

4 new industrial cities by 2025

The Economic Stimulus Plan approved by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik last week will help the country navigate through the challenges unleashed by the global economic slowdown and the coronavirus pandemic, said Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn). In a statement to ONA, he said the plan will help attract investment inflows into, among other areas, the four new industrial cities planned for development over Madayn's 2021-2025 Vision – at Ibri, Thamrait, Shinas, Al Mudhaibi and Al Rawdah. **P14**



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OMAN OBSERVER

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COACH BRANKO ASSESSES PLAYERS IN OVERSEAS CAMP



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REFLECTIONS FROM THE NOT SO DISTANT PAST



MUSCAT

FOREIGN INVESTORS ELIGIBLE TO OWN LAND IN OMAN

Foreign investors will be entitled to ownership of land for the first time in the Sultanate under the new Economic Stimulus Plan unveiled by the Omani government last week. According to Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), the move is part of a series of incentives offered by the government to enhance Oman's investment appeal, as well as ease the business environment severely impacted by the pandemic and economic slowdown.

PACT SIGNED FOR RO 60M PROJECT

The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Qurm Stone Development signed an agreement for setting up Yenkit Hills tourism project in Yenkit area in Muscat Governorate at an approximate cost of RO 60 million.

The agreement was signed by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and Sayyid Dr Al Khattab bin Ghalib al Said, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors of Qurm Stone Development, in the presence of officials from the ministry and the company. The project will be constructed on a 500,000 sq metre area in three phases, the first of which involves a 5-star resort with 90 rooms and suites complete with all facilities.



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OMAN 2ND BEST ARAB COUNTRY IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

BRUSSELS: The Sultanate has been ranked 2nd in the Arab world and 57th globally, according to the 2020 'Top Countries for Sustainable Tourism' report released by the global market research company Euromonitor International. Jordan topped the Arab countries' ranking while UAE ranked third and Tunisia fourth. Sweden topped the global ranking, followed by Finland, Austria, Estonia and Norway. The report classified 99 tourism destinations worldwide by measuring environmental and socio-economic sustainability as well as the demand for sustainable tourism, transport and lodging. The company said that the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the defects of conventional tourism systems based on volume which are no longer suitable for purpose-driven tourism at a time of pandemic. — ONA



Sayyid Badr and UN chief discuss efforts to end Yemen war

MUSCAT: Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud al Busaidy, Foreign Minister, received a phone call on Friday evening from Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General.

The telephonic conversation dealt with developments in the Yemeni crisis and efforts to end the war.

Emphasis was laid on the immediate halt of military operations and the realization of peaceful solutions through direct dialogue among the disputing parties in a manner that allows for the entry of humanitarian aid and the supply of livelihood materials for the Yemeni people.

The phone call also underscored the significant role of Martin Griffiths, UN Special Envoy to Yemen, and the need to enhance his efforts, as well as efforts

of the United States to put an end to the war, resume political negotiations and achieve aspirations of the Yemeni people for security and stability.

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

The United Nations describes Yemen as the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Some 80pc of Yemenis need help, with 400,000 children under the age of five severely malnourished, according to UN data. For much of its food, the country relies on imports that have been badly disrupted over the years by all warring parties.

The people's suffering has been worsened by an economic and currency collapse, and by the Covid-19 pandemic. — ONA/Agencies

CRUISE SHIP ON FIRE!



Cruiser *MSC Lirica* catches fire while docked in the port of the Greek island of Corfu on Friday. There were no passengers on board, as the ship was not due to start its voyages until May. The cause of the fire was still unclear. — AFP

Over 11,000 travellers in quarantine hotels

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 13

Over 11,000 passengers who have arrived in the Sultanate have taken institutional isolation and ten per cent of them are Omanis, said the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Development and head of the Relief and Shelter Sector.

There are 482 hotels and hotel apartments catering to the needs of institutional isolation in the Sultanate, including 200 hotels in the country.

Institutional health isolation was made compulsory for incoming passengers from February 10.

PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS

The official said that 33 private institutions were allowed to have institutional isolation facilities on their premises under the supervision of a committee that includes the Relief and Shelter Sector, the Royal Oman Police, and the Ministry of Health.



Petrol stations, health institutions, private pharmacies, home delivery services, shops selling and repairing vehicle tyres located in fuel stations are now exempted from the ban

HOME DELIVERY OF FOOD ALLOWED

The Supreme Committee has decided to exclude home delivery services (foodstuff and restaurants) and shops that sell and repair vehicle tyres located in fuel filling stations from the activities that need to be closed at night.

The night ban of commercial activities will continue between 8 pm and 5 am until March 20.

Petrol stations, health institutions, private pharmacies, home delivery services, shops selling and repairing vehicle tyres located in fuel stations are now exempted from the ban.

The decision to close all commercial activities from 8 pm will not prevent the movement of individuals and vehicles, the authorities have confirmed.

The Supreme Committee had earlier reviewed the international Covid-19 epidemiological scenario marked by a steep surge in infections.

293 trade unions in Sultanate

KABEER YOUSUF
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The Sultanate has always been supporting the rights of the workers while allowing companies to operate smoothly, according to statistics released by the General Federation of Oman Workers (GFOW).

Oman currently has 293 trade unions till the end of 2020, with the majority based in Muscat. The capital city has 139 trade unions operating in various sectors.

"This is as a result of the concerted efforts to set legal frameworks for union functioning, which in turn created a legislative environment prepared to enable workers to form trade unions to take care of their interests, defend their rights and represent them in all matters related to their affairs," a source at the GFOW said.

"Besides standing steadfast for the rights of the labourers, we created a platform for amicable talk between the employ-

ers and employees."

There are 64 unions in North Al Batinah followed by Al Wusta with 43 unions. In Dhofar there are 15 trade unions, 13 in Al Dhahirah, six in Al Batinah South, five in South Al Sharqiyah, four in Al Dakhiliyah, and two each in North Al Sharqiyah and Buraimi.

Last year witnessed an increase in the formation of women's trade unions with many women becoming members in existing trade unions.

WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 32°C Min 25°C SALALAH: Max 28°C Min 20°C NIZWA: Max 33°C Min 20°C

PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:17 FAJR: 05:02 DHUHR: 12:21 ASR: 15:46 MAGHRIB: 18:20 ISHA: 19:30

Pact signed for RO 60m Yenkit Hills tourism project

MUSCAT: The Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Qurum Stone Development signed an agreement for setting up Yenkit Hills tourism project in Yenkit area in Muscat Governorate at an approximate cost of RO 60 million.

The agreement was signed by Salim bin Mohammed al Mahrouqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism, and Sayyid Dr Al Khattab bin Ghalib al Said, Vice-Chairman of the Board of Directors of Qurum Stone Development, in the presence of officials from the ministry and the company.

The project will be constructed on a 500,000 sq metre area in three phases, the first of which involves a 5-star resort with 90 rooms and suites complete with all facilities. The second phase involves construction of 122 upscale residential/tourist units, a panoramic commercial complex to serve the area and the project.

The third phase involves construction of a 5-star hotel with 150 room and suites in addition to 50 5-star hotel apartments complete with facilities.



The project will highlight the tourism potentials of Yenkit area with its scenic views overlooking the Sea of Oman and Al Khairan area in Muscat Governorate.

According to the project's executive plan, the construction

work is scheduled to commence in 2022 while the entire project is expected to be completed in 2026.

On the occasion of the signing, Sayyid Dr Al Khattab bin Ghalib al Said said: "The signing of the agreement stems from our



belief in the importance of the tourism sector in the country's development and enhancing the other economic sectors. Hence, we have decided to focus on the tourism sector which will help in building the renewed renaissance

in line with the Oman Future Vision 2040 under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik, as one of the main pillars of the future vision focuses on attracting investments to the tourism sector being a major

tributary of the national economy and one of the pillars of economic growth. The tourism sector also contributes to the provision of job opportunities for the national youth as well as businesses for small and medium enterprises."

Paintings depict architectural uniqueness of old Omani buildings

KAUSHALENDRA SINGH
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The raw beauty of Oman caught the imagination of this Scottish artist who is living in Oman for the last four years. She is a woman of varied interests, including painting and photography.

Oman's raw nature and its unspoiled beauty are the inspiration for Sarah Thompson's art. She keeps on exploring the country in search of some newness but ends up indulging in the country's old values, its tradition and culture that reflect either in her photographs or in paintings.

Some of her latest works are on display at the Art and Soul Gallery in Qurum Waterfront. Her paintings showcase the architectural uniqueness of Omani old buildings based on her visits to Masirah Island and Muttrah.

"Their simplicity and accommodativeness impressed me. I tried my best to reflect the finer elements of those structures based on my own observations," she said.

She takes inspiration from travels and creates large bold vibrant artworks focusing mainly on architecture and individual culture and traditions.

Commenting on her art background, the young artist says, "I have a degree in textile design, but this has eventually lead me to paint not only design work but abstract contemporary works."

She is not only an artist but loves to tutor those who have a love for art — a part-time art tutor and host of workshops focusing on developing someone's individual style, markings drawing, illustration, acrylic painting skills, abstract and contemporary works.

She is passionate about Oman and calls Oman her new home. She feels fortunate to travel frequently to Oman, camping and hiking most weekends.



Oman's raw nature and its unspoiled beauty are the inspiration for Sarah Thompson's art. Her paintings showcase the architectural uniqueness of Omani old buildings based on her visits to Masirah Island and Muttrah

"I love photography and document my travels throughout the Sultanate through sketches and photographs. The older buildings fascinate me with their intricate facades and repeat

patterns featured everywhere."

Sarah loves to teach art to individual students of all ages. She is passionate about sharing her talent and skills with people. "I believe art will help us see this tough Covid year through."

For her artwork, she uses mixed media in her artwork that include acrylic paints, pen, pencil, and even textiles with the machine and hand embroidery.

"My collection depicts two places that inspire me — Masirah and Muttrah. I visit these places regularly and they have given me so much joy seeing old traditions continue, focusing on simple ways of living, traditional Omani culture that is still alive."

A glimmer of hope in the region with vaccines: WHO

VINOD NAIR
@vinot_nair

With the roll-out of vaccines gathering steam, there is a glimmer of hope in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 46 to 56 million doses of Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccines are expected to be available during the first half of 2021 in 20 countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region — Afghanistan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Pakistan, Qatar, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.

"As the first vaccines are rolled out by WHO and partners, we are working hard to make sure that the most vulnerable people in our region are vaccinated first, with the rest of the population planned for vaccination rounds later this year. This is welcome news for us, and for thousands of people who are at most risk of infection. As vaccines start rolling out, opportunities to flatten the curve of the pandemic across the region are more likely to happen," said Dr Ahmed al Mandheri, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

In parallel, many countries in the region have also taken steps to protect their populations by approving several Covid-19 vaccines for emergency use through their national regulatory authorities.

Vaccination campaigns have been ongoing in nine countries of the region since the beginning of the year, targeting high-risk groups, including health workers, people over the age of 60, and people with underlying health conditions.

So far, over 2.9 million doses of various vaccines have been administered in the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt,



As the first vaccines are rolled out by WHO and partners, we are working hard to make sure that the most vulnerable people in our region are vaccinated first, with the rest of the population planned for vaccination rounds later this year

DR AHMED AL MANDHERI
WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean

Qatar, and recently in Morocco.

WHO's Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean tracks vaccine use, regulations and other developments in countries of the region and provides technical support as needed.

However, vaccinations only work when they are effectively combined with public health strategies. These strategies include

isolation and quarantine, tracking and tracing, as well as effective communication.

"While vaccines offer a flicker of hope, we are also faced with a reality today that we cannot ignore — many countries are continuing to see an increasing number of cases and deaths; new variants of Covid-19 are being reported in several countries around the world, and people who are not adhering to prevention measures are still being infected and infecting those around them," he said.

While 2020 was a unique and challenging year, it has provided a glimmer of hope as vaccines for Covid-19 are rolled out.

Dr Ahmed bin Mohammed al Saeedi, the Minister of Health, has clarified that the Sultanate is expected to receive 200,000 doses of Johnson & Johnson Covid-19 vaccines by the end of June or early July.

The minister said that is likely to receive thousands of doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

Through the 190-strong international Gavi vaccine alliance of WHO, more than 240,000 doses of different vaccines are scheduled to arrive in the Sultanate from mid-March to the beginning of May.

AL SALAM, A TREE SO SPECIAL!

THE TREE HAS GREAT IMPORTANCE IN THE LIFE OF A LARGE NUMBER OF OMANIS
AS THEY ARE KNOWN FOR RESISTING PESTS, INSECTS, HIGH TEMPERATURES
AND FOR ENDURING LONG PERIODS OF DROUGHT

TEXT & PHOTOS BY: YAHYA AL SALMANI



AL Salam, the scientific name of which is *Acacia ehrenbergiana*, is a tree mainly found in the northern and middle parts of the Sultanate. It grows in the most arid areas from Musandam (north) to Haima (middle of Oman). It extracts water from ambient humidity. It grows around 6 metres tall and its thorns are straight and sharp. Distinguished by its bright yellow flowers, the tree's fruits are long and lean in semi-arched pods.

Despite the freshness of its flowers,

ants are not attracted to them. But it is an essential source of grazing for many animals such as camels, sheep and wild deer.

The tree has great importance in the life of a large number of Omanis as they are known for resisting pests, insects, high temperatures and for enduring long periods of drought. The trunks of this tree are used in the preparation of coals. This is due to the strength of its roots and branches which have exceptional fragrance.

Due to these benefits, the tree is felled by people violating regulations.

Preserving these trees is a shared responsibility, and everyone should contribute to protecting them from any kind of abuse. Destruction of these trees will affect, directly or indirectly, the wildlife in the Sultanate in the long-term

**AHMED BIN
ABDULLAH AL
NAHDI**

Specialist in biodiversity



"There are some people who use the wood of this tree without obtaining official permits especially during festival occasions like Eid. This is inconsistent with the environmental legislation approved by the competent authorities", Ahmed bin Abdullah al Nahdi, a specialist in biodiversity, told the *Observer*.

"Preserving these trees is a shared responsibility, and everyone should contribute to protecting them from any kind of abuse. Destruction of these trees will affect, directly or indirectly, the wildlife in the Sultanate in the

long-term", he added.

"There is a special team to monitor violations that affect the wildlife, but public awareness is very important in reducing the impact on the animal species", Al Nahdi added.

Although this tree can withstand heat and drought, its extent of growth to more areas is less than other wild trees in the Sultanate. The tree grows individually, not collectively. And it can be seen in the valleys and on the slopes of hills. The tree is also a safe nesting place for many birds and butterflies.

Active local winds due to low pressure in some areas

LAKSHMI KOTHANETH
@lakshmioman

Strong winds dominated on Friday and Saturday in certain parts of the Sultanate due to low pressure, according to Oman Met Office.

Some of the governorates experienced strong wind due to low pressure in the surface area. It was expected to subside on Saturday. The dust raising wind was experienced in Muscat, Dhofar and Al Dhahirah.

"As it is a local wind, it was dry in Muscat and Al Dhahirah, however, in Dhofar it was humid", explained the weather forecaster at the Met Office.

Over most of the Sultanate winds are expected to be southerly to southeasterly light to moderate occasionally fresh, while over the coasts of Oman Sea winds will be easterly northeasterly moderate to fresh.

Mainly clear skies over most of the Sultanate with

clouds advection over Musandam Governorate and chances of dust rising due to wind. There are chances of late night and early morning low level clouds or fog patches over parts of Dhofar, South Al Sharqiyah and Al Wusta governorates.

Moderate along the coasts of Musandam Governorate, Oman Sea and Dhofar Governorate coasts with maximum wave height of 2.0 metres, and slight along the rest of the coasts with maximum wave height of 1.25 metres.

Oman Met Office has alerted on caution as moderate sea conditions are expected over Oman Sea, Musandam and Dhofar coasts.

Suwaik recorded the highest temperature with a high of 36 degrees Celsius and low of 21 degrees Celsius while Jabal Shams recorded the lowest with a high of 18 degrees Celsius and a low of 10 degrees Celsius.

The dust raising wind was experienced in Muscat, Dhofar and Al Dhahirah

Muscat airport welcomes Air Arabia Egypt's inaugural flight

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 13

Air Arabia Egypt has started operation of two weekly flights between Cairo International Airport and Muscat International Airport. The inaugural flight was greeted by a water salute to mark the start of direct flights on Thursday.

The decision to operate Air Arabia Egypt flights to Muscat comes in response to the growing demand for travel between the two countries, both for tourism and business. The flight leaving the Cairo International Airport at 2:45 pm local time will arrive in Muscat at 6:35 pm Oman time.

On this occasion, Samer al Nabhani, Chief Commercial Operations at Oman Airports, said, "On behalf of the executive department and my colleagues at Oman Airports, we are celebrating the successful launch of new direct flights between Muscat International Airport and Cairo International Airport — one of the most prominent destinations in the Middle East. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to our employees and our strategic partners for their unyielding efforts to attract more international flights to the Sultanate's gateways.

"That being said, both charter flights and commercial flights



provide vital links for the tourism and commercial activity between Oman and the rest of the world.

"Moreover, the Sultanate combines touristic features with various investment opportunities and has recently approved a visa-free entry for citizens of 103 countries for up to 14 days, including Egypt, which will promote tourism-related activity between the two countries."

Al Nabhani further noted that these weekly flights between Muscat and Cairo will cater to the aspirations of travellers wishing to visit the two countries,

whether from Oman or Egypt, including those who wish to get to East Asia by transiting through Muscat, due to the connecting lines between Muscat International Airport and other airports in Asia via direct flights. Muscat International Airport has also recently made great strides in the areas of health and safety as a result of adhering strict precautionary travel procedures within the current crisis and in line with the national efforts and response plans around Covid-19."

Muscat International Airport

recently became the first airport in the Middle East to achieve the Airports Council International (ACI) Airport Health Accreditation, based on a programme designed to assist airports by assessing new health measures and procedures introduced in response to Covid-19.

This certificate recognises Muscat International Airport's commitment to prioritising health and safety measures in accordance with industry best practices and international health and safety protocols.

L E A R N I N G T O C O P E

VINOD NAIR
[@vinot_nair](#)

This month students around the world, including some in Oman, marked a year without seeing the gates of their schools.

The decision, what is seen as temporary, to limit the spread of a virus has now come to stay, at least for the moment.

According to International Monetary Fund (IMF), nearly 300 million students across the globe were forced out of schools as countries employed unprecedented measures in 2020 to bring the situation under control.

According to education experts and psychologists, the situation can have a big impact on young students as they miss out on building long-standing friendships, and more importantly on personality development through direct rapport with teachers and classmates.

“The lost year cannot be recreated for them and hence it is a big miss for children of that age at that stage,” primary teachers who spoke to the Observer said.

The closure of schools was expected to last only a week, but a year later the online education seems to have made major inroads, despite some inherent drawbacks, in countries with well-developed education systems, Internet infrastructure and quality teaching communities.

“While online education is the need of the hour, it cannot be an alternative to conventional teaching methods. Schools are just not about teaching children

science, mathematics and languages from textbooks. It is also shaping citizens of the future through personality development,” said Maya Krishna, an English language teacher.

She added, “While all teachers try to bridge the gap between conventional and online learning, it is not just the same. Students and teachers must return to schools following precautionary measures.”

Parents who agree that online education was a safer option compared to sending students, reluctantly admit that prolonged absence from schools will have a major impact on the Covid Generation in the years to come.

“It will be interesting to see how these students face the pressures of real school life when they have to return a year or two later. It will take a heavy emotional toll and all stakeholders will have to be prepared to face such situations,” said Layla, a parent of three.

“We really miss meeting our classmates in their person and really feel bored about being under parents’ surveillance. We can make mistakes and get reprimanded by teachers or senior schoolmates but what is important is we get to do things differently and learn from our mistakes, which may not be possible at home,” said Vidit Mohan, a grade seven student.

Education experts argue that it is all about having a balance between learning with technology and studying in a traditional way.

While school cannot be totally online, but the fact is that the cost of learning online is relatively cheaper than traditional classes. So it is all about finding a fine blend.

9:30
SUNDAY

A YEAR AFTER
THE PANDEMIC
STARTED, ONLINE
EDUCATION
SEEMS TO HAVE
MADE MAJOR
INROADS, DESPITE
SOME INHERENT
DRAWBACKS, IN
COUNTRIES WITH
WELL-DEVELOPED
EDUCATION
SYSTEMS,
INTERNET
INFRASTRUCTURE
AND QUALITY
TEACHING
COMMUNITIES

FINDING
A FINE BLEND

POWERFUL QUAKE SHAKES NEW ZEALAND CITIES

WELLINGTON: A powerful earthquake measured at a magnitude of over 7 has struck off the east coast of New Zealand's North Island, shaking residents as far away as Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

A tsunami warning issued for an area of 300 kilometres around the epicentre was lifted several hours later.

There were no immediate reports of injuries or significant

damage.

The quake, at a depth of 20 kilometres according to the US Geological Survey, hit in the early hours of Friday, at 2:27 am (1327 GMT Thursday).

The USGS said the earthquake had a magnitude of 7.3, while the local GeoNet monitoring centre put the quake at 7.1, at a depth of 90 kilometres.

The main quake was followed by several aftershocks measuring

about 5 in magnitude.

"Anyone near the coast who felt a long or strong quake should move immediately to the nearest high ground, or as far inland as you can," the disaster management agency had tweeted before the tsunami warning was lifted.

Radio New Zealand reported that hundreds of people in various areas had moved to higher ground.

In February, New Zealand marked 10 years since a major Christchurch earthquake that left 185 people dead.

Meanwhile, an earthquake of magnitude 6.3 in central Greece forced them out of their houses on Wednesday, many people had to spend the night in tents, hotels or with relatives.

Several of them were in shock and had suffered from the cold overnight, Kostas Agorastos,

governor of the Thessaly region told Greek daily *To Proto Thema* on Thursday.

The military had put up hundreds of provisional tents as shelter. The region saw several strong aftershocks overnight.

Further aftershocks were expected for the next weeks, a seismologist told local daily *Kathimerini*.

Many schools in the affected region remained closed on

Thursday. One school in the town of Damasi was completely destroyed and has to be rebuilt.

The quake struck at 11:16 am (1016 GMT) on Wednesday at a depth of 10 kilometres near the town of Tyrnavos, some 380 kilometres north of the Greek capital.

While there were no fatalities, six people had to be rescued from rubble close to the epicentre of the quake. — dpa

PROTEST AGAINST CONFISCATION OF LAND



Palestinians and Israeli activists trying to block Route 60, the main Jewish settler road in the West Bank, as a protest against the confiscation of Palestinian land, are dispersed by Israeli security forces near the village of Yatta, south of Hebron, in the occupied West Bank. — AFP

Buckingham Palace to investigate bullying allegations against Meghan

LOS ANGELES: Prince Harry and Meghan Markle are reclaiming their narrative after the United Kingdom's *Times* newspaper published a buzzy report about a bullying complaint allegedly filed from inside Kensington Palace.

According to the *Times*, a former communications secretary to the Duke and Duchess of Sussex during their stint at Kensington reportedly alleged in 2018 that toxic behaviour by Meghan forced two personal assistants to leave their positions and negatively affected another palace employee.

"The Duchess is saddened by



Britain's Meghan, the Duchess of Sussex. — Reuters

this latest attack on her character, particularly as someone who has been the target of bullying herself and is deeply committed to supporting those who have experienced pain and trauma," a spokesperson for Meghan and

Prince Harry wrote in a statement provided on Wednesday morning to the *Los Angeles Times*.

"She is determined to continue her work building compassion around the world and will keep striving to set an example for doing what is right and doing what is good."

On Wednesday, Buckingham Palace announced plans to investigate the accusations levelled against Meghan, according to The Associated Press. In a statement, the palace said it was "clearly very concerned" about the situation and vowed to "look into the circumstances outlined in the article." — dpa

Six EU leaders warn of 'huge disparities' in vaccine distribution

VIENNA/BRUSSELS: The leaders of six European Union countries called on Saturday for high-level EU talks on the equitable distribution of coronavirus vaccine doses, saying that the current system would create "huge disparities" among member states by the summer.

The leaders of Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovenia said in a letter to EU officials that the current system "would continue creating and exacerbating huge disparities among member states by this summer, whereby some would be able to reach herd immunity in a few weeks, while others would lag far behind."

Croatia also joined the initiative later on Saturday.

The letter, addressed to EU Council President Charles Michel and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, called on EU officials "to hold a discussion on this important matter among leaders as soon as possible."

According to the bloc's vaccine strategy, all EU countries get access to approved shots at the same time, with distribution of available doses linked to population size.

But Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said on Friday that doses were not being handed out proportionally among EU member states, as additional supply contracts were being agreed as the result of non-transparent negotiations in an EU steering group.



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen attends the signing ceremony of the declaration on the Future of Europe in Brussels. — Reuters

Denmark and the Netherlands have access to significantly more vaccine doses per capita than countries like Bulgaria or Croatia

SEBASTIAN KURZ
Austrian Chancellor

According to Kurz, Denmark and the Netherlands have access to significantly more vaccine doses per capita than countries like Bulgaria or Croatia.

The European Commission negotiated vaccine supply contracts with pharmaceutical

companies on behalf of the 27 member states, which could opt in or out of each pre-order and choose how many doses to buy.

EU officials confirmed receipt of the letter. "We are closely monitoring the situation," one EU official said, pointing to a summit planned for March 25-26 to address Covid-19 coordination.

On Saturday, the Netherlands rejected Austria's allegations that it had procured additional vaccination doses outside the scope of EU agreements.

The country receives vaccines through the designated EU mechanism, but makes use of leeway granted by the bloc, a Health Ministry said.

If a country waives its right to its full allocation, other countries can gain access to it, as the Netherlands had done, the spokesperson pointed out. — dpa

Required in Oman for Immediate Placement

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Bolivia former president Anez arrested in 'coup' probe

LA PAZ: Bolivia's former acting president Jeanine Anez was arrested on Saturday on terrorism and sedition charges over what her predecessor and political rival Evo Morales denounced as a "coup" that unseated him.

Police were also rounding up former ministers who backed the conservative politician's caretaker government, which was in place for a year after Morales fled the country in November 2019 amid disputed elections, media reports said.

The arrests came months after Morales returned to Bolivia from

exile on the back of a fresh election victory in October 2020 for the leftist Movement for Socialism (MAS) party he founded.

The presidency and congress are now under the control of MAS. "I inform the Bolivian people that Mrs Jeanine Anez has already been apprehended and is currently in the hands of the police," government minister Carlos Eduardo del Castillo wrote on Twitter and Facebook.

Castillo congratulated the police for their "great work" in the "historic task of giving justice" to the Bolivian people. — AFP

شركة النماء للدواجن ش م ع م A' Namaa Poultry Co. S.A.O.C

Job Opportunities

A'Namaa Poultry, is an integrated poultry project, using state of the art technologies in the market for all the project components, to produce a high- quality poultry meat.

Anamaa Poultry currently seek to recruit for the following position to joint Anamaa Poultry team. For more details and apply, Kindly login to <https://foodjobs.om>. Last date receiving application will be on **18th March 2021**.

No.	Job Tittle	Number of Position
1	IT MANAGER	1

UN calls for withdrawal of foreign troops from Libya

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations Security Council called on Friday for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya “without further delay” in a unanimously approved declaration.

It also welcomed the Libyan parliament’s approval of a new unified government on Wednesday, which is set to lead the oil-rich country to December elections after a decade of conflict following the removal of Muammar Gaddafi.

“The Security Council calls on all parties to implement the ceasefire agreement in full and urges Member States to respect and support the full implementation of the agreement”, the statement approved by all 15 council members said.

According to the global body, around 20,000 foreign troops and mercenaries remained in Libya at the end of 2020, and no withdrawals have been observed since.

“The Security Council calls for full compliance with the UN arms embargo by all Member States, in line with the relevant Security Council resolutions”, the text said.

The approval of a unity government led by Dbeibah was praised by world powers and raised hopes for reconciliation

The arms embargo imposed since the Nato-led mission to overthrow Gaddafi has been violated regularly for years, according to UN experts responsible for its implementation. Their annual report is expected in the coming days.

The experts have previously denounced the presence in Libya of Russian mercenaries, Turkish troops and armed groups made up of Syrians, Chadians and Sudanese.

“The Security Council recognizes the need to plan for the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of armed groups, security sector reform and to establish an inclusive, civilian-led security architecture for Libya as a whole”, the statement added.

Meanwhile, Libya’s new government, approved in a



Libya’s Interim Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah delivers a speech during a national conference on the Covid-19 pandemic in Tripoli. — AFP

“historic” parliamentary vote this week, faces a long list of challenges to unite the country after 10 years of strife.

The country descended into chaos after Gaddafi was toppled

and killed in a Nato-backed uprising in 2011, resulting in multiple forces vying for power. The approval Wednesday of a unity government led by Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, named interim

premier alongside a three-member presidency council in February under a UN-sponsored inter-Libyan dialogue, was praised by world powers and raised hopes for reconciliation.

But the new executive faces daunting challenges as it follows the UN roadmap toward unifying institutions, ending a decade of fighting marked by international interference and setting the stage for December elections.

Dbeibah, a 61-year-old billionaire from the western city of Misrata, is set to be sworn in on Monday in Tobruk, the eastern city that hosted one of Libya’s two rival administrations.

Fayez al Sarraj, head of the outgoing Government of National Accord based in Tripoli, has said he is “fully ready to hand over” power.

The GNA was also established off the back of a UN-sponsored process in 2016, but never won the parliament’s vote of confidence, its authority contested by the parallel administration in the east.

Dbeibah’s government is expected to replace both the GNA and the parallel cabinet — not recognised by the international community — of Abdallah al Thani, headquartered in Cyrenaica in the east, a key region under the de facto control of forces of military strongman Khalifa Haftar. — dpa/AFP

Time stands still at historic Cairo watch shop

CAIRO: Time seems to have stood still at Papazian’s, an Armenian Egyptian watchmaker whose almost 120-year-old Cairo shop has withstood the decades, surviving political upheavals and urban transformations.

Sheltered from the hustle and bustle of the capital’s unforgiving traffic and surrounded by street vendors in Attaba Square, the unassuming shop housed under the arcades of an old Haussmanian building is a time capsule of Cairo’s rich cosmopolitan history.

It is a rare museum-like site where old clocks, watches and timepieces are meticulously repaired.

“I have spare parts from my grandfather’s days”, Ashod Papazian, the current 64-year-old owner who inherited the family business, said.

The shopfront with patinated wooden frames boasts an impressive array of pocket watches and wrist models with ageing bracelets, as well as yellowed advertisements of the vaunted watchmaker.

At the turn of the 19th century, Egypt had become a popular destination for Armenians who specialised in delicate manual crafts such as jewellery-making, along



Samy Taha, a Egyptian watchmaker, repairs a watch at the Francis Papazian watchmaker’s shop in the central Attaba district of Cairo. — AFP

with a thriving European community that included Italians, Greeks, Jews and French citizens.

The Armenian community, estimated to have numbered between 40,000 and 60,000 before Egypt’s 1952 anti-monarchy revolution, mostly living in Cairo and Alexandria, has dwindled to only around a few thousand now.

In his small office surround-

ed by a quaint mess of archives, books and clocks of all kinds, Ashod is the keeper of precious memories.

Two black-and-white portraits hang behind his armchair: Of his grandfather Nerses, known as Francis, the founder of the store, and of Ashod’s own father Sarkis.

Under the more than century-old counters, dozens of wooden

drawers contain spare parts of almost every imaginable brand of watch.

Antique comtoise pendulum chimes or cuckoo clocks — some from the 19th century — occupy every inch of available wall space.

They belong to customers who have entrusted him to repair them or owned by the watch enthusiast himself — who refuses to part with his rarest timepieces.

In 1893, Nerses Papazian, drafted into the Ottoman army, escaped by jumping on a boat without knowing his final destination, his grandson said. He ended up in Alexandria on Egypt’s Mediterranean coast.

Ten years later, he opened the watch shop in Cairo that carries his name on the storefront to this day.

Building a reputation, he attracted several stars from the golden age of Egyptian cinema such as Youssef Wahbi, Fouad el-Mohandes and Abdelmoneim Ibrahim as customers.

Papazian also said the family of King Farouk, Egypt’s last monarch, called his father Sarkis to the royal palace to have their pick from a wide array of watches.

— AFP



People protest outside a hospital in the town of Salt, northwest of Jordan’s capital. — AFP

Jordan oxygen shortage linked to 6 corona deaths

AMMAN: At least six Covid-19 patients have died in a Jordan hospital after it ran out of oxygen early on Saturday, the health minister announced before later tendering his resignation.

Jordan’s King Abdallah II ordered the head of the state hospital in the town of Salt northwest of Amman to resign, state media reported, as hundreds of people gathered outside the hospital to protest the deaths.

“Between 6 and 7 this morning, oxygen ran out for nearly an hour at the hospital and this probably led to the deaths of six patients”, Health Minister Nazir Obeidat said.

“As minister of health I assume full moral responsibility for what happened and I have submitted my resignation to the prime minister”, Obeidat said. “So far I have not received a response.”

Government spokesman Sakher Dodin said Prime Minister Bisher al Khasawneh had demanded Obeidat’s resignation.

“The prime minister asked the health minister to step down”, he told state-run Petra news agency.

Alarmed by the news of the deaths, the king went to Salt, where he visited the hospital and denounced the tragic incident, state-run A Mamlaka television said. — AFP

SHORT TAKES

AL BOU DOR

Iraqi village in mourning after IS kills 8

Hundreds of mourners attended funerals in a village north of Iraq’s capital for eight people killed in attacks claimed by the IS group, a reporter said.

The attacks took place on Friday and killed six members of the same family, including two women, along with a lawyer and a policeman.

Witnesses said men in military uniform had carried out the three attacks on the victims’ homes in the village of Al Bou Dor.



The Iraqi military said it was a revenge attack ordered by a village resident who had been driven out by neighbours who accused him of being an IS member. — AFP

ALGIERS

Thousands protest after election date announced

Thousands demonstrated in Algiers on Friday, rejecting early legislative elections announced the day before, as weekly rallies by the resurgent Hirak pro-democracy movement gain momentum. Protesters defied a coronavirus-related ban on gatherings to rally from different parts of the capital, converging on the central post office, the Hirak movement’s emblematic rallying point.

Demonstrators shouted slogans including “No elections with mafia gangs” and “a civil



not a military state”, a key Hirak slogan. President Abdelmadjid Tebboune issued a decree setting June 12 for early legislative elections, after dissolving parliament last month. — AFP

TUNIS

Tunisia on hunt for convicted TV boss

Tunisian authorities have issued a national wanted notice for a television chief who disappeared after being sentenced to eight years in jail for misappropriation of funds, the prosecution said.

Sami Fehri, owner of one of Tunisia’s main private television stations, was on trial over the illegal use of state television funds in connection with his production company Cactus Prod, under the regime of former autocrat Zine El Abidine Ben Ali.



His associate at the time, Ben Ali’s brother-in-law Belhassen Trabelsi, was also sentenced in absentia to 10 years in prison, judicial official Mohsen Dali said. — AFP

In brief

■ HERAT



CAR BOMB KILLS 7, INJURES 53 IN HERAT PROVINCE

A powerful car bomb near a police station on Friday night killed at least seven people and wounded more than 50 others in Afghanistan's western Herat province. Herat Governor Sayed Abdul Wahid Qatali said several women and children were among the dead. He added that at least 53 people including civilians and security forces have been hurt in the explosion.

Dozens of homes and shops were also damaged in the blast as rescuers rushed to the scene to help several people trapped under the rubble, Qatali said.

No one claimed responsibility for the bombing but local officials blamed the Taliban insurgents.

— Reuters

■ SEOUL



S KOREA REPORTS 3-WEEK HIGH CORONAVIRUS CASES

South Korea reported a three-week high 490 new coronavirus cases, with infections creeping higher as the authorities prepare for a broad vaccine rollout. The daily tally as of Friday midnight was up slightly from 488 the day before to the highest since February 19, said the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA).

Of Friday's total, 474 were locally transmitted infections and 16 imported. This brings the country's total coronavirus infections to 95,176 with 1,667 Covid-19 deaths. Nearly 70 per cent of the domestically transmitted cases have been from the capital, Seoul, and its neighbouring areas. — Reuters

■ ISLAMABAD



IMRAN KHAN'S CANDIDATE ELECTED TO CHAIR UPPER CHAMBER

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's preferred candidate was declared chairman of the upper house of parliament despite the government holding a minority of seats there, potentially facilitating the passage of key reforms. Opposition parties, who say that Khan enjoys support from the military generals who brought him to power in a fraudulent election in 2018, rejected the results of the upper house vote.

Senator Sadiq Sanjrani who was backed by Khan received 48 votes, while the opposition parties' joint candidate, former prime minister Yusuf Raza Gilani, secured 42. — Reuters

Seven dead in Myanmar



Frontline protesters keep watch in front of makeshift barricades in Yangon as security forces continue to crackdown on demonstrations against the military coup. — AFP

YANGON: At least seven protesters were killed on Wednesday as security forces used live ammunition on the 30th day of demonstrations against last month's military coup, local media reported and witnesses claimed on social media.

Local media had multiple reports of security forces using force against protesters.

The Eleven Myanmar news portal tweeted reports of authorities using tear gas, flash grenades and rubber bullets against protesters in Yangon, the country's largest city.

There were reports of police using live ammunition against the protesters, including unconfirmed reports of one young protester dead in the northern city of Myingyan.

Two other demonstrators, a 37-year-old man and a 19-year-old woman, died in the city of Mandalay, Myanmar Now reported.

Other media outlets said there had been four protester deaths in the city of Monywa, but no details

Security forces force patients out of hospital as South Korea suspends defence exchanges

were provided.

It is not known how many deaths have resulted from the clashes. On Sunday, there were reports of 18.

The UN Security Council has decided to discuss the matter, most likely in the form of a closed session on Friday. The decision comes amid appeals from inside Myanmar for the UN to send aid. Sources on the ground are referring to it as a "war zone."

The deaths came as the leaders of the United States, India, Australia and Japan vowed to work together to restore democracy in the Southeast Asian nation.

More than 70 people have been killed in Myanmar in widespread protests against a February 1 coup by the military, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners

(AAPP) advocacy group has said.

Saturday's protests erupted after posters spread on social media urging people to mark the death anniversary of Phone Maw, who was shot and killed by security forces in 1988 inside what was then known as the Rangoon Institute of Technology campus.

His shooting and that of another student who died a few weeks later sparked widespread protests against the military government known as the 8-8-88 campaign, because they peaked in August that year.

An estimated 3,000 people were killed when the army crushed the uprising, at the time the biggest challenge to military rule dating back to 1962.

Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as a democracy icon during the movement and was kept under house arrest for nearly two decades.

She was released in 2008 as the military began democratic reforms and her National League for Democracy won elections in 2015 and again in November last year. — Reuters

Japan to extend coronavirus state of emergency in Tokyo region

TOKYO: Japan is likely to prolong a coronavirus state of emergency in Tokyo and its neighbouring prefectures by two more weeks, the government said on Thursday, as the regions have been struggling to rein in Covid-19 infections.

Japan "needs to extend the measure by about two weeks to protect people's lives and livelihoods," Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga told an upper house budget committee.

Suga declared the state of emergency for 11 prefectures in early January amid a resurgence of Covid-19 cases. It ended in the prefecture of Tochigi a month ago and in six prefectures, including Kyoto and Osaka, on Sunday.

The measure is set to expire on March 7, but the number of daily infections has not fallen sharply in Tokyo and in the prefectures

of Kanagawa, Chiba and Saitama.

"There is a high possibility of facing a rebound in infections (in the four prefectures) compared with the rest of the country" given a higher population density and a higher flow of people, said Shigeru Omi, who chairs the government's coronavirus advisory committee.

Many fear the postponed Tokyo Olympics this summer could become a coronavirus super-spreader event, especially as much of the public is not expected to be vaccinated by July.

Japan began the rollout of Covid-19 vaccines in mid-February.

In mid-April, the country imposed a month-long nationwide state of emergency due to the pandemic. Some prefectures such as Tokyo and Osaka had been under the measure for one and a half months. — dpa

India records worst daily spike this year with 25,000 cases

NEW DELHI: India has recorded 24,882 new Covid-19 cases in the past 24 hours, its highest daily rise so far this year, government data showed on Saturday, amid worries over the resurgence of the virus in the country.

India, which at 11.3 million has the largest virus caseload after the United States, saw a downward trend in infections at the end of 2020, but the numbers have been rising again in recent weeks.

The western state of Maharashtra mainly contributed to the surge in cases in

the country, accounting for 15,817 of the new infections, the Health Ministry said.

On a pan-Indian level, fresh infections were almost 7 per cent higher than Friday, when the country registered 23,285 cases.

Another 140 deaths took the total number of fatalities to 158,446.

The number of infections reported on Saturday is the highest daily rise since December 19, when as many as 26,624 new infections were recorded, according to data on the Johns Hopkins University website. — dpa

Malala says educate girls to fight climate change

LONDON: Keeping girls in school and taking young climate leaders seriously are keys to tackling climate change, Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai said on Friday.

Speaking to a virtual panel, Malala, 23, said educating girls and young women, particularly in developing countries, would give them a chance to pursue green jobs and be part of solving the climate crisis in their communities.

"Girls' education, gender equality and climate change are not separate issues. Girl's education and gender equality can be used as solutions against climate change," Malala told an online event by British think-tank Chatham House.

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, some 130 million girls worldwide were already out of school, according to the United Nations cultural agency Unesco, which said more than 11 million may not return to classes after the pandemic.

"When we educate girls... they can become farmers, conservationists, solar techni-



Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai. — Reuters

cians, they can fill other green jobs as well. Problem-solving skills can allow them to help their communities to adapt to climate change."

From violence in displacement camps to extra farm work, women and girls shoulder a bigger burden from worsening extreme weather and other climate pressures pushing people to move for survival, aid group CARE International says.

Scientists expect forced displacement to be one of the most common and damaging effects on vulnerable people if global warming is not limited to an internationally agreed aim of 1.5 degrees Celsius.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

Philippine artist fights waste by using recycled trash in paintings

MANILA: When Filipino artist Gilbert Angeles found out that his country was one of the world's biggest contributors of plastic trash in the ocean, he felt compelled to take action.

Angeles decided the best way to show how discarded waste could be given a new life in a different medium was to incorporate materials ranging from shredded plastic to old paint and leftover construction wood in his paintings.

Since 2019, he has made over two dozen paintings of this kind.

"I make these artworks to raise awareness so we can fight against the trash in our area, to make us more responsible in how we dispose of our trash, and to make us aware of where our trash goes," said the 49-year-old.

The artist sources the materials from around his Manila neighbourhood or through donations from contacts he has made since launching his environmental campaign.

Angeles remembers being spurred on to take up the project after seeing a news report about the Philippines being one of the top contributors of plastic waste.



Filipino artist Gilbert Angeles works on a painting using expired paint and shredded plastic wrappers, at his studio in Plaridel, Bulacan province. — Reuters

The Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam and China account for around 60 per cent of the world's marine plastic, or 8 million tonnes annually, according to a 2017 report from the Ocean Conservancy and the McKinsey Center for Business and Environment.

Angeles' artwork has since been shown in galleries, with paintings selling for around \$600 to \$3,000, depending on the size.

Part of the proceeds goes to

his environmental group, Green Artz, which encourages artists to use recycled waste in their work.

"I love the fact that it gives us hope," said Linda Pecoraro, general manager of Conrad Hotel, where Angeles' work is being exhibited.

"It's got beautiful colours and recycled plastic, repurposing things that damage our environment and making them beautiful."

— Reuters

Biden and ‘Quad’ leaders launch vaccine push

WASHINGTON: The United States and three of its closest Indo-Pacific partners committed to supplying up to a billion coronavirus vaccine doses across Asia by the end of 2022 at a summit on Friday carefully choreographed to counter China’s growing influence. President Joe Biden and the leaders of Australia, India and Japan — countries together known as the Quad — pledged at their first summit to work to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific and to cooperate on maritime, cyber and economic security, issues vital to the four democracies in the face of challenges from Beijing.

“We’re renewing our commitment to ensure that our region is governed by international law, committed to upholding universal values, and free from coercion,” Biden told his counterparts, without naming China. His national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, called the virtual summit a big day for US diplomacy, as Washington sought to revitalise its alliances and approach Beijing from a position of strength ahead of a high-level US-China meeting next week.

“The four leaders did discuss the challenge posed by China, and they made clear that none of them have any illusions about China,” Sullivan told reporters, adding that they all believed democracy could out compete “autocracy.”

Freedom of navigation in the



A monitor displaying the virtual meeting of US President Joe Biden, Australia’s Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Japan’s Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seen during the virtual Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) meeting, at Suga’s official residence in Tokyo. — AFP

South and East China Seas, recent cyber attacks and semi-conductor supply-chain security, were also discussed, along with the North Korean nuclear issue and the coup and “violent repression” in Myanmar, he said. In a joint statement, Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison pledged to work closely on Covid-19 vaccine distribution, climate and security.

US, India, Japan and Australia hold talks on economy, climate change, pandemic

“We strive for a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion.” The leaders agreed to set up an experts’ group to help distribute vaccines, as well as working groups on

climate change, technology standards, and joint development of emerging technologies. An in-person summit would be held later this year, they said.

Suga told reporters he had expressed strong opposition to China’s attempts to change the status quo in the region, and Modi told the session the Quad had “come of age” and would “now remain an important pillar of stability in the region.” — Reuters

German Covid cases could revisit Dec peak in April

BERLIN: German health experts warned on Saturday against any further easing of coronavirus lockdown measures as the number of cases jumped again, raising the possibility that infections could again reach peaks seen around Christmas by mid-April.

The Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for infectious diseases predicted that the number of daily reported cases could exceed 30,000 in the 14th week of the year starting on April 12.

“An extrapolation of the trends shows that case numbers can be expected above the Christmas level from week 14 onwards,” the RKI said in its current situation report.

On Saturday, the number of Covid-19 cases rose by 12,674 and the death toll was up 239, with the number of cases per 100,000 over seven days jumping to 76.1 from 72.4.

Germany’s death toll from the virus stands at 73,301, with a reported 2,558,455 infections.

Frustration about the ongoing lockdown and the slow pace of

vaccinations has been denting support for Chancellor Angela Merkel’s conservatives, also under fire over a face mask procurement scandal involving lawmakers from the party.

A small group of protesters braved rain in Berlin on Saturday to demonstrate against the lockdown.

Merkel’s Christian Democrats have seen support slip in two states where regional elections on Sunday will be a crucial gauge of popular feeling before a federal election in September.

Merkel and state leaders agreed a phased easing of curbs earlier this month along with an “emergency brake” to let authorities reimpose restrictions if case numbers rise above 100 per 100,000 on three consecutive days.

The RKI report said the rapid spread in Germany of a more infectious virus variant first detected in Britain could mean that the number of cases per 100,000 reaches levels of between 200 and 500 by mid-April. — Reuters



A demonstrator gestures behind two police officers, during a rally against the government’s restrictions following the coronavirus disease outbreak in Berlin. — Reuters

Minneapolis reaches \$27m settlement with Floyd’s family

WASHINGTON: The city of Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Friday reached a \$27-million settlement with the family of George Floyd, almost a year after the black man’s death.

The Minneapolis City Council unanimously approved the agreement to settle the civil lawsuit filed by Floyd’s family, Mayor Jacob Frey said at a press conference attended by representatives of the city’s administration, members of the victim’s family and their lawyers.

Floyd, an unarmed black man, died in May after Minneapolis police pinned him to the ground for over eight minutes as he begged for his life.



George Floyd’s family, including brother Philonise Floyd (2nd L), and Floyd family lawyer Ben Crump visit a memorial at the site where George Floyd died while being arrested, after attending a press conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. — AFP

His death, which was filmed by bystanders, sparked an unprecedented nation-wide protest movement to address systematic racism and police brutality in the United States.

“This historic agreement, the largest pre-trial settlement in a police civil rights wrongful death case in US history, makes a statement that George Floyd deserved better than what we witnessed on May 25, 2020. That George Floyd’s life matters, and by extension black lives matter,” Floyd family attorney Ben Crump said in the press conference.

“This is a message that the unjust taking of black lives will no longer be written off as trivial, un-

important or unworthy of consequences,” Crump said.

Meanwhile jury selection continued in the trial of Derek Chauvin, the white officer who knelt on Floyd’s neck and has since been expelled from the police.

Chauvin has pleaded not guilty to second-degree unintentional murder and second-degree manslaughter charges. He has also pleaded not guilty to third-degree murder, which was reinstated in the case on Thursday.

The three other officers who held Floyd down have been charged with aiding and abetting murder.

The US House of Representatives passed a comprehensive

police reform bill on Wednesday, more than nine months after the death of African-American George Floyd at the hands of police.

A majority in the Democratic-led House approved the bill, with 220 lawmakers voting in favour and 212 against.

Among other things, the draft law named after Floyd stipulates that the federal government should create incentives for banning choke holds and carotid holds during police operations.

Floyd died in May last year after a police officer in Minneapolis pinned him to the ground with his knee for nearly nine minutes. — dpa

SHORT TAKES

ALMATY

4 killed in Kazakhstan military plane crash

Four people died and two more were injured after a military plane crashed while trying to land in Kazakhstan’s largest city Almaty, authorities said. “According to preliminary data, four people died, and two injured were sent to the nearest hospital,” the emergencies ministry said in a statement.

The plane was travelling to Almaty from the capital Nur-Sultan, the ministry in the Central Asian country said.

The Russian news agency In-



terfax reported that the plane belonged to Kazakhstan’s national security committee, a successor to the Soviet-era KGB that controls the national border service. — AFP

DUSSELDORF

Greenpeace mounts protests over mining policies

Greenpeace activists said that they had mounted protests against the German government’s coal mining policies in front of churches in 46 towns and cities across the country.

The vigils were held in front of churches including Cologne Cathedral, Muenster’s Lambertikirche, Dresden’s Frauenkirche and Aachen Cathedral. The locations were intended as a reminder of the Immerather Cathedral, which was destroyed to make way for



a lignite mining project in 2018. As part of its protest, Greenpeace called for a quicker exit from lignite mining, referring to the government’s current climate policies as “ruthless.” — dpa

LONDON

Philip has ‘successful procedure’ for heart condition

Prince Philip has had a “successful procedure” for a pre-existing heart condition, Buckingham Palace said. A spokesperson for the 99-year-old prince — who also uses the title of duke of Edinburgh — announced the procedure took place on Wednesday and was a success.

The type of the procedure has not been made public.

“His royal highness will remain in hospital for treatment, rest and recuperation for a number of days,” a statement



from Buckingham Palace read. Prince Philip, who is married to Queen Elizabeth II, was first admitted to King Edward VII’s Hospital in London on February 16 for treatment. — dpa

Oprah’s primetime paradox: Myth of a disenchanted Hansel and Gretel

What we are as people, what we can become, and what the world sees of us may be the same, or different, and I guess that is all a question of perspective. But what we cannot do is live in the public eye, or the ‘limelight,’ without driving nails in the coffin of our own respectability. Certainly, Megxit has dominated headlines, airtime, screen time, and attention with a fervour that almost beggar’s belief this week. The privileged, little-boy-lost, ‘Richie Rich,’ who, like Peter Pan, has never really grown up, and his waif like, chic, beautiful, divorcee, Meghan, together as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, presented a Pandora’s Box promising to titivate, but has mercilessly scandalised and more, ironically, much of which is the ‘pot, kettle and black’ heterogeneity.

According to legend, when Prometheus stole fire, Zeus foisted Pandora, and her gift box upon Prometheus’ brother. Of course, eventually the box was opened and evil, sickness and death were unleashed upon the world. Now, the Sussex’s revelations form an uncanny resemblance to the consequences laid bare in mythology, which Chamber’s idiomatic dictionary references “a source of great and unexpected troubles,” while Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable refers to “something that seems of value but



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IT IS NOT THAT THE PAIR HAVE CHOSEN A BATTLE, OR A BATTLEGROUND WISELY, BUT THAT THEY HAVE TAKEN WHAT MAY WELL TURN OUT TO BE FOOL’S GOLD

is really a curse.” Both appear so eerily accurate as to wonder whether it was Heriod’s ‘Work and Days,’ or Oprah Winfrey’s ‘Primetime Special,’ that has unleashed such malevolence.

In choosing to go public, and engage the sycophantic Winfrey’s television and social media platform, it is not that the pair have chosen a battle, or a battleground wisely, but that they have taken what may well turn out to be fool’s gold, thus removing every shred of self-respect, and letting the birds have every breadcrumb that may have been left, a la Hansel and Gretel, for the petulant pair to find their way back home to the safe haven that is the British monarchy. We can only gasp at the appalling sense of entitlement and naivety that has driven the young couple, formerly lauded as the ‘breath of fresh air,’ that would reach out to the younger generations, in a way the Royal Family had not been seen to do since Diana, into the open arms of... well... Hansel and Gretel thought their nemesis was a kindly soul too, didn’t they?

The truth is, that I don’t care at all about the rights and wrongs of the situation, but about the insecurities led this pampered pair to think that they deserved more than what they were getting? Did they think they could have the job and not do the work? Did they think they could

take all the ‘perks’ and not do the hard yards? They already had a life of privilege, position, and no small wealth, and if it meant serving a nation, what was the problem? They were sworn to serve a small, select group of globally respected nations, bound by language and royalty, with their diverse nationalities, cultures, traditions that most of us would consider a dream job!

I watched ‘Suits’ week after week, hoping that Mike Ross and Rachel Zane would get together and be happy, and after a prolonged ‘will they-won’t they,’ once they did, I stopped watching the series. Conversely, Harry and Meghan were a train crash, a soap opera, with daily backbiting, family truths, and lies, each presenting a clearer (and more present) danger to the wider Royal family. I hope an extraordinarily fragile Harry carries his regrets wisely. I hope an indignant Meghan can find her way without further malice. I pray that young Archie and his siblings are not raised with their parent’s chip on their shoulders.

Most of all though, I pray that the antagonism on display is recognised, by this generation for what it is, the vexatious consequence of childish pique, of immature umbrage, of misguided privilege, and misspent judgement.

WRITE FOR US

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

DREADFUL DRAMA

French Oscars turn political over virus shutdown

FRANCOIS BECKER

There was a fiercely political air at France’s annual celebration of cinema, Les Césars, on Friday as frustrations were unleashed over the months-long shutdown of theatres.

The country has seen mounting protests in recent days over the closure of cultural sites, with several theatres occupied by activists and students.

That frustration was centre stage at Friday’s awards, with actress Corinne Masiero stripping naked with the words “No culture, no future” written across her front as she presented the costume award.

Others used the stage to confront the government over its decision to keep cinemas shut since October, even as most other businesses have reopened.

“My children can go to Zara but not the cinema... it’s incomprehensible,” said Stephane Demoustier as he picked up the Cesar for best screenplay for “The Girl With a Bracelet”.

The mood was set from the opening monologue, as mistress of ceremonies Marina Fois launched a scathing attack on Culture Minister Roselyne Bachelot.

“The minister hasn’t done nothing... Madame Bachelot, you released a book with your recipe for pasta and gorgonzola,” the actress joked, before striking a sad note to conclude: “What we miss is what unites us, the emotions that we experience together.”

Also hanging heavy over the ceremony was the memory of last year’s disastrous event, in which the decision to award veteran Polish director Roman Polanski — accused of multiple assaults — led to stars walking out and police teargassing protesters outside.

The entire Cesar academy board resigned in the build-up to the 2020 ceremony due to the uproar over Polanski’s nominations for his film *An Officer and a Spy*.

This year’s first awards signalled that the academy was keen to embrace calls for greater ethnic diversity, with the most promising actor and actress awards going to Jean-Pascal Zadi and Fathia Youssouf.

Zadi’s film, *Tout simplement noir*, plays on racist clichés about black people in France, while 14-year-old Youssouf won for her part in the controversial Netflix film *Mignonnes* about teenage girls caught between the pressures of Senegalese society and social media.

“The rules of the game are changing, not so that the game stops, but so that it can be played fairly this time,” said host Roschdy Zem at the start of the evening. — AFP

NOVEL WAY TO END FAMINE

UN looks to US private equity investor to help fund famine fight in Yemen

MICHELLE NICHOLS AND LISA BARRINGTON

The United Nations World Food Programme is hoping to get a share of hundreds of millions of dollars from a private foundation set up to help Yemen by US private equity investor Tim Collins, UN food chief David Beasley said on Friday.

More than six years of war in Yemen have sent the country spiraling into what the United Nations describes as the world’s largest humanitarian crisis.

In a document shared with aid groups, the 2021 Famine Prevention Foundation aims to “avert a widespread famine by getting immediate assistance to the maximum number of people” experiencing famine or on the brink of famine.

Beasley said that he has spoken with Collins several times about the foundation, which has yet to be publicly announced.

“Tim’s working hard on a private foundation of funds,” Beasley told reporters. “He expressed his concerns about the governments around the world being stretched because of the crisis that we’re now facing because of Covid.”

Collins, founder of US private equity firm Ripplewood Holdings LLC, declined to comment.

Most funding for UN aid appeals comes from governments, so the creation of the Famine Prevention Foundation is novel.



World Food Programme Executive Director David Beasley is hoping to get a share of hundreds of millions of dollars from a private foundation set up to help Yemen. – Reuters

THE AIM OF THE FUND IS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THE UN CAN PROMPTLY SCALE UP RESPONSES WHEN GIVEN THE MEANS TO DO SO...

Contributors to the fund are thought to include entities in Gulf countries, an aid source said. Aid agency Action Contre la Faim told The New Humanitarian media outlet, which first reported on the new fund this month, that the money was thought to have come from private Gulf entities.

“The aim of the fund is to demonstrate that the UN can promptly

scale up responses when given the means to do so... it is a way to reassure donors, in particular Gulf donors,” the aid source said.

The foundation is being run by John Ging, former director of UN aid operations, and Neal Keny-Guyer, the former chief executive of Mercy Corps aid organisation, said two sources familiar with the situation.

— Reuters

Coach Branko assesses Oman players in Dubai overseas camp

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 13

The Sultanate football team players are currently engaged in an overseas camp in Dubai under the watchful eyes of head coach Branko Ivankovic at the training complex which belongs to UAE Football Association.

The national football team delegation arrived to Dubai on Thursday evening and all players have implemented the mandatory PCR test after arrival in Dubai Airport and two players have tested positive.

According to the medical protocol measures, the positive cases were separated in quarantine while all the other players and coaching staff are in a fit health condition.

Earlier, Oman Football Association announced two players from the team including Dhofar's Ali Salim al Nahar and Khalid al Hajri will not join the Dubai camp as they have tested positive too.

The training set plan of the team will continue with a series of morning and evening sessions. The team had a morning training session on Saturday under the supervision of the fitness coach and featured stretching and fitness exercises.

The day was completed with another evening training session under the directions of the Croatian coach Branko Ivankovic. The session was completed with some tactical training as the players were distributed into two groups.

Each group trained on receiving and passing balls techniques. Also, the players exercised on some attacking styles and creating the scoring attempts.

Talented striker Salah al Yahyaei trained individually under supervision of fitness coach.

The experienced head coach will target from Dubai camp to raise the readiness of the players prior the forthcoming crucial assignment at to the joint 2022 Fifa World Cup and 2023 AFC Asian

Earlier, Oman Football Association announced two players from the team including Dhofar's Ali Salim al Nahar and Khalid al Hajri will not join the Dubai camp as they have tested positive too

Cup qualifiers and for the GCC Cup championship. The preparatory external camp will feature two friendly matches as the first scheduled match is against Jordan on March 20 in Dubai while the next preparatory fixture is against India on March 25.

The coaching staff headed by Branko will focus on working hard in sustaining the good technical and physique levels. The warm-up programme will continue with more focus on the fitness and tactical sides until reaching high levels of fitness and suitable shape for all the players.

The preparatory matches against Jordan and India will identify the initial faces and style of playing prior to the qualifiers and GCC Cup.

OMAN PROBABLES
Goalkeepers: Fayez al Rushaidi, Ahmed al Rawahi, Ibrahim al Mukhaini;
Defenders: Mohammed al Musallami, Ahmad al Khamisi, Ali al Nahar, Fahmi Durbin, Juma al Habsi, Abdulaziz al Ghilani, Ali al Busaidy, Ahmad al Kaabi and Abbas al Hashimi; Midfielders: Abdullah Fawaz, Harib al Saadi, Yazid al Mashani, Amjad al Harthi, Zahir al Aghbari, Salah al Yahyaei, Omar al Fazari, Mohsin Jawhar and Yaseen al Shiyadi;
Forwards: Abdulaziz al Maqbali, Mohammad al Ghafri, Khalid al Hajri, Mohsin al Ghassani, Omar al Malki and Essam al Subhi.



Al Faisal al Zubair to debut in endurance championship



MUSCAT: Oman's talented racer Al Faisal al Zubair is all set for a new challenge this season as he has signed up with Lechner Racing to debut in the highly-competitive endurance series – 2021 International GT Open Championship.

Al Faisal will team up with an experienced driver, Andy Soucek of Spain, and the duo will drive a Porsche GT3-R as they bid to provide tough competition to their rivals, which features some of the world's best endurance racers and teams.

The International GT Open will hold its 16th season since starting in 2006 and the seven-leg series will begin the season with a race at the Paul Ricard circuit in France on May 16. The series concludes in Barcelona on October 24.

Al Faisal's return to a full-fledged series is a welcome development since motorsports across the globe were affected due

to the coronavirus pandemic from early March in 2020.

He now joins another Omani star, Ahmad al Harthy, in endurance racing and will be competing in the top Pro class at the GT Open.

With Ahmad having established himself as an endurance racing, Al Faisal's entry will put Oman drivers in focus at the top stage and boost the Sultanate's profile in international motorsports.

Al Faisal's last participation was at the Silverstone Formula One circuit in October last when, participating for the first time in the British GT Championship, he

along with Croatia's team-mate Martin Kodric claimed a Silver Cup class podium finish and an overall fourth spot.

Revealing the details of his participation in the 2021 International GT Open Series, the 22-year-old two-time former Porsche GT3 Cup Challenge Middle East champion said, "I am excited to go for a new endurance series for the first time. It will be a new challenge and I am looking forward to it along with my team-mate Andy [Soucek]."

Though Al Faisal has in the past competed in endurance races, this is the first time that the Muscat-based driver will be participating

in a complete endurance championship series.

Till date since he began his motorsports career, Al Faisal had the opportunity to race in three endurance races – Abu Dhabi 12Hr, Dubai 24Hr and the British GT where he took a podium in silver class last year.

Al Faisal said, "It is going to be a new experience and with a large grid and some of the best endurance racers in the field with big professional teams, I am eager to provide a healthy competition on my debut season."

"We will compete but it will be difficult to challenge for the overall championship title. We are hopeful of having good races and then taking each race as it comes."

Al Faisal will be racing in No 77 car with all new black and red livery for the Porsche GT3-R car. The new design further enhances the beautiful lines of the Lechner Racing.

Lewis century takes Windies home

NORTH SOUND, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA: West Indies turned a leisurely canter into a desperate scramble to achieve a series-clinching five-wicket victory over Sri Lanka with two balls to spare in the second One-Day International of their three-match series at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in Antigua on Friday.

A fourth ODI hundred by Evin Lewis and an elegant supporting 84 by opening partner Shai Hope seemed to have set the home side up for an effortless stroll to the target of 273 as the pair put on 192 for the first wicket.



Evin Lewis of West Indies celebrates his century. – AFP

However, Lewis' dismissal for 103 in the 38th over triggered a surprising level of indecisiveness with the Sri Lankans coming to life in the final stage of the match as seamers Nuwan Pradeep and Thisara Perera claimed two wickets each.

But when he most needed to be on target, Pradeep's final two overs were plastered for 28 runs with Nicholas Pooran's unbeaten 35, which included two boundaries in the last over the match, taking the West Indies to an unbeatable 2-0 lead ahead of the final match at the same venue on Sunday.

Lewis' hundred, which came off 121 balls and was embellished by eight fours and four sixes, earned him the man of the match award.

"It was a total team performance. Our best chance was chasing so it was good to see the boys sticking to the their plans," said West Indies captain Kieron Pollard.

Earlier, Danushka Gunathilaka just missed out on a century as Sri Lanka posted a competitive 273 for eight after being put in to bat.

Two days after his controversial

SCOREBOARD	
SRI LANKA	
D Gunathilaka b Mohammed.....	96
D Karunaratne b Joseph.....	1
P Nissanka b Joseph.....	10
O Fernando c Holder b Hosein.....	2
D Chandimal c Allen b Mohammed.....	71
A Bandara c Shepherd b Mohammed ...	18
T Perera (run out).....	19
W Hasaranga c Joseph b Holder.....	47
L Sandakan (not out).....	2
D Chameera (not out).....	1
Extras (LB-1, W-5).....	6
Total (For 8 wkts, 50 overs).....	273
Fall of wickets: 1-7, 2-32, 3-50, 4-150, 5-186, 6-204, 7-268, 8-271	
Bowling: A Joseph 10-1-42-2, J Holder 9-0-66-1, A Hosein 4-0-20-1, R Shepherd 3-0-37-0, F Allen 10-0-43-0, K Pollard 4-0-17-0, J Mohammed 10-0-47-3	
WEST INDIES	
E Lewis st Chandimal b Sandakan	103
S Hope c Pradeep b Perera	84
D Bravo c Bandara b Perera	10
N Pooran (not out).....	35
K Pollard lbw Pradeep	15
F Allen c Bandara b Pradeep	15
J Holder (not out).....	2
Extras (B-1, LB-5, W-3, NB-1).....	10
Total (For 5 wkts, 49.4 overs).....	274
Fall of wickets: 1-192, 2-194, 3-212, 4-233, 5-249	
Bowling: N Pradeep 9.4-0-66-2, D Chameera 10-0-56-0, T Perera 7-0-45-2, D Gunathilaka 3-0-17-0, W Hasaranga 10-0-48-0, L Sandakan 10-1-36-1	

dismissal — he was ruled to have obstructed the field in a run out attempt by Pollard — the left-hander played fluently for 96 in helping his team recover from an indifferent start.

— AFP

Khalid's magnificent ton fetches Al Turki runner-up spot

MUSCAT: Khalid Kail's sparkling 146 not out powered Al Turki NMC to an emphatic 5-wicket victory against Renaissance on Saturday, resulting in his side sealing the runner-up spot on a better net run rate than of IT Works which also finished the Premier Division 50-over League campaign on 16 points.

Muscat CT finished on top due to a better NRR of 2.29 compared to Al Turki's 1.41 and IT Works' 1.36 after all three sides secured 8 wins each from 10 games.

Renaissance's 238 for 8 was led by top scores of 71 and 52 by Shubo Pal and Rafi Ullah respectively. Jay Odedara and Hemalkumar Tandel were the pick of Al Turki bowlers, taking three and two wickets respectively.

Al Turki's response was dominated by its run machine Khalid Kail's excellent batting, making sure the job was done without any major hiccups as his side surpassed the total in 38.4 overs, scoring 235 for 5. His 127-ball 142 not out was the highlight of a big game that decided the top three spots in the country's premier cricket tournament.

BRIEF SCORES (PREMIER DIVISION T20 LEAGUE): Renaissance 238 for 8 in 50 overs (Shubo Pal 71 - 9x4, 1x6, Rafi Ullah 52 - 2x4, 4x6, Pruthvikumar Machhi 31 - 2x4, 1x6. Jay Odedara 3-39, Hemalkumar Tandel 2-35) lost to Al Turki 235 for 5 in 38.4 overs (Khalid Kail 142 not out - 18x4, Ajay Lalcheta 29 - 5x4, Rafi Ullah 2-34) by 5 wickets.



Al Turki NMC after beating Renaissance

ZEESHAN'S TON HELPS IT WORKS UPSET MUSCAT

Riding on Zeeshan Maqsood's magnificent hundred and Shakeel Ahmed's 5 for 25, IT Works defeated Muscat CT by 30 runs to end its Premier Division 50-over League campaign at 16 points and third place in a game at OC Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Maqsood's 116 was the highlight of IT Works' total of 246 all out in 49.5 overs. Sandeep Goud excelled with the ball again, taking

4 for 37 whereas Ayaah Khan and Ganesh Chandrashekher took two wickets each.

Shakeel Ahmad dealt some early blows reducing Muscat to 29 for 3 before Ayaan Khan (71) and Wasim Ali (44) put on 107 runs for the fourth wicket to put Muscat back on track. However, Zeeshan Maqsood removed the two well settled batsmen to derail Muscat's chase, dismissing it for 216 in the 45th over. Apart from Shakeel's fifer, Zeeshan bowled well too, taking 2 for 14.

BRIEF SCORES (PREMIER DIVISION 50-OVER LEAGUE): IT Works 246 all out in 49.5 overs (Zeeshan Maqsood 116 - 8x4, 6x6, Khawar Ali 29 - 3x4, Akmal Shahzad 29 - 1x4, 1x6. Sandeep Goud 4-37, Ayaan Khan 2-37, Ganesh Chandrashekher 2-41) beat Muscat CT 216 all out in 44.4 overs (Ayaan Khan 71 - 8x4, 1x6, Wasim Ali 44 - 3x4, 1x6. Shakeel Ahmed 5-25, Zeeshan Maqsood 2-14) by 30 runs.

KHALID BOWLS ALPHA TO VICTORY

Veteran left-arm spinner Khalid Rasheed picked up 5 for 17 to power Arm Alpha to 28-run victory against AER in a Premier Division T20 League game at OC

Turf 1 in Al Amerat on Friday.

Alpha posted 130 for 8 on the board with main contributions coming from Sanuth Ebrahim (28), Chetan Mallya (25) and Ubaid Ullah (22). Muzahir Raza bagged 2 for 23.

Failing to negotiate with Khalid's terrific spell, AER folded up for a dismal 102 in 18.2 overs. Only Muzahir and Azmat Ullah made notable scores of 24 and 22 respectively. Apart from Khalid's five-wicket haul, Kaleemullah and Ubaid Ullah claimed two wickets

each.

BRIEF SCORES (PREMIER DIVISION T20 LEAGUE): Arm Alpha 130 for 8 in 20 overs (Sanuth Ebrahim 28 - 3x4, 1x6, Chetan Mallya 25 - 4x4, Ubaid Ullah 22 - 2x6, Muzahir Raza 2-23) defeated AER 102 all out in 18.2 overs (Muzahir Raza 24 - 4x4, Azmat Ullah 22 - 2x6, Khalid Rashid 5-17, Kaleemullah 2-16, Ubaid Ullah 2-16) by 28 runs.

Nayan Anil's splendid all-round show helped Oman Cricket Women's Academy (OCWA) to a thrilling 4-run win over Muscat Women in a Women's League match at OC Turf 1.

NAYAN SHINES AS OCWA CLAIMS SECOND SPOT

OCWA thus ended its league campaign with 6 points and three wins from four games, walking away with a creditable runner-up spot behind leader ISC Women who remained unbeaten with 8 points.

Nayan (31) and Afida Aftab (27) were the main scorers in OCWA's 102 for 5 in 20 overs. Saparna Sivakumar bagged 2 for 24.

Muscat Women was then bowled out for 98 due to brilliant bowling by Shreya Dhuri (2 for 12) and Anshitha Tiwari (2 for 26). Bhakti Shakti topscored with 28 while Theertha Sivakumar chipped in with 21.

BRIEF SCORES (WOMEN'S LEAGUE T20): OCWA 102 for 5 in 20 overs (Nayan Anil 31 - 3x4, Afida Aftab 27 - 1x4, Saparna Sivakumar 2-24) beat Muscat Women 98 all out in 20 overs (Bhakti Shakti 28 - 1x4, Theertha Sivakumar 21 - 1x4, Shreya Dhuri 2-12, Anshitha Tiwari 2-26) by 4 runs.



England's Jason Roy in action. – Reuters

The series is crucial for both sides as England are the world's top Twenty20 side and their opponents second, with the World Cup looming in October in India

Roy, Archer star as England trounce India

AHMEDABAD, INDIA: Jason Roy and Jofra Archer played the lead roles as England thrashed India by eight wickets in the opening Twenty20 interntional on Friday.

Chasing a modest 125, Roy hit a confident 49 as England romped home in 15.3 overs to take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad.

The series is crucial for both sides as England are the world's top Twenty20 side and their opponents second, with the World Cup looming in October in India.

Roy and Jos Buttler put on 72 in a blazing opening stand. Roy, one of a group who missed England's 3-1 hammering in the Test series, hit three sixes and four fours in a spectacular return to form.

Buttler fell lbw to leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal for 28 and Roy fell one short of a half century when Washington Sundar trapped him lbw.

"I'll take 49 and a comfortable victory for the team any day," said Roy.

England skipper Eoin Morgan said his limited-overs team is not carrying the weight of England's Test defeats.

"We have been on tours before, where possibly the white-ball guys have played first and we have not played well and it has not lingered into the Test matches," said Morgan.

Dawid Malan finished on 24, including the six that won the game, and Jonny Bairstow, scored 26 off 17 balls to finish off the spectacle in front of one of the biggest crowds in a sports stadium

SCOREBOARD		
INDIA		
S Dhawan b Wood	4	Wood 4-0-20-1, Jordan 4-0-27-1, Stokes 3-0-25-1, Curran 2-0-15-0
KL Rahul b Archer	1	
V Kohli c Jordan b Rashid	0	ENGLAND
R Pant c Bairstow b Stokes	21	J Roy lbw Sundar
S Iyer c Malan b Jordan	67	J Buttler lbw Chahal
H Pandya c Jordan b Archer	19	D Malan (not out)
S Thakur c Malan b Archer	0	J Bairstow (not out)
W Sundar (not out)	3	Extras (W-3)
A Patel (not out)	7	Total (For 2 wks, 15.3 overs)
Extras (W-2)	2	Fall of wickets: 1-72, 2-89
Total (For 7 wks, 20 overs)	124	Bowling: Patel 3-0-24-0, Kumar 2-0-15-0, Chahal 4-0-44-1, Thakur 2-0-16-0, Pandya 2-0-13-0, Sundar 2-3-0-18-1
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-3, 3-20, 4-48, 5-102, 6-102, 7-119		
Bowling: Rashid 3-0-14-1, Archer 4-1-23-3,		

since the coronavirus pandemic erupted.

Authorities allowed 55,000 tickets to go on sale in the 110,000 capacity stadium, but they did not give the crowd figure.

The Indian fans still roared on as Malan and Bairstow put on an unbroken stand of 41 after Archer took 3-23 in a fiery opening attack on the Indian batsmen.

Archer said it was too soon to say England have the upper hand.

"It is just the first game in the series," said the man of the match.

"There are still four games to go and they are number two in the world for a reason so I don't think we can get ahead of ourselves yet."

'WORLD-CLASS BOWLERS'

Morgan won the toss, fielded first and India slipped to 48-4 with skipper Virat Kohli out for nought off leg-spinner Adil Rashid.

Kohli blamed a "below par batting performance" by his side.

"There was a lack of execution of some of the shots. We have to come back with much more intent and clarity of plan. The wicket did not allow you to play the kind of

shots you wanted to," he added.

Archer claimed KL Rahul who hit an inside edge on to the stumps. Fellow quick Mark Wood rattled Shikhar Dhawan's stumps as he worlded up speeds upto 152 kmph (over 94 mph).

Wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant reverse hit Archer for a six behind the stumps, but he fell to Ben Stokes for 21.

Shreyas Iyer scored his third T20 fifty and put on 54 for the fifth wicket with Hardik Pandya, who smashed 19, to boost the Indian total.

But Archer, suffering from an injured elbow and who received strong support from Mark Wood, broke the partnership with Pandya's wicket and then took Shardul Thakur with his next ball.

"When the competition is tough you step up and competition brings out the best in me," Archer said on the quality of England's pace attack.

"There are many world-class bowlers" in the England team, he said. The second T20 is on Sunday at the same venue. — AFP



England's Eoin Morgan celebrates the wicket of India's Hardik Pandya with Jofra Archer. – Reuters



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Foreign investors now eligible to own land in Oman

‘New element in Economic Stimulus Plan allows foreign companies to own land of over 5,000 sq metres or leased land which is either commercial or commercial / residential or tourism or industrial land’: Al Yousuf

CONRAD PRABHU
@conradprabhu

Foreign investors will be entitled to ownership of land for the first time in the Sultanate under the new Economic Stimulus Plan unveiled by the Omani government last week.

According to Qais bin Mohammed al Yousuf, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP), the move is part of a series of incentives offered by the government to enhance Oman’s investment appeal, as well as ease the business environment severely impacted by the pandemic and economic slowdown.



Land ownership promises to further sweeten the package of incentives pledged by the government in the form of, among other things, registration fee reductions for new investors, lower income tax rates for small and medium enterprises, long-term residency permits for foreigners, and interest rate deductions.

“There’s a new element to this stimulus plan: allowing foreign companies to own land of over 5,000 sq metres or leased land which is either commercial or commercial / residential or tourism or industrial land,” said Al Yousuf.

“Earlier, foreign companies were not allowed to own land.

But now, with the new stimulus, companies for the first time will be allowed to own land, provided certain conditions are met — for instance, the land is meant for the company to operate its business, and provided it falls in areas allowed for foreign ownership.”

The minister made the revelations during an interview to Oman TV over the weekend. Further, to assure foreign investors that the Omani government is committed to honouring pledges set out in the Economic Stimulus Plan, he said the ministry is open to signing long-term Service-Level Agreements (SLAs) with strategic investors.

“Under the stimulus plan, the

MoCIIP can enter into SLAs with large strategic investors to assure them that the incentives we have announced will remain in place for the medium to long term, thus giving them comfort that they are welcome into Oman,” Al Yousuf said.

He added that the SLA initiative is based on feedback garnered from the investor and business community on the need to offer robust assurance to foreign companies on the longevity of the government’s incentive measures.

Asked about measures to fuel Omani exports, Al Yousuf said the ministry is collaborating with Oman Development Bank (ODB) and the export credit



Under the stimulus plan, the MoCIIP can enter into SLAs with large strategic investors to assure them that the incentives we have announced will remain in place for the medium to long term, thus giving them comfort that they are welcome into Oman

QAIS AL YOUSUF
Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion

agency, Credit Oman, to come up with a package of incentives to encourage Omani firms tap new export markets for their goods.

“Already, many Omani companies have found acceptance for their products in export markets based on their quality standards and competitive pricing. Our job is to further open up new markets for them and try to see whether more Omani products can be exported around the world,” he replied.

In concluding, Al Yousuf said the new Economic Stimulus Plan complements previously announced reform measures to help ease investment inflows into the Sultanate.

“This is the right time to start your business in Oman,” he stressed. “I know the pandemic has really created a slowdown in the economy, but now with His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and the entire cabinet following up on the implementation on the latest plan, we now have a well-balanced strategy — taking into account the Medium Term Fiscal Plan (Tawazun) announced earlier — that will benefit large and small businesses as well as FDI,” he added.

MSM30 Index buoyed by economic stimulus approval

Key goal: The economic stimulus plan aims to achieve a high growth rate as planned by Oman Vision 2040 and ward off the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy



BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 13

The MSM30 Index ended the week up by 1.33 per cent, supported by the Financial index, which rose by 3.43 per cent. The Services Index and Industrial index, however, declined by 0.78 per cent and 1.21 per cent, respectively.

The MSM Shariah Index was higher by 0.34 per cent. Fitch Ratings has affirmed the long-term issuer default ratings of six Omani banks, namely Bank Muscat, National Bank of Oman (NBO), HSBC Bank Oman, BankDhofar, Sohar International Bank and Ahli Bank. The ratings agency, in its rating action statements, said that it has

kept the outlooks negative on all these six banks in the Sultanate.

SMN Power Holding SAOG disclosed the recent development regarding the income tax case in SMN Barka Power Company SAOC, a fully owned subsidiary of SMN Power Holding SAOG, as follows:

The Primary Court in its judgment dated March 8, 2021, has rejected the Company’s appeal regarding the disallowance by the Tax Department of Liquidated Damages paid to OPWP, although Liquidated Damages received from the subcontractor Doosan were taxed in the hands of the Company for the Tax Year

2009.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik approved new economic stimulus plan last week. The Economic Stimulus Plan (ESP) endorsed by the Council of Ministers is based on five main axes, namely:

Incentives pertaining to taxes and fees; Incentives to improve business and investment environment;

Incentives to boost small and medium enterprises; Incentives for the labour market and employment; and

Banking Incentives aimed to enhance efforts to alleviate the impacts of Covid-19 pandemic on the national economy through a set of

measures to support efforts of enhancing economic recovery, economic activities and attracting foreign investments.

The economic stimulus plan aims to achieve a high growth rate as planned by Oman Vision 2040 and ward off the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the economy.

As part of the plan, the Central Bank of Oman announced new banking incentives.

- Continuation of postponement of the repayment of loans taken by Omanis who have been laid-off and those whose wages have been reduced-waive loans until the end of September of this year and till further notice.
- Instructing banks to continue responding to requests to postpone the instalments and interest of all borrowers affected by the repercussions of the current situation for another six months until the end of September 2021, without prejudice to their credit rating.

Incentives announced that are related to taxes include:

TURN TO PAGE 14



SOHAR Port and Freezone invites Tenderers in the following Tender

NO	Tender Ref	Tender Title	Tender Fee OMR
1	SFZ 21/001	Supply of Furniture for Government Office	RO 25/-
2	SIPC 21/055	SharePoint Upgrade	RO 25/-
3	SIPC 21/059	Consultancy Services for Development of Occupational Health and Safety Management system based on ISO45001 (OHS MS Manual along with specific relevant procedures)	RO 100/-

Tenderers can request to receive the electronic tender documents from 9:00 am on Sunday, 14/03/2020 until 4:00 pm on Thursday 25/03/2021.

Tenderers to follow the below procedures and steps to obtain the electronic tender documents:

Step 1: Interested Tenderers should remit the stated tender fees as per the below bank details:

Account Name	Sohar Industrial Port Co
Account Number	3101-007970-500
Bank Name	Oman Arab bank SAOC – Main Br
SWIT	OMABOMRXXX

Note: Bank transfers is the only mode of payment accepted

Step 2
Tenderers to send the following documents:
A request for the electronic tender documents
Scanned bank transfer
The firm’s commercial registration documents
All shall be communicated to the following e-mail address:
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com

Step 3: Tenderers will receive the electronic tender documents
Due to the COVID-19 situation, the below procedure is still valid as of today for the submission of the bids. If the current situation remains until the date of submission, tenderers will receive a circular with clear steps and procedures on the submission protocol.

The Technical and Commercial proposals must be in separate, sealed envelopes marked “Technical and Commercial” addressed to:
SOHAR Port and Freezone
Secretary of Tender committee
Tender Reference No.
Tender Name

The Proposals should be submitted before 4:00pm on Thursday, 08/04/2021
SOHAR reserves the right to accept or reject any tender without assigning any reasons
All SMEs are requested to provide their Green Card along with the required documents
For any clarification regarding the tenders please send an e-mail to :
sipc.procurement@soharportandfreezone.com
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Omantel inks 5G deal with Hutchison Ports Sohar

NEW CAPABILITIES:
Omantel along with Huawei will implement three POCs that leverage 5G and AI to streamline port operations and enhance efficiency and security

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 13

Omantel has embarked upon yet another package of smart ICT solutions that leverage the company's 5G capabilities and have the ability to revolutionise operations in Oman's oil and gas, logistics and transport sectors,

which are vital for the country's sustainable economic growth. Omantel and Huawei entered a tri-party Proof of Concept (POC) Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Hutchison Ports Sohar for showcasing successful utilisations of the telecom giant's 5G infrastructure in three areas. These POCs, to be implemented at Hutchison Ports Sohar, aim to provide highly reliable communication services and improve operational efficiency, accuracy, time management and security, among other services. Talal bin Said al Maamari, CEO of Omantel, said, "The overall objective of the POCs is to showcase the capability of our 5G network and how it enhances



and streamlines performance of the port operations. These POCs will also highlight 5G for other uses other than in telecom network. 5G synergised with AI can streamline business operations across multiple sectors. Omantel is proud to leverage its smart solutions that use 5G technology in an important sector like

transport and logistics. We are confident that these POCs will be successfully converted into strategic commercial agreements at the end of their evaluation period." "One of Hutchison Ports Sohar's strategic aim is to become fully automated and engage with customers, stakeholders and the cargo in the safest and highly

efficient manner. We have continuously invested in automated equipment's and technologically advanced systems and apps for constant service enhancements. Ports are fundamental to Oman's Economy. In the worldwide port and container terminal business, 5G has proven to be one of the crucial future development for automation and smart technologies. We're pleased to partner with Omantel and Huawei for the 5G PoC study in the terminal equipment and look forward to a solution out of it", said Anacin Kum, Chief Executive Officer, Hutchison Ports Sohar." Robin Chen, CEO of Huawei

Oman, noted: "Omantel is a leading ICT service provider in the middle east region, Hutchison Ports is one of the largest port operators globally and Huawei is a strategic partner of Omantel. It's our great pleasure to be part of this strong triangle to integrate 5G in Hutchison Ports Sohar Operational Activities. It is believed that 5G can bring significant values and benefits to Sohar port. Moreover, this 5G pilot will open new doors to introduce the technology advancements of 5G helping to reshape and upgrade vertical industries of Oman. This direction serves to create direct and indirect gains to Oman towards 2040."

MSM30 Index buoyed by economic stimulus approval

FROM PAGE 13

- Exemption from the Income Tax shall be granted to all firms that undertake their business activities within the Economic Diversification Sectors for five years, right from 1 January, 2021 till the end of 2022, in accordance with the terms and conditions to be announced by the Tax Authority (with effect from the date of the firms' registration in the Commercial Register).
- Exemption of hotel establishments from the Income Tax due for the two tax years of 2020 and 2021.
- Permission for the settlement of the due income tax and waiving of the additional income tax (for 2021) ensuing from the segmentation of taxpaying (paying by instalments).
- Deduction of 1 per cent of the value of the due tax, to a maximum of RO 10,000 from

the announced tax based on tax declaration for the next year. This applies to all those who adhere to the presentation of tax declaration and process due tax payments within the deadlines stated in the law. Continued suspension of the application of the Withholding Tax related to the distribution of dividends on shares and interests for five years with effect from 2020. Deferring of the loss incurred by firms and establishments, as of the year 2020, to the next year and deducting the same from taxable income in the year 2021 and the subsequent years till such a time that the loss is zeroed, without commitment to the period of five years stated in Article No 71 of the Income Tax Law. Exemption from the Tourism Tax and the Municipality Tax payable by tourism establishments till the

- Postponement of settlement of the Tourism Tax and the Municipality Tax payable by tourism establishments till end of December 2021. Expat permit fees slashed for some firms: The new stimulus package announced by the government includes a reduction in fees to recruit and renew licences of expatriate workers in intermediate, technical and specialized professions. 50 per cent for firms and establishments fulfilling the approved Omanisation percentage. 25 per cent for firms and establishments with an Omani workforce. It has been also decided to allocate RO 20 million in the 2021 budget for the training of Omanis, which will qualify them for the labour market.

[Courtesy: U-Capital]

Four new industrial cities by 2025

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 13

The Economic Stimulus Plan approved by His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik last week will help the country navigate through the challenges unleashed by the global economic slowdown and the coronavirus pandemic, said Hilal bin Hamad al Hasani, CEO of the Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn). In a statement to ONA, he said the plan will help attract investment inflows into, among other areas, the four new industrial cities planned for development over Madayn's 2021-2025 Vision — at Ibri, Thamrait, Shinas, Al Mudhaibi and Al Rawdah. Those new industrial parks will come on the heels of the completion of the entire industry city at Samayil, as well as the 7th Phase expansion



of Sohar Industrial City (covering an area of 8 million sq metres), the expansion of Raysut Industrial City, the implementation of the first and second phases of Al Mazunah Free Zone, as well as improvements to Al Buraimi, Sur and Nizwa industrial cities. In addition, a comprehensive plan for the development of the technology park, Knowledge Oasis Muscat (KOM) is under completion. So is the Service Centre Project (Masar),

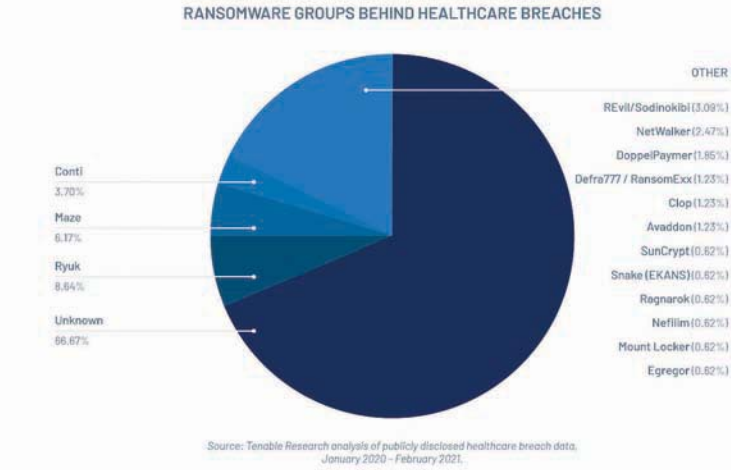
which will be launched at all industrial cities before the end of this year. Masar centres were opened in Al Rusayl and Sohar Industrial Cities last year. Al Hasani said the development of various support institutions of Madayn will help encourage investors and business owners to start new projects or expand existing ventures, thereby helping achieve the government's goal of elevate Oman into the ranks of regional manufacturing and ICT hubs.

Over 102 million healthcare records exposed by cyberattacks in 2020

KEY TRENDS: Ransomware is the root cause in a majority of the healthcare breaches analysed

BUSINESS REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 13

Analysis by Tenable's Security Response Team (SRT) has determined that over 102 million healthcare records were exposed in 2020 as a result of data breaches. Almost three million health records have already been exposed in the first two months of 2021. The threat to healthcare should come as no surprise, given the growing demand for telehealth appointments, medical supplies and a race for vaccine development and distribution. When looking at the root cause of these attacks, ransomware was by far the most prominent, accounting for a whopping 54.95 per cent of breaches.



Ryuk stood out above the rest, repeatedly appearing in breach disclosures and accounting for 8.64 per cent of ransomware-related breaches, followed by Maze (6.17 per cent), Conti (3.7 per cent) and REvil/Sodinokibi (3.09 per cent). SRTs analysis revealed that third-party breaches accounted for over a quarter of the breaches tracked and nearly 12 million exposed records. Other leading

causes of data breaches included email compromise/phishing (21.16 per cent), insider threat (7.17 per cent) and unsecured databases (3.75 per cent). "As the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic continues to place unprecedented strain on global healthcare infrastructure, attackers are finding what was already an attractive target even more enticing", explains Rody Quinlan, Security Response

Manager, Tenable. "These attacks are not going away anytime soon so it's imperative organisations, particularly those being targeted in the healthcare sector, understand the threats against them and have the resources necessary to reduce their cyber risk." Ryuk ransomware, the leading culprit for ransomware attacks against the healthcare industry, is known to favor a number of vulnerabilities including Zerologon, one of the most prominent vulnerabilities of 2020. In order to reduce the risk of compromise, healthcare organisations should: * Prioritise vulnerabilities: Identify and remediate the most business-impacting vulnerabilities. * Address the root cause: Once the vulnerabilities most likely to introduce business risk are identified and prioritised, remediate them and continue regular maintenance check-ups.

PRESS RELEASE

MEETHAQ HAFAWA PRIVATE BANKING: REDEFINING ISLAMIC PRIVATE BANKING

MUSCAT: Meethaq, the pioneer of Islamic banking in Oman from Bank Muscat, in line with the bank's vision "To serve you better, everyday" is offering exclusive solutions for its ultra-high net worth clients. The Hafawa Private Banking proposition is built on the strong foundations of Meethaq Islamic Banking.

Meethaq Hafawa Private Banking is defined by its commitment to provide privileges and solutions specifically designed to meet the exclusive financial and lifestyle goals of the Ultra High Net Worth Individuals (UHNIs). Being the leading Private Banking proposition in Oman based on Sharia principles, Meethaq Hafawa Private Banking places great emphasis on developing long-term relationships with its customers who are served through exclusive Hafawa Centres across the length and breadth of the Sultanate. All Hafawa Private Banking clients are also assigned a dedicated Relationship Manager who provide personalised wealth management and financial advisory services.

Meethaq Hafawa has launched several innovative products, solutions and services since its launch for the benefit of its Private Banking clients. These include easy access to a Global Sukuk Fund, customised wealth management solutions, access to a large number of benefits including complimentary access



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Shell mulls sale of non-operated assets in Malaysia



A Shell logo is seen at a petrol station in Kuala Lumpur. — AFP

KUALA LUMPUR: Royal Dutch Shell PLC's Malaysia unit said it is considering selling its stakes in two production-sharing contracts it does not operate off the coast of Sarawak state.

Shell Malaysia said the decision to consider divestment options is part of Shell Group's strategy to focus and increase resilience and competitiveness in its upstream business.

The Baram Delta EOR and the SK307 production-sharing contracts are operated by Petronas Carigali Sdn Bhd, a unit of state energy firm Petronas. Sarawak Shell Berhad owns a 40 per cent equity interest in Baram Delta and 50 per cent in SK307, with Petronas Carigali holding the remainder.

Shell Malaysia remains committed to supporting the operator in delivering safe and smooth operations until completion of a sale to a credible buyer", said Shell, which has been operating in Malaysia for 130 years. — AFP

Energy shares look for next spark as investors eye recovering economy

WALL STREET WEEK AHEAD

NEW YORK: Investors betting on US energy shares have enjoyed a blistering rally, as the sector leads a move into value and economically sensitive stocks that has gripped the equity market. How much further that run continues could hinge on the success of the economic recovery, supply dynamics in oil markets and whether companies can stay disciplined on spending.

The near doubling in the price of crude has helped make shares of oil and gas companies — for years a losing bet — one of the best performing areas of the market, with outsized gains in the stocks of companies such as oil major Exxon Mobil Corp and Diamondback Energy Inc, which have surged 89 per cent and 231 per cent, respectively, since early November.

With a gain of over 80 per cent in that time, the S&P 500 energy sector is back to levels last seen in February 2020, when the stock market began its plunge as the Covid-19 outbreak took its toll on the economy. "Shares are being bid up because there are expectations for greater



The Fearless Girl statue stands in front of the New York Stock Exchange in New York, in this file photo. — Reuters

demand", said Michael Arone, Chief Investment Strategist for State Street Global Advisors. "We need to see the follow-through."

The outlook for energy shares is at the centre of a number of market themes, including how long the economic "reopening" trade can last, whether energy and other value stocks can continue outperforming tech and growth shares and if the market is primed for a potential

rise in inflation. With the benchmark S&P 500 nearing the 4,000 level for the first time, the health of the economy, the pace of inflation and a recent rise in bond yields are expected to be hot topics when the US Federal Reserve meets on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Ample crude supply that weighed on global oil prices and concerns over a push toward "green energy" were among the

factors pulling down energy stocks for most of the past decade. Oil prices plummeted in the coronavirus-fuelled downturn amid global travel restrictions and shutdowns but roared higher in recent months, buoyed by breakthroughs in vaccines against Covid-19.

Recent data has shown signs of an economic recovery continuing to gain momentum. The number of Americans filing

new claims for jobless benefits dropped to a four-month low last week, while US consumer sentiment improved in early March to its strongest in a year.

Prices for US crude are up 35 per cent year-to-date. Investors are watching supply dynamics as another catalyst for crude prices and energy stocks.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies last year cut output substantially as demand collapsed due to the pandemic. The group earlier this month agreed to extend most output cuts into April.

Any efforts by President Joe Biden's administration to regulate US drilling could support prices by keeping supply in check, investors said. "There is more likely to be an aggressive regulatory regime, which would rein in supply, which would be a positive for commodity prices", said Burns McKinney, Portfolio Manager at NFJ Investment Group.

Investors said they want to see whether companies are spending on new drilling, which could oversupply the market and eventually weigh on prices, or pay down debt and bolster dividends.

— Reuters

African economies to rebound 3.4 per cent this year

NAIROBI: African economies are expected to grow by an average of 3.4 per cent this year, the African Development Bank said, as the continent recovers from its worst contraction in half a century.

The 54 economies shrank by 2.1 per cent last year, the AfDB said in its 2021 economic outlook report, as the coronavirus crisis disrupted economic activity across the continent. "The continent-wide projected recovery... does not remove the threat of increasing poverty", the Abidjan-based AfDB said in the report, published on Friday.

An estimated 39 million Africans are likely to slip into extreme poverty as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the



The headquarters of the African Development Bank (AfDB) is pictured in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. — Reuters

bank said, after 30 million were pushed into that bracket last year. "Populations with lower levels of education, few assets, and working in informal jobs are

the most affected and must be protected", it said.

Governments on the continent boosted their spending last year in an effort to support their

economies through the crisis, putting pressure on budgetary balances and debt burdens. "The average debt-to-GDP ratio for Africa is expected to climb by 10 to 15 percentage points in the short to medium-term", the AfDB said.

The worsening outcomes will be driven by the surge in government spending and the contraction of fiscal revenues caused by the pandemic. The AfDB called on the international community to work with policymakers on the continent to help it deal with debt loads that are getting heavier and heavier. "Africa's debt burden must be prioritised and not ignored", it said. — Reuters

Boeing unveils order for 737 MAX, shares jump

WASHINGTON: Boeing Co unveiled a new order for its 737 MAX on Friday, pushing its shares up 6 per cent as it renews efforts to recapture investor confidence following a two-year safety crisis.

The deal to sell 24 of the 737-8 model to a backer of Canadian low-cost carrier Flair Airlines comes after Reuters reported it was poised to win another, much larger deal with Southwest Airlines. Shares in Boeing rose 6.2 per cent to \$267.86.

Boeing has been trying to rebuild its image with passengers and airlines following the nearly two-year grounding of the MAX after crashes in Indonesia and



A Boeing 737 MAX takes off during a flight test in Washington, in this file photo. — Reuters

Ethiopia killed 346 people.

This week marked the second anniversary of the second accident, with a final investigative report expected any day. Boeing said Miami-based private equity firm 777 Partners, which has a stake in Flair Airlines, agreed to buy 24 737-8 airplanes with an option to purchase a further 60. — AFP

Ant Group CEO leaves after failed IPO prompts revamp

BEIJING: China's Ant Group Chief Executive Officer Simon Hu has unexpectedly resigned amid a regulatory-driven overhaul of the financial technology giant's business, the first top management exit since a scuppered \$37 billion initial public offering.

Hu, who was named chief executive of the Alibaba Group Holding affiliate in 2019, will be replaced by company veteran and Executive Chairman Eric Jing, Ant said in a statement on Friday.

Hu's exit from the company comes as Ant is working on plans to shift to a financial holding company structure following intense regulatory pressure to



Simon Hu, CEO of Ant Group, is seen on a giant screen as he delivers a speech at the INCLUSION Fintech Conference in Shanghai. — Reuters

Hu's exit from the company comes as Ant is working on plans to shift to a financial holding company structure following intense regulatory pressure to subject it to rules and capital requirements similar to those for banks

subject it to rules and capital requirements similar to those for banks.

That pressure abruptly scuttled Ant's IPO last year, which would have been the world's biggest. Hu resigned for personal reasons, Ant said in a statement, without elaborating. "Following the board's thorough discussions, we have decided to respect Simon's personal request and support him fully in his new

mission", Jing said in an internal memo, an excerpt of which was seen by Reuters.

Jing will continue in his current role as chairman, he said. Hu's departure is the first major management change since the IPO was scrapped. He was one of the key executives responsible for managing the company's mega dual-listing in Hong Kong and Shanghai.

Ma's business empire has been

at the centre of a crackdown following an October 24 speech in which he blasted China's regulatory system.

Regulators have since been tightening scrutiny of the country's technology sector, with Alibaba taking much of the heat. The regulator launched an official anti-trust probe into Alibaba in December.

Ma, who is not known for shying away from the limelight, disappeared from the public eye for about three months, prompting frenzied speculation about his whereabouts. He re-emerged in January in a 50-second video appearance. — Reuters



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1BHK & 2 bhk flats for rent at Ruwi and Al Khoudh. 93994402, 93994403, 24834644.

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FINANCE Manager/ CFO. Indian Chartered Accountant and Cost Accountant with 25 years of experience in Trade Finance, MIS, Budget, Planning, Strategy, Projects, Procurement, Admin, seeks suitable placement. Contact. 99884291 / 99741875 Email vipul70@gmail. com

■ SIT. WANTED

MECHANICAL engineer, 21, Indian male currently in Oman looking to work at any engineering field. Contact 96511338. Email: rkdhanush11@gmail.com

OMANI male, 17 years experience as driver. Looking for transporting job for nurses, office goers, sight seeing. Contact: 97947900.

THREE years experienced in administration / sales and marketing seeking placement. Omani D/L, and NOC available. Gsm- 98270993

SALES/Marketing/ retail executive BMS in Marketing. 6 years experience. Contact 93920174. Rehankadri91@hotmail.com

YOUNG experienced Pakistani driver with Omani light vehicle driving licence seeks suitable opening. Speaks Arabic, Hindi, English and familiar with interior and Muscat areas. Contact GSM 95856719.

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INDIAN, male, Master Degree in Accounting, 15+ years of experience in Oman, UAE & India as Finance / Accounts Manager / Chief Accountant. looking for a job and have noc on visit. contact: 79007124 / 78039524. email: kadercok@outlook.com

■ SIT. VACANT

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JOB vacancy: Sales Manager. Contact: 99522963, 99324292.

URGENTLY required **assistant HR & Admin manager** (only Omani national), oil & gas experience must. Contact: hrrecruit2828@gmail.com

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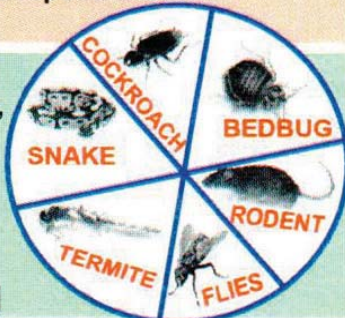


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ANNOUNCEMENT

A leading contracting company is looking for subcontractors (excluding materials) in CIVIL, TILING, MARBLE & MEP works for building construction projects in Muscat, interior region and Salalah.

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Sohar Office

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sohardaily@outlook.com

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99639264

wadi.almashari@yahoo.com

Indian Social Club Oman

(SUR BRANCH)

NOTICE CALLING THE AGM

Members are hereby notified that the Third Annual General Meeting of the Indian Social Club, Sur branch is scheduled for Friday, the 26th March 2021 at 7.00 pm online. The AGM will be followed by election to the Management Committee of Sur branch of Indian Social Club for 2021-2023.

Agenda:

1. Reading of the notice calling the meeting by the General Secretary.
2. Opening address by the President.
3. Approval of the minutes of the Previous Annual General Body meeting.
4. Report by General Secretary.
5. Presentation of the Accounts of 2019 – 2020 by the Treasurer.
6. Discussion and Approval.
7. Any other points raised by the members with the permission of the Chair.

Only those who are already members of the Indian Social Club, Sur branch, and have regularized the membership by payment of the prescribed fees for 2021 on or before 10.03.2021 are entitled to attend the AGM and Election.

The details of the election procedures are displayed in the Circular placed on the Notice Board of the Indian Social Club, PO Box No 120, PC 411, Sur, at its office, for the information of the members who desire to vote or submit nominations for the Management Committee Membership.

General Secretary,
Indian Social Club, Sur Branch.

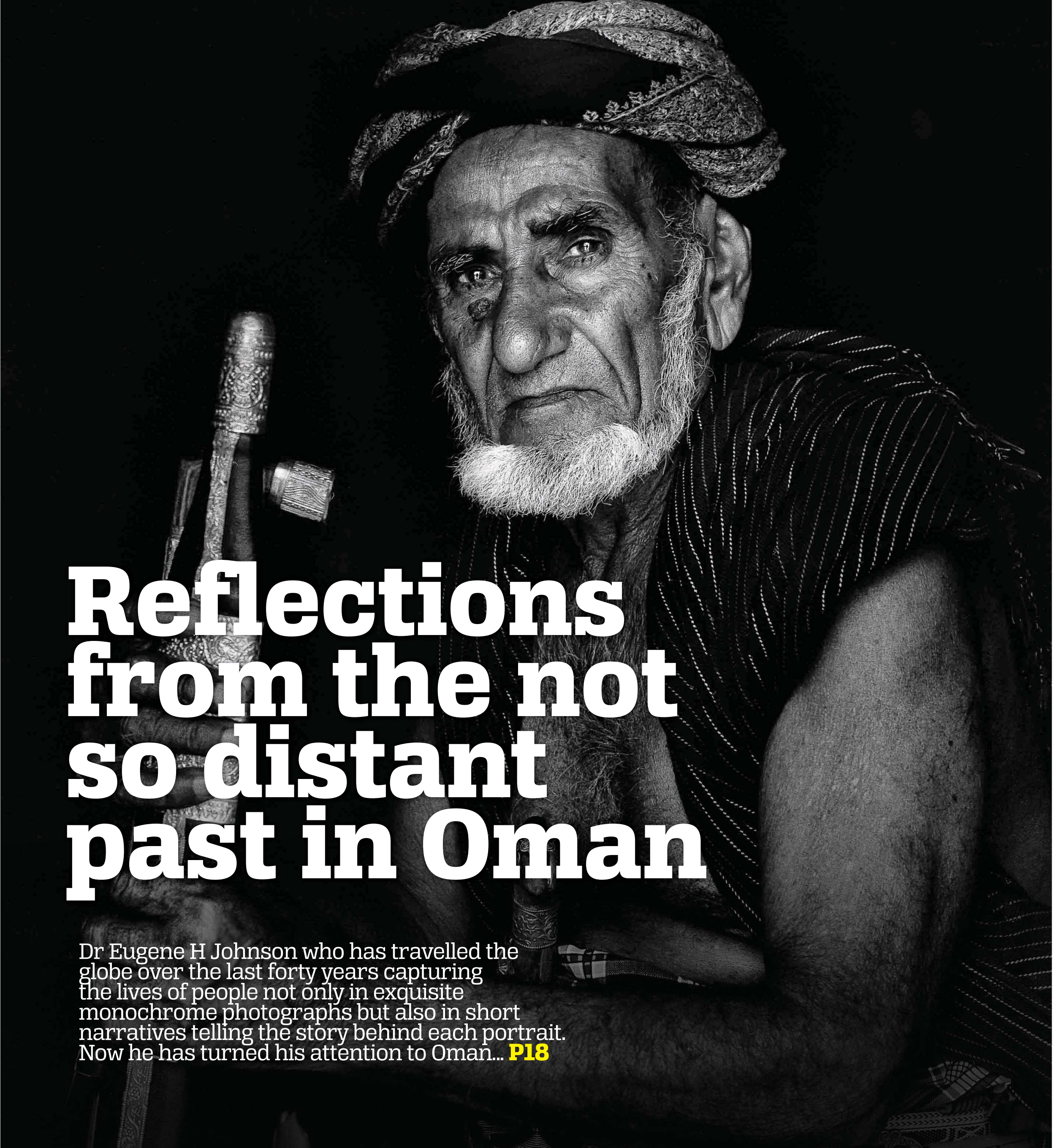
■ LAND FOR RENT

AGRICULTURAL land in Ramis, 7,500 sqm near German University suitable for stores. RO 5,000 per month. 99328880.

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A STORE which can be made into a two-storey building, has a 350 sqm area. Contact 97811111.

features



Reflections from the not so distant past in Oman

Dr Eugene H Johnson who has travelled the globe over the last forty years capturing the lives of people not only in exquisite monochrome photographs but also in short narratives telling the story behind each portrait. Now he has turned his attention to Oman... **P18**

INSIDE STORIES

HERITAGE



PASSION FOR PIGEONS PERSISTS IN ARAB WORLD

Atop his humble wooden dovecote overlooking the majestic Giza pyramids, Abdel-Rahman Gamal released 20 homing pigeons sending them soaring up into the Cairo sky reddened by the setting sun... **Story on P18**

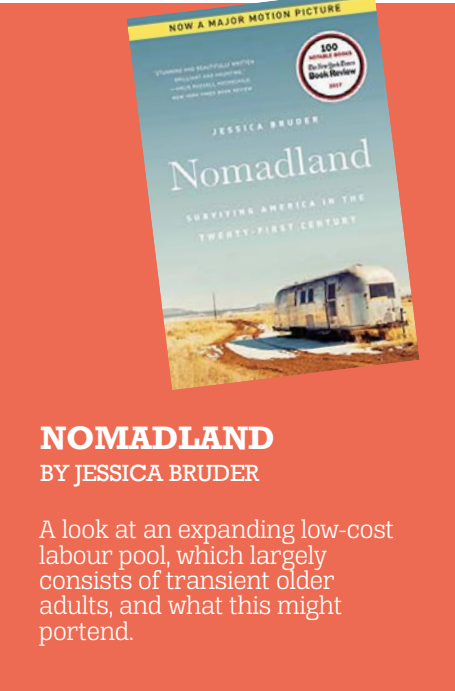
DISCOVERY



NEANDERTHALS DISAPPEARED FROM EUROPE EARLIER THAN THOUGHT, SAYS STUDY

Neanderthal fossils from a cave in Belgium believed to belong to the last survivors of their species ever discovered in Europe are thousands of years older than once thought, a new study said on Monday... **Story on P19**

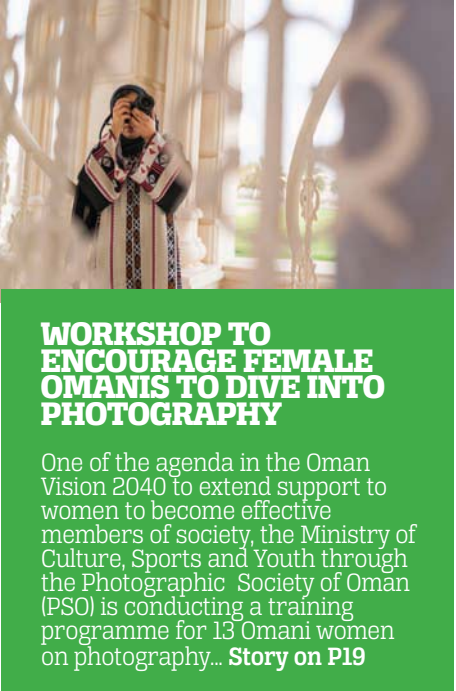
READ



NOMADLAND
BY JESSICA BRUDER

A look at an expanding low-cost labour pool, which largely consists of transient older adults, and what this might portend.

PHOTOGRAPHY



WORKSHOP TO ENCOURAGE FEMALE OMANIS TO DIVE INTO PHOTOGRAPHY

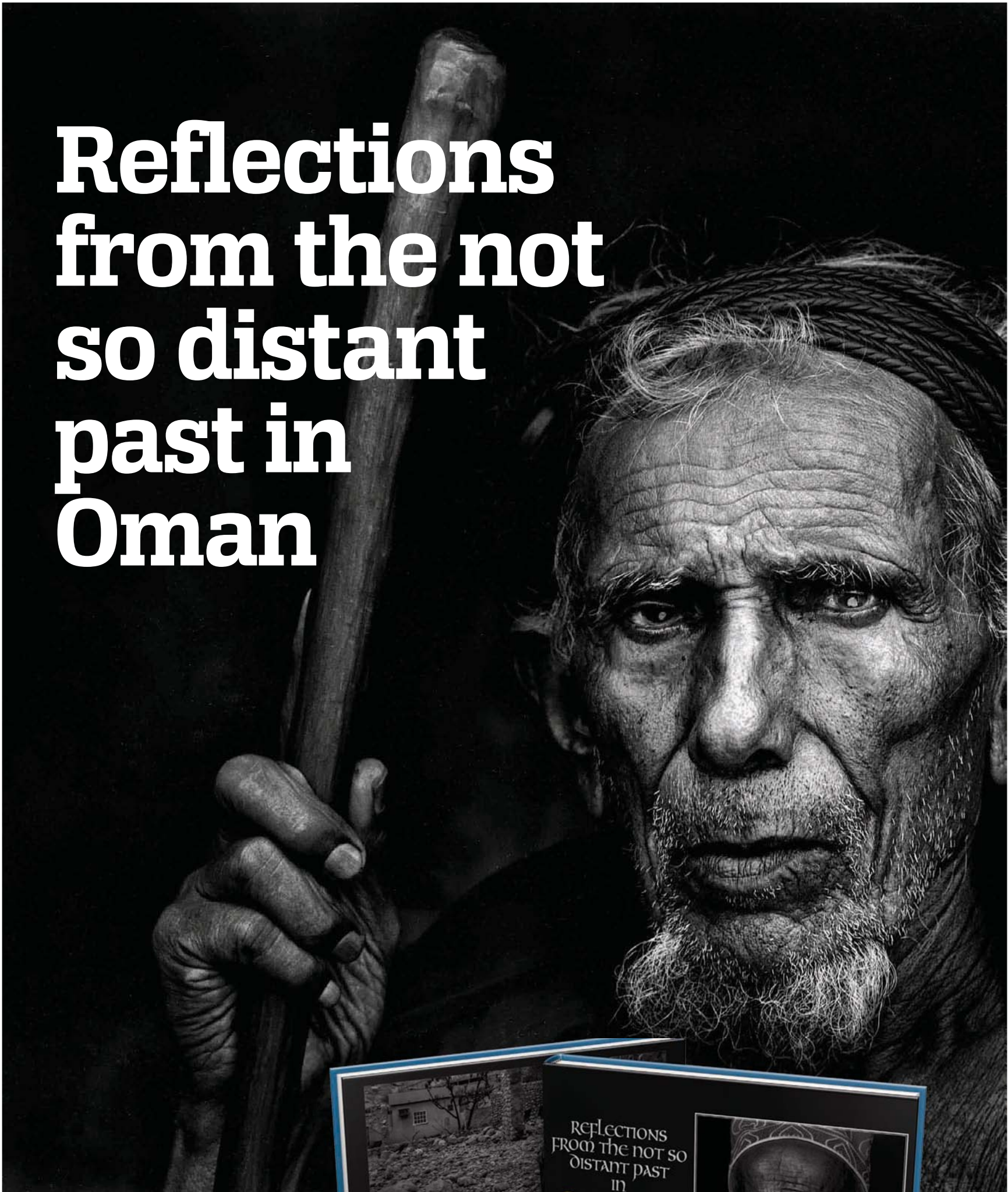
One of the agenda in the Oman Vision 2040 to extend support to women to become effective members of society, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth through the Photographic Society of Oman (PSO) is conducting a training programme for 13 Omani women on photography... **Story on P19**

LOCAL SCENE



AN ALL FLOWER-BEARING PARASITE PLANT OF THE DESERT

I was in one of my routine birding expedition, one fine evening in February, the coldest month and the best season to explore the deserts, especially Al Qabil, which is at the edge of the vast Wahiba Desert, located on the North-West of Oman... **Story on P20**



BY MAGGIE JEANS OBE

This two-volume set of books weighing in at 3 kg each is a tour de force. It is the work of Dr Eugene H Johnson who has travelled the globe over the last forty years capturing the lives of people not only in exquisite monochrome photographs but also in short narratives telling the story behind each portrait. Now he has turned his attention to Oman and has created a permanent oral history record of the lives of those born before Oman's Renaissance in 1970.

"As a young boy, Said's father had often told him about an old man who had prophesied that one day there would be boats made of steel that would fly in the sky and others that would move on the ground. He also told them that one day there would be small boxes from which sounds of men would come and others in which people would move about."

We now know that he was describing planes, cars, radios and televisions but at the time he was thought to be majnoon (mad).

The stories are poignant and many of them focus on the daily struggle for survival. The major preoccupation of many of these tales is finding enough to eat. This endless struggle is summed up in volume two with the story of a mother coaxing her hungry children to sleep by telling them that the meat was too tough so they should rest whilst she boiled stones which never became tender.

There are many similar accounts of extreme hardships. Life was about survival. Many men made long and difficult journeys by sea and land to neighbouring countries to find employment. "Work or starve were the only options," says one participant. Yet these people overcame adversity. There was a sense of community often lost in the modern world and many of those interviewed have lived to a ripe old age and are still active despite all the hardships they have endured.

"Work is love made visible," states one participant

There are also accounts of seafarers and fishermen, farmers and those who depended on livestock to eke out a living. In the mountains of Salalah some families lived in caves. "Life was not very different to that of the free-roaming animals, cattle and camels," comments one Jabali.

Although most of the subjects are men, there are also accounts of life by women. Early arranged marriages were common and their lives were preoccupied with collecting water, wood for cooking, as well as raising children and tending to animals.

Infant mortality was high, many children did not survive infancy and women frequently died in childbirth. Only traditional remedies were available, including branding with hot irons called wassim or firing.

Men frequently took more than one wife as described in this extract from the story of a seafaring man from Sur.

"His philosophy was that if he was going to stay in a place for more than 10 days then it was better to have a wife on site. "Over a lifetime he managed to marry five women from Sur, four from Jaalan and five from India. At times he had four wives at one time." "In total, his wives presented him with nine sons and nine daughters."

There are accounts of seafarers and fishermen, farmers and those who depended on livestock to eke out a living. The hardships of this period are etched in the faces of the subjects. The storytelling behind the portraits is the pièce de résistance of this project.

HM Sultan Qaboos freed all slaves and granted them citizenship when he came to power in 1970. They became masters of their own destiny.

Before this, their lives were full of cruelty including frequent whippings which took courage to survive.

In 2010 the United Nations ranked the Sultanate of Oman at the top of the list of 135 countries in the world in the rate of improvement in human development over the past 40 years. These stories precede this progress. Only now are the trials and tribulations of this Omani pre-Renaissance period becoming known. Many informants in the books comment on the importance of making today's youth aware of this recent history.

"What can the nation do to develop a sense of understanding of the recent past and not take progress for granted?" commented one of the subjects interviewed from the book.

With this in mind, a major exhibition of the portraits together with a series of workshops is being planned at the National Museum and a nation-wide project for Omani government schools focused on oral history is also under discussion. These newly published books will shortly be available from the National Museum Gift Shop.

HERITAGE

Passion for pigeons persists in Arab world



ATOP HIS HUMBLE wooden dovecote overlooking the majestic Giza pyramids, Abdel-Rahman Gamal released 20 homing pigeons sending them soaring up into the Cairo sky reddened by the setting sun.

"It's a lovely hobby that keeps you busy while you're at home and keeps you on the straight and narrow," said Gamal, 30, who has been raising pigeons since he was six.

He said he inherited his deep love for pigeons from his grandfather and uncle.

Along with his younger brother Omar, 28, they keep about 40 pigeons on the roof of their family building in Nazlet al Samman, in western Cairo.

Ahmed Khalifa, head of the Egyptian Federation for Homing Pigeons, said the ancient tradition dates back to the time of the pharaohs.

"Pigeons were engraved on the walls of temples," he said. Handed down through the generations, the practice of domesticating pigeons stretches across borders from the banks of the Nile across north Africa and beyond, with people not only training birds for competitions, but also serving them up as a dining delicacy.

SKY-HIGH PRIZES

Neither regional instability nor the Covid-19 pandemic have dampened enthusiasm for keeping the birds and popular pigeon races still draw crowds.

In war-torn Syria, the battered economy has forced some pigeon fanciers to sell their precious birds to make ends meet. Markets for breeders have sprung up in refugee camps in rebel-held northwestern Idlib, while races still attract ardent fans seeking a respite from the conflict, an AFP reporter said.

In Yemen where a six-year deadly civil war has left the country on the brink of famine, according to the UN, pigeon races were still being held last year. And in Iraq, where breeders were once viewed as immoral or unreliable, the practice has taken flight again in recent years.

At auction, racing pigeons can fetch from tens of dollars to several thousands for the most prized, and one Iraqi feathered friend was sold in recent years for an eye-popping \$180,000. The pandemic however has forced a temporary pause in competitions in Morocco.

"We hope that they come back this year," said Salaheddine Khannouss, deputy head of the kingdom's national organisation for pigeon racing.

Racing pigeons can reach speeds of up to 100 kilometres (60 miles) per hour and can cover distances of hundreds of kilometres, the Egyptian Federation's Khalifa said.

The body organises two major contests annually, with one race from Cairo to Salloum, near the Libyan border, a distance of about 600 kilometres, and a second from the capital to Aswan deep in Egypt's south — over 700 kilometres away.

'PIGEON WARS'

Dotted around the rooftops of Cairo's greying buildings are colourfully painted dovecones — known as gheya in Arabic — which provide huge shelters to house pigeon nests.

In daily ad-hoc contests involving thousands of birds launched from the rooftops, fanciers try to poach each other's pets to add to their own flock in a fierce competition which can net prizes of up to \$160,000.

Gamal's family mark their pigeons with rings attached to their feet carrying their date of birth, and his name and contact details.

"If a rogue pigeon flies down to me, it's mine. It's my hostage," Gamal said. In the coming days his rival fancier will try either to win back the lost pigeon or fork out a 'ransom' for it. Gamal said he pays between \$1 to \$65 for each of his birds, depending on their breed, their feather colour and their racing stamina.

Younger brother Omar prefers to focus on the competitive aspect of keeping birds.

"Pigeons are like soccer players when they enter the pitch and I'm their coach," he joked.

DELICIOUS GRILLED OR STUFFED

Others prefer a more culinary experience when it comes to pigeons, opting for stuffed or grilled choices served up in dishes from Morocco to the Gulf. In Egypt, rice or freek (a green grain made from wheat) is masterfully stuffed into the birds' diminutive bodies. At Farahat, one of the most popular Cairo chains specialising in pigeon fare, diners jostle for seats, with hungry male customers salivating over the tiny delight believed to possess other benefits.

"Since the dawn of time, Egyptians have believed that pigeons give them vigour for performing on their wedding night," said restaurant manager Khaled Ali mischievously.

But at 70 Egyptian pounds (\$4.50) it's an expensive treat "for those who do not have the means".

Regular customer Jordanian medical student Bashar al Malkawi said: "Eating stuffed pigeon is the best way to embrace Cairo." But Omar, the Cairo pigeon fancier, does not have the stomach for such notions.

"If you love pigeons, you can't eat them. They just won't taste any good," he declared. — AFP



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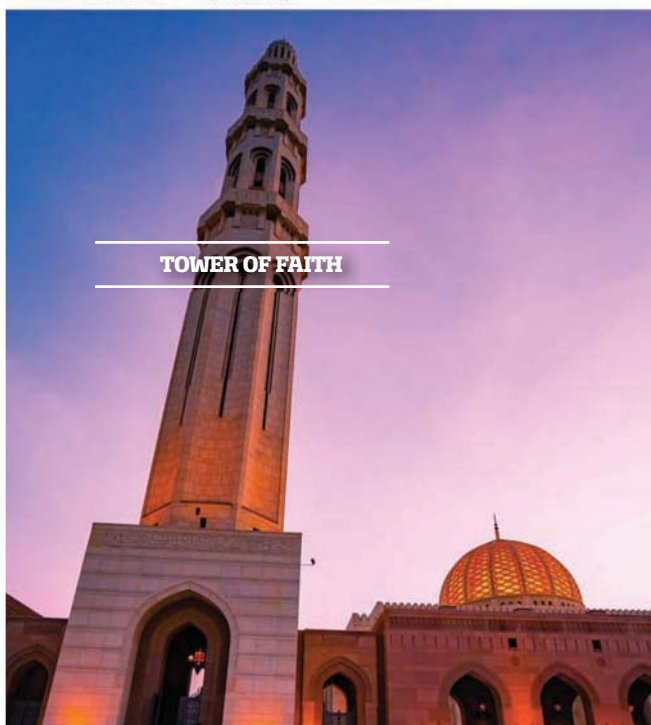
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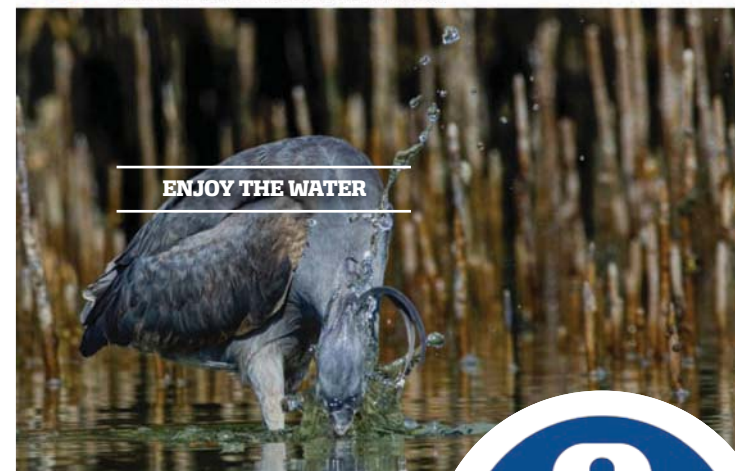
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Workshop to encourage female Omanis to dive into photography

ONE OF THE agenda in the Oman Vision 2040 to extend support to women to become effective members of society, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth through the Photographic Society of Oman (PSO) is conducting a training programme for 13 Omani women on photography.

Slated to happen on March 14 to 18, 2021, it will be conducted at the PSO headquarters in Al Seeb with the Ministry of Social Development through the Department of Family Development collaborating to ensure the proper learning of participants.



The programme will include workshops for female citizens on the basics of photography. They will also be trained in the most in-demand sectors like wedding and product photography.

The organisers hoped that at the end of these workshops, the participants will be able to open their own projects in the related field. This is a way of empowering them to establish their own small businesses that in the long run will not only benefit the citizens but the overall economy as well.

By conducting the training workshop, the attendees will now be able to professionally compete and cover gender-sensitive areas in photography like engagement shoots, weddings and family events. The government is keen on sponsoring those interested in photography emphasising the importance Omani women play in developing key areas in the country. Overall, these women will not only learn technical skills but will also be able to enhance their creativity.

Neanderthals disappeared from Europe earlier than thought, says study



NEANDERTHAL fossils from a cave in Belgium believed to belong to the last survivors of their species ever discovered in Europe are thousands of years older than once thought, a new study said on Monday.

Previous radiocarbon dating of the remains from the Spy Cave yielded ages as recent as approximately 24,000 years ago, but the new testing pushes the clock back to between 44,200 to 40,600 years ago.

The research appeared in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences and was carried out by a team from Belgium, Britain and Germany.

Co-lead author Thibaut Deviese from the University of Oxford and Aix-Marseille University said he and colleagues had developed a more robust method to prepare samples, which was better able to exclude contaminants.

Having a firm idea of when our closest human relatives disappeared is considered a key first step towards understanding more about their nature and capabilities, as well as why they eventually went extinct while our own ancestors prospered.

The new method still relies on radiocarbon dating, long considered the gold standard of archaeological dating, but refines the way specimens are collected.

All living things absorb carbon from the atmosphere and their food, including the radioactive form carbon-14, which decays over time.

Since plants and animals stop absorbing carbon-14 when they die, the amount that remains when they are dated tells us how long ago they lived.

When it comes to bones, scientists extract the part made up of collagen because it is organic.

"What we have done is to go one step further," said Deviese, since contamination from the burial environment or through glues used for museum work can spoil the sample.

Instead, the team looked for the building blocks of collagen, molecules called amino acids, and in particular selected specific single amino acids

they could be sure were part of the collagen.

- 'RELIABLE FRAMEWORK' -

The authors also dated Neanderthal specimens from two additional Belgian sites, Fonds-de-Forêt and Engis, finding comparable ages.

"Dating all these Belgian specimens was very exciting as they played a major role in the understanding and the definition of Neanderthals," said co-lead author Gregory Abrams, of the Scladina Cave Archaeological Centre in Belgium.

"Almost two centuries after the discovery of the Neanderthal child of Engis, we were able to provide a reliable age."

Genetic sequencing was meanwhile able to show that a Neanderthal shoulder bone previously dated at 28,000 years ago was heavily contaminated with bovine DNA, suggesting the bone had been preserved with a glue made from cattle bones.

"Dating is crucial in archaeology. Without a reliable framework of chronology we can't really be confident in understanding the relationships between Neanderthals and Homo sapiens," added co-author Tom Higham of the University of Oxford.

Certain stone tool use has been attributed to Neanderthals and has been interpreted as a sign of their cognitive evolution, said Deviese.

But if the timeline for Neanderthals' existence is being pushed back, Deviese added, then Paleolithic industries should be re-examined to determine if they really were the work of the extinct hominid species. — **AFP**



Marriott's head honcho for the Middle East retires

MARRIOTT International announced on March 10 that after 35 incredible years with the company, Guido De Wilde, Chief Operating Officer for the Middle East, has decided to retire from the company at the end of June.

Satya Anand, President EMEA, Marriott International, said, "Guido has delivered so much over the past three decades — he's been instrumental in growing the Middle East region, but more importantly, has been responsible for the career development of so many associates across the globe. I can't thank him enough for his dedication, drive and commitment to Marriott International."

De Wilde has had a fantastic career in the hospitality business. He started with ITT Sheraton in 1983 and has since held various management positions in Bahrain, Morocco, Germany, Belgium and Portugal. Guido was the Area Manager for Starwood in Portugal and General Manager of the prestigious Pine Cliffs Resorts which operates under the Luxury Collection brand, before moving to the Middle East with Starwood in January 2006 where he held the position of Senior Vice-President, Regional Director.

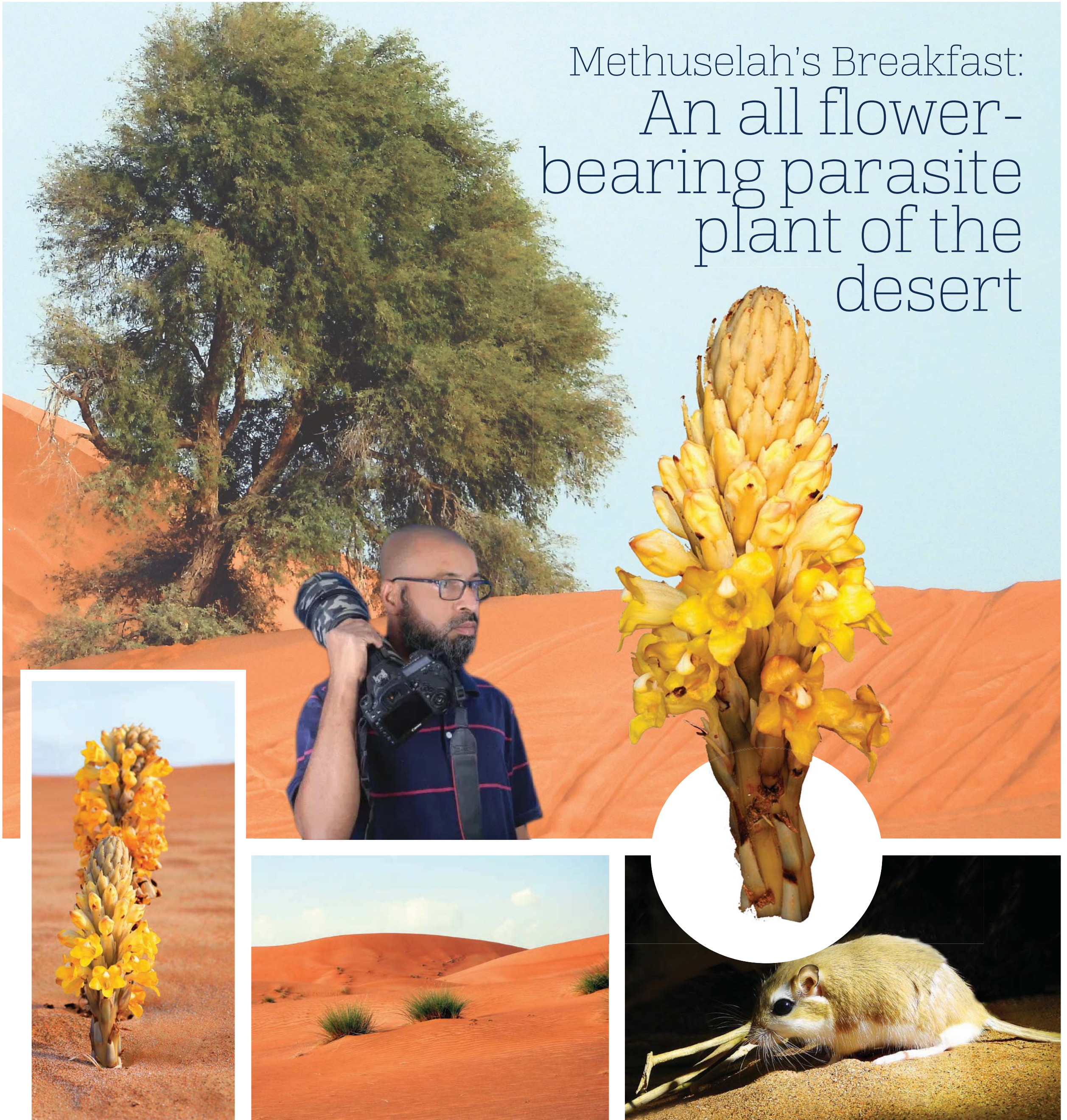
De Wilde joined Marriott at the time of the Starwood acquisition in September 2016 as Chief Operating Officer for the Middle East. He played a pivotal role during the integration and has had responsibility for over 146 hotels across 10 countries.

Anand concluded, "There is no doubt that I will miss having Guido as part of my leadership team and the support and counsel he has provided me. However, I am excited for him as he steps into the next chapter of his life."

The company aims to announce De Wilde's replacement in the coming weeks.



Methuselah's Breakfast: An all flower- bearing parasite plant of the desert



TEXT & PHOTOS BY DR SS SURESH

I was in one of my routine birding expedition, one fine evening in February, the coldest month and the best season to explore the deserts, especially Al Qabil, which is at the edge of the vast Wahiba Desert, located on the North-West of Oman. I started this routine with a specific target – to capture in photos the Thick-knee bird (Karwan in Arabic), a bird with long legs and bulging eyes, as recommended by one of my Omani colleagues who had spotted it a week before. My long hours of search in the vast sandy planes and dunes were disappointing, as there was no trace of the bird. Nevertheless, I was engrossed in the extremely alluring and overwhelming beauty of the vast golden sands and dunes around me and the clear blue

ish sky with flying silver clouds above my head. Suddenly, a golden yellow flower protruding out of the sands grabbed my attention. I knelt to take a closer look at the stunning bright yellow desert flora. The sight of it was startling and it mesmerised me. Desert Hyacinth (Cistanche tubulosa) also known as fox radish or Ginseng of the desert (Thanoon in Arabic) is a parasitic desert shrub. This plant lacks chlorophyll, as it has no green colouration. It gets its nutrients from host plants, through a tiny root that extends for several metres from the underground tuber. Only the inflorescence of the plant grows above the ground from December to March, with a colourful dense pyramid of funnel-shaped bright yellow flowers. Its fruits have lots of fine seeds, but they remain dormant for years until the favourable conditions to ger-

minate occur. This exemplifies the interdependence of nature, where organisms interact with each other for all to survive. This plant requires severe environmental conditions to grow with large temperature differences, intense sunshine and receiving as little as 20 cm of rainfall in a year. The Chinese knew the medicinal properties of this plant and they had used it in many of their indigenous treatment methods for over 2000 years. As reported, its cultivation in China has increased recently. Due to its great medicinal properties, floral extracts of this flower are used as medical remedy for chronic renal disease, female infertility and erectile dysfunction. The traditional Chinese medicine system describes this plant as the Ginseng of the Desert. The products made from this plant are indexed in Chinese Pharmacopeia as they

have medical properties and the presence of multiple chemical constituents. Empirical pieces of evidence support that the extract of the plant significantly improves human cognitive ability, particularly to store and recall memory. They also have a positive effect on male hormone production and thereby enhances male fertility. Furthermore, an article in the Frontiers of Pharmacology substantiates the antioxidant, neuroprotective and anti-ageing properties of this plant. The active ingredient of this plant has three main biological functions and they help to improve brain functions, increase immune-boosting and have an aphrodisiac effect. In certain parts of Africa, the tuber is often dried into a powder and taken along with camel's milk. It is reported that regular consumption of these plant products in certain regions of China and Japan has been the reason for longevity and hence

they are also called Methuselah's breakfast for its use in increasing longevity amongst traditional medicine practitioners. Methuselah is the (grandfather of Noah), the longest-lived human on planet earth, that is, 969 years as per the Holy Bible. Hence, anything that increases longevity is synonymised with this biblical character. Desert hyacinth is facing existential threats due to over-exploitation for its medicinal properties causing its extinction in near future. Concerted efforts of environmentalists and concerned authorities are the need of the hour to protect and preserve this astounding beauty of the desert, for generations to come.

Dr Suresh is a Senior Consultant & Head of Orthopaedics, Ibri Regional Referral Hospital. He's an avid photographer outside of his regular job.