two locations were firmed up in the wake of a succession of severe climatic events that have hit the Sultanate at various intervals starting in 2007, when Tropical Cyclone Gonu slammed into Oman's east coast.

Gonu, followed by Phet in 2010, inundated neighbourhoods, ravaged infrastructure and caused human casualties as well.

The latest two dam projects are part of a network of flood protection schemes — some already completed and others on the anvil — designed to help alleviate some of the severe flooding associated with extreme weather events. Similar protection schemes are also in various stages of implementation in parts of the South Al Sharqiyah and Dhofar governorates, which have also been battered during previous flood events.

In July, the Government Tender Board awarded contracts worth \$120 million for the construction of two flood protection dams in the hills overlooking Salalah in Dhofar Governorate. Both schemes will avert disastrous flooding of the kind that was witnessed two years ago when Cyclone Mekunu pummelled Dhofar Governorate, flooding Salalah Port and the surrounding

areas.

AZ Engineers & Partners LLC is currently building a 386-metre-

long dam structure spanning Wadi Adawnib at a cost of \$62 million. Separately, another

Plans for flood protection schemes at the two locations were firmed up in the wake of a succession of severe climatic events that have hit the Sultanate at various intervals starting in 2007, when Tropical Cyclone Gonu slammed into Oman's east coast.

Omani contractor has kicked off work on a flood protection dam spanning Wadi Annar that also cuts through Salalah en route to the sea. Also as part of the contract, valued at around \$60 million, the contractor will train wadi channels so any runoff during flooding will not spill into the port area.

## Slight uptick in Omani crude exports to India

**JOMAR MENDOZA**  
@JmObserver

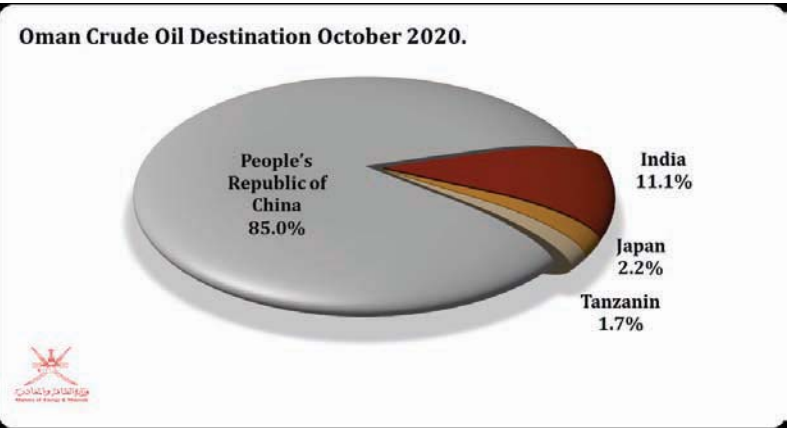
Exports of Omani crude (Oman Export Blend) to India rose 8.9 per cent (m-o-m) to reach 11.1 per cent of total exports of 741,813 barrels per day (bpd) in October, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals announced in its latest monthly bulletin.

China, however, remained the dominant market for Omani crude, with 85 per cent of total exports for the month. Japan (with 2.2 per cent) and Tanzania (1.7 per cent) were placed a distant third and fourth in terms of their respective shares.

Crude production averaged 721,100 bpd in October, which was up 0.33 per cent (m-o-m) compared with the average for September 2020

Oil prices for all reference crude oil grades around the world have experienced a fluctuating trend during the trading days of October 2020 — for December 2020 delivery — compared with trading of September 2020.

The average price of West Texas



Intermediate Crude Oil at the New York Mercantile Exchange (NYMEX) settled at \$39.83 per barrel, an increase of \$0.42.

The price of North Sea Oil (Brent) at the Intercontinental Exchange (ICE) in London averaged \$41.52 per barrel, decreasing by \$0.35 compared with trading during September 2020.

The average price of Oman's Crude Oil Futures Contract on the Dubai Mercantile Exchange (DME) similarly decreased by 1.2 per cent compared with the previous month.

The monthly official selling price for Oman Crude oil for December 2020 delivery — traded during October 2020 — was announced to be \$41.11 per barrel, entailing a drop of \$0.49 compared with the November 2020 official selling price.

The daily trading marker price ranged between \$37.65 per barrel and \$42.56 per barrel. The yearly average for the Oman Crude in 2020 reached \$46.02 per barrel, the Ministry of Energy and Minerals added.



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# Ban on plastic shopping bags is a positive measure

The world is increasingly concerned about environmental factors that can have adverse impacts on the planet and its inhabitants. This global concern is also reflected in Oman's recent decision — the first by a GCC state — to ban the use of unicast plastic shopping bags from the beginning of 2021.

The decision stipulates that companies and organisations are prohibited from using such shopping bags in order to safeguard the Omani environment. It prescribes fines

ranging from RO 100 to RO 2,000 (\$260 to \$5,200) for breaches, with a doubling of the amount in the case of repeat violations. The concerned authorities have started to educate citizens and expatriates about this decision through text messages.

The proscribed bags, which are made from flimsy plastic, are typically used only once and disposed of as waste.

As they are featherweight, they can be scattered about in the wind and cause an eyesore where they settle. It is also difficult to get rid of them naturally, as plastics takes about 1,000 years to biodegrade. Oman's authorities are



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COMPANIES ARE PROHIBITED FROM USING SUCH SHOPPING BAGS IN ORDER TO SAFEGUARD THE OMANI ENVIRONMENT

advocating the use of non-plastic shopping bags made from cloth, paper or other organic materials. These can be used several times for shopping. They are widely available as alternatives to single-use plastic bags.

The ban on single-use plastic bags and their replacement with environmentally-friendly bags comes in the wake of protracted discussions between the concerned authorities within the framework of efforts involving government and private sector stakeholders to find effective and sustainable solutions to environmental challenges. These efforts also mirror

initiatives underway globally to safeguard public and environmental health in the face of hazards posed by plastic products and related waste.

Indeed plastic waste continues to accumulate unacceptably as plastic does not decompose easily, while collection and recycling options are not particularly cost-competitive.

It is against this backdrop that policies and guidelines have been put in place to regulate the manufacture, supply and sale of such bags for use in malls and supermarkets.

Plastic bags also pose great risk to public health, flora and fauna

and the environment in general. Plastic waste also has the potential to contaminate soils, marine life, and the oceans. Studies have shown that microscopic plastic pieces may be absorbed by the human body through the marine food chain.

Oman's authorities are collaborating with a number of regional and international organisations to help create a strong platform for supporting local waste management and recycling initiatives that will open up opportunities for small and medium-sized companies and eventually build a sustainable solid waste sector in the country.

## New remote-controlled gantry cranes installed at Sohar Port terminal



BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, NOV 18

Hutchison Ports Sohar has commissioned two of its eight incoming fleet of Remote-Controlled Rubber-Tyred Gantry Cranes (RCRTGC) at its container terminal at Sohar Port. These two units were put into operation at the beginning of November, with the other six units scheduled for operations by the end of Q1 2021.

These RCRTGCs are state-of-the-art equipment, capable of automated container stacking and remote control for handling the loading and unloading of containers to and from external trucks through wireless communication.

The centralised remote control operations centre improves the safety and comfort of the operating environment and reduces physical stress of the operators, while allowing good daytime and nighttime visibility

for cranes control through optical cameras.

Moreover, these remote-controlled cranes are designed with a hybrid smart power management system. The hybrid system's electric powertrain eliminates the need for traditional large diesel engines. The new RCRTGCs can help reduce air as well as noise pollution, and further reinforce Hutchison Ports Sohar's commitment to transform itself into a green terminal.

"These RCRTGCs represent the first of their kind in the Sultanate of Oman and in the Middle East and Africa region. We strive to deliver the highest level of customer service and better working conditions to our employees. The anti-collision automation system included in the RCRTGCs further improves operational safety for employees as well as external truck drivers," said Anacin Kum, CEO of Hutchison Ports Sohar.

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, NOV 18

Muscat-based Glorious Wings International Services, the Sultanate's first internationally recognised aviation services company, has announced the official launch of its new corporate branding that includes a redesigned visual identity and a new online digital experience, in celebration of Oman's 50th National Day.

The redesigned website offers visitors richer insight into the company's professionally



integrated aviation services, best-in-class team of pilots and growing affiliations. The rebranding is to solidify their stance, offering, and direction in the industry. In addition to the visual identity, the new website offers comprehensive online services to those interested in pursuing a career as a professional aviator or contemplating of

joining the aviation industry.

"Glorious Wings has a history of distinction, service and leadership made possible by our dedicated team of professional pilots," said Captain Farhan al Shaheibi, CEO of Glorious Wings. "As a company, we aim to embody these core tenets in every aspect of our business. Our brand refresh builds upon our solid foundation while providing a consistent presentation across all our services for a new generation of aviators. We had delayed the launch from August this year to 18th November, so that we could

align it with our beloved country's 50th National Day."

Glorious Wings appointed Muscat-based Silent Sky Services on developing the new identity and website. "Working with a highly creative local firm on the rebrand initiative created a true team environment," stated Captain Farhan. "Silent Sky became an extension of our Glorious Wings family and accomplished a stunning task in clearly visualising and communicating our core values and depth of services through the rebranding process."

### PRESS RELEASES

#### BANK MUSCAT CELEBRATES 50TH NATIONAL DAY WITH RO 500,000 SPECIAL AL MAZYONA DRAW

As part of the celebrations being held on the Glorious 50th National Day of Oman, Bank Muscat, the leading financial services provider in the Sultanate, conducted a special Al Mazyona draw for RO 500,000.

Fifty lucky winners won RO 10,000 each on this special occasion, which was held at the Hala FM radio station in the presence of Abdullah bin Tamman al Maashani, Deputy General Manager — Institutional Sales and Product Development, Bank Muscat and other senior officials. The event was broadcast on Hala FM and livestreamed over the social media channels of both the radio station and the bank so as to share the joy of National Day celebrations with customers and the general public.

Abdullah bin Tamman al Maashani said: "As one of the great achievements of Oman's Blessed Renaissance, Bank Muscat is proud to hold this special draw to celebrate the Glorious 50th National Day."



#### OAB LAUNCHES DEBT EXEMPTION INITIATIVE FOR DEFAULTING BORROWERS

On the occasion of the 50th National Day, Oman Arab Bank (OAB) has written off over 150 defaulting loans. This initiative is part of the bank's social responsibility towards society and was prompted by the special circumstances of the account holders which include the elderly, widows and people with disabilities.

Rashad al Musafir, CEO of the Bank said, "Since our establishment, Oman Arab Bank has been, and continues to be, a financial institution that takes care of its customers and strives to build closer relations with the



community. Since the passing of 50 years marks a significant milestone for the country and all its people, we decided to share in the joy and celebration of our customers. For this reason we are launching this debt exemption initiative to help people in need, especially those who are facing difficult circumstances brought about by the current challenges."

# Madayn CEO inaugurates 'Made in Oman' campaign

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, NOV 18

As part of Oman's celebrations of the 50th National Day and in line with the ongoing month-long Made in Oman Campaign, Omani Products Exhibition was inaugurated on Wednesday at City Centre Qurum under the auspices of Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, Chief Executive Officer of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn).

The 'Made in Oman' Campaign aims at highlighting and promoting the Omani products through the commercial centres across all the governorates in

the Sultanate. The campaign also encourages consumers to choose locally manufactured products, and emphasises on the significance of buying Omani products and its contribution to the national economy.

Speaking at the event, Hilal al Hasani, CEO of Madayn, emphasised that promoting Omani products in such platforms plays a key role in increasing the spread of these products, which eventually reflects positively on the national economy.

Al Hasani stated that the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Madayn, Oman Chamber of



Commerce and Industry, in addition to a number of key bodies,

are unifying efforts to spread awareness on the importance of

supporting the Omani products among various segments of the society.

"Through the ongoing cooperation with the major commercial stores in Oman, the Omani products are not only showcased at the local level, but also at external markets as these stores play a role in displaying these products in various markets abroad," Al Hasani said, adding: "Madayn offers logistics and service support to the Omani factories within our industrial cities through providing a flourishing environment for their production processes. This eventually enhances their spread

in the markets and increases the exports of their products."

The Made in Oman Campaign is organised by the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, in coordination with Madayn, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Public Authority for SMEs Development, Consumer Protection Authority, in addition to other related bodies.

The campaign is being organised in cooperation with the commercial centres in the Sultanate including Sultan Centre, Carrefour, Nesto Hypermarket and Lulu Hypermarket in all their branches.

# Value-Added Tax impact across the organisation

ALKESH  
JOSHISARA AL  
HARTHI

The introduction of the value-added tax (VAT) regime in Oman will not only affect consumers, it will also have an impact on the businesses. VAT will have an impact on virtually all functions within an organisation, including information technology, finance, sales, procurement, legal and human resources.

While it is the finance function that usually drives the progress

of VAT implementation, the efforts need to be enabled throughout a range of processes and technologies within the organisation. Some of the impacts of VAT across the business functions are discussed below.

## Information technology

IT systems form an important part of the VAT implementation process and are often considered the backbone of VAT compliance. Businesses need to assess their system's capability and make the necessary upgrades required to handle the requirements of VAT such as issuing valid tax invoices and generating VAT reports.

In larger organisations, business may revert to external tax engines and third-party solutions to automate the compliance process or add efficiency to the determination, consolidation,

reporting and VAT analytics processes.

## Finance and administration

VAT will impose a number of compliance requirements that will constitute an administrative burden for the business. These requirements include obtaining a VAT registration, filing the periodic returns and making payments of VAT due or claiming refunds from the authorities, in addition to maintaining records and documents in accordance with the requirements of the VAT law. Additionally, a business will have to be ready to attend to tax audits and queries raised by the Tax Authority as well as handle any fines or penalties imposed on the business.

Internally, the business needs to ensure it is correctly managing any cashflow risks resulting from

VAT and introducing processes and controls to manage these risks, such as optimising payment terms.

## Sales and marketing

All businesses should review their sales contracts and commercial arrangements to determine the appropriate VAT treatment of their supplies and assess if VAT has been appropriately addressed in the contracts or not. If long-term contracts are not amended to accommodate the introduction of VAT, businesses may be forced to absorb the impact of the new tax.

Moreover, businesses need to carefully assess the impact of VAT on consumer demand and whether a competitive pricing strategy should be introduced to maintain market share.

## Procurement and supply

## chain

Similar to sales, businesses should review their commercial arrangements to minimise any VAT risks that could result in a cost escalation to the business. A significant effort is required to validate vendors' VAT credentials as well as ensuring all invoices issued by vendors are VAT compliant. Additionally, businesses should evaluate the VAT liabilities on their various purchase transactions including scenarios involving imports or where a special VAT self-accounting mechanism is due.

## Human resources

The human resource ("HR") department and fringe benefits provided to employees are considered "low hanging fruits" for VAT audits across the globe in jurisdictions implementing VAT.

Businesses may need to optimise their HR policies for VAT after considering the input VAT recovery position of their HR-related purchases and the VAT impacts of making free of charge supplies to employees.

Training and development of staff are crucial to a smooth business transformation while implementing VAT and for on-going compliance. Besides training existing staff, businesses should consider the need to hire additional resources with VAT expertise to handle the business's additional compliance requirements.

*Watch this space for more on the impacts of VAT across the business community and on specific sectors. [Alkesh Joshi may be contacted by email at: alkesh.joshi@om.ey.com]*

## EU urges capitals to back recovery plan

**BRUSSELS:** The European Commission's top economic official urged member states to get behind the bloc's 1.8-billion-euro budget and coronavirus recovery plan on Wednesday, after Hungary and Poland blocked approval.

"I call on member states to show a strong sense of responsibility to their own citizens and to all Europeans at this crucial moment and to get this recovery plan over the line," economy Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni said.

EU Vice President for the economy Valdis Dombrovskis chimed in that "quick political agreement" was needed on the recovery package "so that it can provide a financial anchor through this storm".

Hungary and Poland on Monday blocked adoption of the recovery plan and the 2021-2027 long term budget over a dispute over the rule of law.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban argued that the EU wants to link funding to a member state's respect for the rule of law in order to force his country to accept immigrants.

After Poland also issued its veto, on Tuesday Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa expressed his own support for the move.

Germany, which holds the rotating EU presidency, has vowed to work to convince Budapest and Warsaw to lift the blockade and Thursday's summit promises to be tense.



**I call on member states to show a strong sense of responsibility to their own citizens and to all Europeans at this crucial moment and to get this recovery plan over the line**

**PAOLO GENTILONI**  
*Economy Commissioner*

EU leaders thought they had resolved disputes over the seven-year EU budget and associated stimulus plan at a marathon four-day-and-night summit in July.

They have since also overcome differences with the European Parliament over spending priorities, paving the way for MEPs' approval of the trillion-euro budget and 750-billion-euro stimulus package.

But Hungary, Poland and now Slovenia remain implacably opposed to allowing EU institutions to sit in judgement on whether their governments abide by European democratic norms. — **AFP**

## Global airlines scramble to prepare for COVID-19 vaccine distribution

**PARIS:** Global airlines are scrambling to prepare ultra-cold shipping and storage facilities to transport COVID-19 vaccines developed by Pfizer and Moderna, whose doses, which require deep freezing, are likely to be among the first to be distributed.

A recent survey by an air cargo association and a drug shippers' group found only 15 per cent of industry participants felt ready to transport goods near the minus 70 degrees Celsius (-94°F) required by the Pfizer Inc vaccine, while around 60 per cent could meet Moderna Inc's less stringent -20°C requirement.

Typically, airlines use containers with cooling materials such as dry ice to transport pharmaceutical products, but some don't have temperature controls, making products susceptible to unforeseen events such as flight delays.

Airlines are now considering options ranging from a large plug-in freezer that can cost about as much as a small car to a multi-layered canister that uses liquid nitrogen to ship vaccines requiring a deep freeze.

The potential demand for such high-end packaging has helped shares of cold container specialists such as Cryoport Inc and Germany-based va-Q-tec more than double.

"With direct contracts with five temperature-controlled container manufacturers, Korean Air has



A worker passes a line of freezers holding coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccine candidate BNT162b2 at a Pfizer facility in Puurs, Belgium. — **Reuters**

secured sufficient quantities of containers. For now, we are in the process of signing contracts with other container manufacturers," a Korean Air spokesperson said.

Air France-KLM said it was gearing up for a test run with one of the drugmakers — it declined to say which — that will see dummy samples shipped at ultra-low temperatures, likely via Amsterdam's Schiphol airport.

The drill will use boxes carrying as many as 5,000 doses each, all cooled by dry ice, Air France-KLM special cargo manager Béatrice Delpuech told Reuters. Later shipments may also use larger ultra-cold containers rented

from va-Q-tec.

"They need to validate the entire logistics chain from end to end, including the air freight segment," Delpuech said. "We have a dedicated task force examining every step of the process with all our teams, to make sure there are no hitches anywhere."

But one difficulty with vaccine transport is that aeroplanes can only carry a limited amount of dry ice - frozen carbon dioxide - as it turns into gas over time, displacing the breathable air in the cabin.

All widebody planes can carry a maximum of around 1 tonne of dry ice in refrigerated and

insulated containers, according to a DHL white paper on vaccine transport.

"Depending on the type of aircraft, there are usually not more than a few containers on board at the same time," said Joachim von Winning, chief executive of Air Cargo Community Frankfurt.

For an alternative, Deutsche Post AG's has been using Cryoport's capsule containers, which use liquid nitrogen to keep goods as cool as -150C for up to 10 days to support clinical vaccine trials, said Patricia Cole, DHL Global Forwarding's global head of temperature management solutions. — **Reuters**

### SHORT TAKES

#### MOSCOW

### Russian e-retailer Ozon eyes \$1bn in US IPO

Russian online retailer Ozon is looking to raise nearly \$1.0 billion in a US initial public offering (IPO), according to regulatory paperwork.

The online giant, which reported growth of 142 per cent year-on-year in the first nine months of 2020, is aiming to capitalise on the boom in e-commerce during coronavirus lockdowns.

According to a prospectus submitted to the United States Securities and Exchange



Commission (SEC), the Russian retailer will be issuing 34.5 million American depositary shares (ADS) on the Nasdaq stock exchange at between \$22.50 and \$27.50. — **AFP**

#### REYKJAVIK

### Iceland cuts key interest rate as outlook worsens

Iceland's central bank cut its key interest rate for the fifth time this year, by a quarter-point to a record low 0.75 per cent, and revised downward its outlook as the pandemic's second wave washes over the country.

"The autumn surge in COVID-19 cases and the tightened public health measures have weakened the economic rebound that began in the third quarter, following a historically large contraction in the second quarter," the central bank said.

For 2020, it predicted the economy would shrink by 8.5 per cent, compared to the 7.1 per cent contraction it anticipated in August.

"Growth is projected to be weaker in 2021 as well," it said, predicting the economy would grow 2.3 per cent instead of the 3.4 per cent seen in its forecast.

"The economic outlook is highly uncertain and economic developments will depend to a degree on the path the pandemic takes," it said. — **AFP**

#### SAN FRANCISCO

### Apple to halve its cut from small app developers

Apple is to slash the commission it takes from small businesses selling programmes on its App Store, but the tech giant will still take a 30 per cent cut from major developers.

The iPhone manufacturer said that from the new year, developers who make less than \$1 million from selling apps on its store will see Apple's revenue bite cut to 15 per cent.

The announcement, however, will have no effect on developers that generate huge amounts of



cash from wildly popular apps and videogames.

Apple and Epic Games, are fighting over whether the California-based company's tight control of its App Store, and its 30 per cent cut of revenue, counts as monopolistic behaviour. — **AFP**

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■ FOR SALE/RENT

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**SMART Indian** professional, excellent English, double Masters — journalism & communication, finance, writing & research skills, Arabic speaker, 15 years diversified Oman experience in Muscat Airport project, healthcare, media, EPC, seeks suitable role. NOC. 99283938

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■ SIT. WANTED

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**MECHANICAL engineer.** 21, Indian male currently in Oman looking to work at any engineering field. Contact 96511338. Email: rkhdhanush11@gmail.com

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■ ANNOUNCEMENT

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ANNOUNCEMENT

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# features

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## Muttrah Souq, 50 years into the Renaissance

For several decades, Muttrah Souq has transformed itself and become an icon to many of the country's residents and travellers. If one thinks of a place to get authentic Omani gifts and giveaways, Muttrah Souq is always the first place that came to mind. The souq continues to defy time, and this year, even the pandemic... **P18**

### INSIDE STORIES

#### HUMAN INTEREST



##### EGYPT'S SIWA FORTRESS RENOVATION BOOSTS HOPES FOR ECOTOURISM

Tucked away in Egypt's Western Desert, the Shali fortress once protected inhabitants against the incursions of wandering tribes, but now there are hopes its renovation will attract ecotourists... **Story on Page P20**

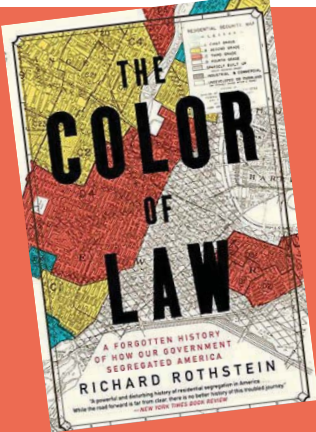
#### COOK LIKE A CHEF



##### SALMON TIRADITO

Salmons are rich in Omega-3 fatty acids and those that are found in salmon increase cell membrane fluidity, helping inhibit inflammation. Omega-3's can also improve fat metabolism and reduce your body's production of triglycerides (a type of fat)... **Story on Page 19**

#### READ



##### THE COLOR OF LAW

BY RICHARD ROTHSTEIN

A case for how the American government abetted racial segregation in metropolitan areas across the country.

#### GASTRONOMY



##### CAPTAIN'S CORNER: GROUNDED MALAYSIAN PILOT'S NOODLE STALL TAKES OFF

Every morning, Malaysian pilot Azrin Mohamad Zawawi puts on his white uniform and black captain's hat before heading to work... **Story on Page 19**

#### CELEBRATE



##### INTERNATIONAL MEN'S DAY

International Men's Day seeks to raise awareness about mental health issues in men, as well as other health and societal issues, by encouraging men to open up and communicate with others. The traditional ideas of what masculinity means in society is changing, and needs to change, if vulnerable men are to be protected from these harmful conditions.



# Muttrah Souq, 50 years into the Renaissance

BY KABEER YOUSUF

**A**hmed al Hajri, a shopkeeper inside the traditional Muttrah Souq is heaving a sigh of relief as he can sell the goods he had stored months ago in of his two shops inside the vast market 80 days after the souq reopened.

The iconic market, one of the oldest and largest traditional souqs in the country, that was closed after the pandemic began to erupt in the Sultanate on March 17, was opened in August.

Ahmed is not the only one who is thanking his God for getting life back in Muttrah Souq that houses over 5,000 vendors, salesmen and craftsmen from across the world, along with citizens and traditional tradesmen.

"Life is a lowly but steadily coming back to the Souq as the weekend witnessed hundreds of people visiting the scores of shops inside the market and spending for their purchases," says a happy Ahmed.

Muttrah Souq was closed with the Supreme Committee order after it was known to be the focal point of the COVID-19.

The three major seasons when Muttrah Souq brimmed with life, the two Eid seasons and the cruise season, were missed out by the people inside the souq this year.

"We are slowly getting back on track after five months of closure and lost three seasons owing to Corona," says Abdul Sathar, an expatriate shopkeeper.

The worst affected is invariably

those tailors and textiles that sold Abaya, and the Jallabiya the traditional Omani women dresses.

"It's better not to count the losses due to COVID-19 but our customers have been loyal to us and they are back just like a family asking if we all were safe, Rajibulla, who owns a shop inside Muttrah shopping centre said.

"One of the seasons which is truly crucial for us is the cruise season and people like me depends heavily upon tourists as it brings in good international clients from Germany, France, the US, the UK and you name it," adds Mohammed Ashraf, another tradesman.

However, the authorities remind those shopkeepers as well as the customers who visit these shops to be beware of the COVID-19 safety protocols.

The authorities have urged all companies, shops and other commercial establishments inside the Muttrah Souq to follow safety precautions for oneself and others failing of which actions would be taken.

"The number of customers at one time should be limited to 2, and the thermometer to check the customer's temperature should be placed at the entrance. Names, contact numbers and temperature of the customers who enter the shop should be noted in a registry," a Muscat Municipality official said.

"Social distancing, sanitiser and strict adherence wearing a mask are a few other factors that need to be followed at the workplace," he added.

## EASY ACCESS TO HERITAGE

For several decades, Muttrah Souq has transformed itself and become an icon to many of the country's residents and traveller. If one thinks of a place to get authentic Omani gifts

and giveaways, Muttrah Souq is always the first place that came to mind.

Dating back to nearly two hundred years ago and located adjacent to the Sultan Qaboos Port, it is one of Oman's most visited locations. Also called Al Dhalam in the olden days, it got its name from the dark halls typical of the ancient days because of the crowding of the stalls and lanes.

From its rustic beginnings, the souq has gone through massive renovations in recent years. The Muttrah Souq we know today has been fully developed and now are properly divided into different sections from basic commodities to pieces of jewellery and accessories, from perfumes and ouds and to Omani traditional clothing and local produce.

The area around Muttrah would be very different without the souq. While it has been shut down, the sellers and stall owners are hopeful that Muttrah Souq will survive the pandemic because of its resilience to defy time. While it's not as boisterous as it is in the past, the majority still believe it will find its footing and will see and only become better as it marches on towards the next renaissance.





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# SALMON TIRADITO



## GOING JAPANESE

Salmons are rich in Omega-3 fatty acids and those that are found in salmon increase cell membrane fluidity, helping inhibit inflammation. Omega-3's can also improve fat metabolism and reduce your body's production of triglycerides (a type of fat). This meal is very suitable for the people who are beginners in trying sashimi.

### PREPARATION METHOD

#### PONZU SAUCE

Mix kikkoman soy sauce, rice vinegar and lemon juice in a bowl and keep in the refrigerator. Ponzu sauce is ready.

#### SALMON TIRADITO

Slice salmon thinly. (2-3mm thick, 3cm width, 5cm long in size)  
Arrange the sliced salmon in a plate.  
Gently apply/rub chopped garlic on sliced salmon and pour 20ml of Ponzu sauce on salmon. Keep the plate in the refrigerator.  
Cut ginger in fine julienne.  
In a pan, add oil in medium heat and put ginger.  
Remove from the oil immediately once you see the ginger in golden brown.  
Take out the salmon plate from the freezer and keep aside.  
Heat the pan in high flame and add sesame oil and olive oil until you see the smoke comes from the oil. Then pour the very hot oil on top of the salmon.  
Garnish with fried ginger, spring onion and sesame seed.



## CHEF

### CHEF RAJESH THAPA

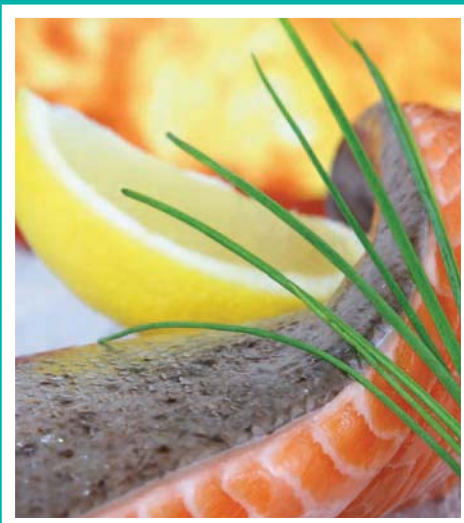
Executive Chef

Head Chef  
TAKARA Japanese Restaurant

Born in Nepal, Chef Rajesh Thapa, at a very young age has been inspired by the local chefs of Kathmandu. It is from these chefs that he first learned his culinary experience.

After years of mastering many of the Nepalese styles of cooking, he moved to Dubai in 2008 and began venturing into multi-cuisine speciality and working with some of the best 5-star hotels in the country. Working in different restaurants, he eventually gravitated towards Japanese culinary. He would spend the next 10 years working with Jumeirah Group where he pre-opened several of their world-renowned restaurants. As the head chef of Takara, he has dedicated his time into making sure that he prepares not only the freshest ingredients but the best that Japanese dishes have to offer. One of his missions is to train other chefs to become better especially at the Japanese style and art of cooking and inspiring the next generations of Head Chefs.

#### PONZU SAUCE:



60ml Kikkoman soy sauce  
30ml Rice Vinegar  
20ml Lemon Juice

100gm Salmon thin slice (10-12 slice)  
1 clove Garlic (Fine chopped)  
20ml Ponzu sauce (prepared)  
20ml Sesame oil  
20ml Olive oil

#### GARNISH:

5gm Spring onion or chives (finely chopped or julienne)  
5gm Sesame Seed  
80gm Ginger (Fine julienne cut)



## ABOUT THE

## GASTRONOMY

## Captain's Corner: Grounded Malaysian pilot's noodle stall takes off



Every morning, Malaysian pilot Azrin Mohamad Zawawi puts on his white uniform and black captain's hat before heading to work.

But rather than going to the airport, as he has done for two decades, he heads to a small noodle stall he now runs in a suburb just outside the capital, Kuala Lumpur.

Azrin, 44, is one of thousands of staff who have lost their jobs

to slash its workforce this month.

Deprived of a regular income, the father of four decided to start a food business, selling Malaysian dishes such as a curry noodle dish made from a family recipe, laksa, and a mixed fruit dish called rojak.

His business got a surge of unexpected publicity when a photograph of Azrin wearing his captain's uniform with a red



after airlines were grounded by the coronavirus pandemic.

"I need some income because I was retrenched by my previous company," said Azrin, whose most recent employer, Malindo Air, was forced

apron taken by his wife and posted on social media went viral.

Still, customers say the business, aptly named "Kapten Corner" ("Captain's Corner"), is more than just a gimmick. — **Reuters**



# Egypt's Siwa fortress renovation boosts hopes for ecotourism

**T**ucked away in Egypt's Western Desert, the Shali fortress once protected inhabitants against the incursions of wandering tribes, but now there are hopes its renovation will attract ecotourists.

The 13th-century edifice, called "Shali" or "home" in the local Siwi language, was built by Berber populations atop a hill in the pristine Siwa oasis, some 600 kilometres (370 miles) southwest of Cairo.

The towering structure is made of kershef — a mixture of clay, salt and rock which acts as a natural insulator in an area where the summer heat can be scorching.

After it was worn away by erosion, and then torrential rains almost 100 years ago, the European Union and Egyptian company Environmental Quality International (EQI) began to restore the fortress in 2018, at a cost of over \$600,000.

"Teach your children, and mine, about what ancient Shali means," sang a choir of young girls in brightly coloured robes at the renovated fortress' inauguration ceremony last week.

Dotted by thick palm groves, freshwater springs and salt lakes, the Siwa oasis's geographic and cultural isolation offers a rare eco-friendly getaway, far from Egypt's bustling urban communities.

The region's tourism model contrasts with Egypt's mass approach in other areas, such as its Red Sea resorts in the east or along the Nile valley, especially in Luxor and Aswan in the south.

## EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Tourists began gravitating to Siwa from the 1980s, after the gov-



ernment built roads linking it with the northwestern city of Marsa Matrouh, the provincial capital on the Mediterranean.

The Marsa Matrouh governor has called the oasis, registered as a natural reserve since 2002, a "therapeutic and environmental tourism destination".

Eco-lodges offer lush vegetable gardens and kershef facades.

Restoration works at the Shali fortress were carried out under the aegis of the Egyptian government, which has been pushing to make Siwa a global "ecotourism destination".

The project also includes setting up a traditional market and a museum on local architecture.

"The project will certainly bene-

fit us and bring tourists. Today, I can offer my palm frond products inside Shali," said Adam Aboulkassem, who sells handicrafts in the fortress.

EQI project manager Ines al-Moudariss said the materials used in the restoration work were sourced from the fortress site itself.

She said the project was about "bringing the inhabitants of Siwa back to their origins and offering them employment opportunities" and services.

Events in the past decade outside the desert oasis have had a ripple effect in Siwa, and tourism slumped after political unrest that rocked Egypt and other countries in the Middle East in 2011.

Foreign tourist arrivals at the oasis have plummeted from around 20,000 in 2010 to just 3,000, said Mahdi al-Howeiti, director of the local tourism office. Domestic tourism has only partially made up for the sharp decline, he added.

## AILING INFRASTRUCTURE

This year, the coronavirus pandemic put a brake on travel worldwide and dealt a further blow to arrivals.

And though the project is seen by some as a way to bring back visitors, critics say it fails to address the concerns of the 30,000-strong Siwi population, a Berber ethnic group.

"No Siwi goes to Shali. We are attached to it, but from afar, like a landscape," said Howeiti.

He said there were more pressing issues for residents, such as fixing crumbled and unsafe roads or treating agricultural wastewater that harms the cultivation of olives and date palms — key pillars of the local economy.

Tourism and Antiquities Minister Khaled al-Anani said at the inauguration that the fortress was a "cultural asset" and its renovation was "essential".

But he also acknowledged that "we need to work on the infrastructure of the region, the airport and especially the roads".

The closest airport to Siwa, located just 50 kilometres (around 30 miles) from the border with war-torn Libya, is restricted to the military.

But some locals remain sceptical. "The fortress was not in danger of collapsing," said Howeiti.

"In my opinion, it would have been better to leave it as it is. These ruins have a history." —**AFP**