

### Iran nuclear deal parties eye US return to accord

The remaining parties to the ailing 2015 Iran nuclear deal said on Monday that they were preparing for the possible return of the US to the pact as President-elect Joe Biden readies to take office next month. Biden, who takes office on January 20, has signalled Washington would rejoin the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action that was aimed at limiting Iran's nuclear programme. **DETAILS ON P6**



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OMAN OBSERVER

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OMAN'S  
STAR ACT  
ON TRACK



P15

AFTER 2020,  
IRAQ EYES MORE  
ECONOMIC PAIN



P18

INSPIRED BY  
NATURE, COLOUR  
AND EMOTION



#### MUSCAT

##### EXPAT WORKFORCE FALLS BY 16.3PC

MUSCAT: The number of expatriate workforce in the Sultanate declined by 16.3 per cent to 1.440 million by the end of November this year compared with 1.712 million at the end of 2019, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). This may be due to the grace period and exemption from fines the Ministry of Labour has granted to expat workers who are willing to leave the country forever. According to the latest data released by NCSI, the majority of expat workers are centred in basic and assistant engineering professions which account for 572,000 workers, service jobs (418,000), food and chemical industries (99,000), agriculture and livestock breeding (79,000).

**DETAILS ON P2**

##### 7,391 APPLY FOR POWER SUBSIDY

MUSCAT: The number of registered consumers for electricity subsidy under the National Subsidy System (NSS) that started on Sunday was 7,391 till 2:30 pm on Monday. Under the electricity and water subsidy system, eligible Omanis, who hold a valid electricity account, get subsidy over the use of the services. The categories covered by the subsidy include, less than RO 500 family income regardless of the number of family members; family income is RO 750 or less and the number of family members is five or more; the income is RO 1,000 or less and the number of members is seven or more; the income is RO 1,250 and the number of members is nine or more. **DETAILS ON P2**



#### INSIDE



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#### HM INVITED FOR GAS SUMMIT



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik has received a written message from Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, inviting His Majesty to attend the 6th Gas Summit of Heads of State and Government of Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF). The message was received by HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tarik al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, when he received at his office on Monday Shaikh Jassim bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Qatari Ambassador to the Sultanate. During the meeting, the two sides reviewed the relations between the two brotherly countries and means of enhancing them in various fields. **SEE ALSO P2**

## Agreement signed to develop and operate Duqm Fishing Harbour

ALDUQM: The Special Economic Zone Authority of Duqm (SEZAD) on Monday signed an agreement with an alliance led by Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority, for the development, management and operation of the multi-purpose fishing harbour in Duqm.

Also, FDO signed a land usufruct agreement for the fishing port with Al Wusta Fisheries Industries.

With an 8-km area and 10-metre depth, the fishing port is expected to be fully operational in the first quarter of 2021 at a cost of RO 63 million. The port will be able to receive large fishing and food ships.

The fishing port's location is distinguished by its proximity

The port, to be built at cost of RO 63 million, will be able to receive large fishing and food ships and will be fully operational in the first quarter of 2021

to a 7-km food industries zone that was designated to supplying the basic requirements of food industries in the area.

The signing ceremony was held under the auspices of Dr Saud bin Hamoud al Habsi, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The agreement for the development, management and operation of the fishing port in

Duqm was signed by Yahya bin Khamis al Zadjali, in-charge of managing operations of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm. The land usufruct agreement was signed by Dawood bin Sulaiman al Wahaibi, CEO of Al Wusta Fisheries Industries, while FDO was represented in the signing by Khalid bin Ali al Yahmadi, CEO.

Yahya bin Khamis al Zadjali, in-charge of managing operations of the Special Economic Zone at Duqm, said the signing of the two agreements comes within the framework of SEZAD's strategy to draw local and foreign investments who seek to benefit from the modern infrastructure, excellent investment climate and the encouraging incentives offered by SEZAD. — ONA

**PHOTO ON P4**

## Sultanate closes borders



### DECISION EXEMPTS CARGO AIRCRAFT, SHIPS AND TRUCKS

VINOD NAIR

@vinot\_nair

The Supreme Committee tasked with tackling developments resulting from coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic studied announcements made by authorities in different countries around the world about the emergence of a new COVID-19 variant and measures taken to protect individuals and societies from the fierce virus attack and fast propagation.

The meeting was held under the chairmanship of Sayyid Hamoud bin Faisal al Busaidy, Minister of Interior.

The Supreme Committee decided to prohibit entry to and exit from the Sultanate via all border outlets with effect from 1 am from Tuesday

(December 22 for a period of one week.)

The decision exempts cargo aircraft, ships and trucks. The committee will continue monitoring the epidemiological situation of the new COVID-19 virus strain and will take appropriate decisions accordingly.

Such decisions come as part of the ongoing convening of the Supreme Committee and they stem from the panel's role in protecting individuals and society from the spread of the virus.

Earlier, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) said it is in constant contact with the Ministry of Health and other relevant authorities to discuss developments in the matter.

#### STAY HOME

The Cultural Attaché Office in London has urged Omani students not to leave homes except for necessity, due to the spread of a new coronavirus variant.

**TURN TO P4**

### First batch of vaccines arrives on Thursday

The first batch of COVID-19 vaccines will arrive in Oman on Thursday, the government has confirmed.

The vaccines, which are manufactured by Pfizer-BioNTech will be delivered in two doses, separated by 21 days.

The announcement on Tuesday coincides with the fact that the number of deaths and new cases continues to remain stable over the past few weeks.

Only four people were hospitalised during the past 24 hours, taking the total number of in-patients in hospitals to under 100 at 95, including 40 in Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

The Ministry of Health reported one COVID-19-related death, taking the total death toll to 1,489.

The ministry will announce the list of vaccination centres in the next few days.

**TURN TO P4**



PHOTO BY AMIN AL GHAZALI

## Jupiter and Saturn make 'Great Conjunction'

ZAINAB AL NASSRI

@zainabalnasseri

The 'Great Conjunction' of two planets — Jupiter and Saturn — took place on Monday night. The conjunction happens when the two large planets pair when they have the same right ascension or celestial longitude.

According to Abdulwahab al Busaidy, Member of the Oman Astronomical Society, this phenomenon is rare and will only happen again after 60 years. "It is a very beautiful view to watch. From 5 pm on Monday, the great conjunction appeared clearly in the sky on the western or south-western side in the Sultanate," he said. The phenomenon was easily visible around the world a little after the sunset.

**TURN TO P4**

#### WEATHER

MUSCAT: Max 26°C Min 17°C SALALAH: Max 29°C Min 23°C NIZWA: Max 27°C Min 14°C

#### PRAYER TIMINGS

SUNRISE: 06:45 FAJR: 05:24 DHUHR: 12:10 ASR: 15:11 MAGHRIB: 17:31 ISHA: 18:47

# Expat workforce falls by 16.3%

SHAMSA AL RIYAMIYAH  
MUSCAT, DEC 21

The number of expatriate workforce in the Sultanate declined by 16.3 per cent to 1.440 million by the end of November this year compared with 1.712 million at the end of 2019, according to data released by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). This may be due to a grace period and exemption from fines the Ministry of Labour granted to expat workers who are willing to leave the country forever.

According to the latest data released by NCSI, the majority of expat workers are centred in basic and assistant engineering professions which account for 572,000 workers, service jobs (418,000), food and chemical industries (99,000), agriculture and livestock breeding (79,000).

Data shows that the private sec-

tor employs 1.145 million expats whilst the family sector and the public sector employ 252,000 and 42,000 expats, respectively.

Of the total expat workforce number, 2,371 are holders of PhD, 4,284 have master's degree, 3,363 with higher diploma, 68,000 with bachelor's degree, 41,000 with diploma, 190,000 with secondary school certification, 460,000 with pre-primary education, 160,000 with primary education while 28,473 are literate.

The majority of expat workforce in the Sultanate are Bangladeshi nationals with 552,000 followed by Indians (491,000) Pakistanis (181,000) and Filipinos (44,000).

Muscat Governorate is home to the majority of expat workforce with 604,000 followed by North Al Batinah with 203,000, Dhofar (164,000) and Al Dakhiliyah Governorate (95,000).



## ■ HM RECEIVES INVITE FROM EMIR OF QATAR



His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq received a written message from Shaikh Tamim bin Hamad al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, inviting His Majesty to attend the 6th Gas Summit of Heads of State and Government of Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF). The message was received by HH Sayyid Asaad bin Tariq al Said, Deputy Prime Minister for International Relations and Cooperation Affairs, Special Representative of His Majesty the Sultan, when he received Shaikh Jassim bin Abdulrahman al Thani, Qatari Ambassador to the Sultanate, in his office on Monday. During the meeting, they reviewed the relations between the two brotherly countries and means of enhancing them in various fields. – **ONA**

## Workshop held for new nurses

MUSCAT: A workshop on documentation was held at the Sultan Qaboos Hospital in which new nurses were familiarised with the hospital documentation process and other necessary office procedures. Among the participants were 36 new nurses who graduated from the Oman College of Health Sciences, Dhofar Governorate branch.

# Over 7000, applications for electricity subsidy

ZAINAB AL NASSRI  
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Those eligible for the subsidy include those who earn less than RO 500 family income regardless of the number of family members; RO 750 or less and the number of family members is five or more; the income is RO 1, 000 or less and the number of members is seven or more; the income is less than RO 1,250 and the number of

**At present subsidy facility on fuel and electricity is available. For water it is likely to be launched on a later date**

members is nine or more.

But if the income is more than 1,250, the family is not covered by the support, regardless of the number of family members.

The NSS provides the eligible people with a protective cover against the increase in related regular expenditure streams such as fuel, electricity and water.

At present subsidy facility on fuel and electricity is available. For water it is likely to be launched on a later date. The total number of

applications in the NSS stood at 362,512 till Monday afternoon.

There is a rush for subsidy among the eligible families after the Council of Ministers approved on Sunday new tariffs on electricity and water services. The subsidy is to be lifted in a phased manner in five years.

A statement from the Ministry of Finance indicated that the measures on electricity and water tariff were ambitious initiatives of the medium-term fiscal balance plan (2021-2025) to enhance the efficiency and sustainability of the two sectors, raising the efficiency of government spending, establishing financial sustainability rules, and linking it to the social protection system keeping in mind to support the entitled families.

## ■ STONE LAID FOR ARAB OPEN UNIVERSITY BUILDING



Dr Rahma bint Ibrahim al Mahrouqiyah, Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, laid the foundation stone for the construction of the Arab Open University (AOU) building in Muscat on Monday. In her statement, the minister said, "The availability of an educational environment conducive to learning and stimulating creativity and innovation has an active role in improving the educational process, developing programmes and services, and attracting students to study at the educational institution locally and internationally."

# Omani entrepreneurs, their role in shaping this nation, and talabat's commitment to support and help them thrive

Back in 1993, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said spoke on the potential the youth has in store for our beloved nation, highlighting the central role that they will have in the future and growth of the Sultanate. His words marked the country and the years to come, as he stated that "It is equally important that we appeal to young people to realize their great role in building the nation in various fields. And to strive for a greater and happier life that can be achieved only with effort and race and overcome all difficulties that may obstruct the way or obstruct the march". Many years later, the nation has gone through tremendous strides on that very vision - where the youth continued to play a critical role in turning aspirational ideas into reality.

His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, also shared the same vision, putting a constant emphasis on the value of youth in building the nation. In his second speech to the people of Oman, His Majesty added: "Youth are the wealth of a nation, its inexhaustible resource and the arms that build it. They are its present and future. We will always listen to them, and sense their needs, interests and aspirations which will definitely be accorded the attention that they deserve". This constant drive and encouragement towards the citizens of the Sultanate has resulted in a number of businesses and concepts that were both introduced and managed by those successful Omani entrepreneurs - including those in the F&B sector.

Supporting local F&B businesses thrive in Oman, talabat has seen impressive success stories worth celebrating. Those entrepreneurs have thrived and survived and even grew their businesses throughout the year and during the hardest times that 2020 faced. Khalood Al Bakri and Hudhaifa Al Maymani are perfect examples of hard work and success, while celebrating and sharing their Omani-based treats.

When it comes to authenticity, the journey of Cake Creations embodies it. Khalood Al Bakri started as a home business where she enjoyed making desserts and snacks, producing home-made treats for her customers. Since her journey started, Khalood has thrived and opened two branches; one in Al Khoud and the other one in Maabala.

Sharing her journey, Khalood says: "I've been preparing desserts for a long while to those around me, and have decided to share them to those who've heard of me through friends. A big part of my growth has been through talabat, which helped me reach a much larger audience in a number of locations across Oman."

"Ever since I considered partnering with a food aggregator, I've seen my business grow tremendously as it helped us meet new customers from different locations" Khalood said.

Since its launch in the Sultanate, talabat has seen more Oman-based concepts entering the F&B industry. This allowed the platform to witness the fast growth of the Oman-based concepts as they come to life, supporting them as a partner, and being a part of their successful stories.

This has also been the case with one of the leading Omani bakeries, Dice. Hudhaifa Al Maymani, a young Omani entrepreneur who introduced Dice as a doughnut house serving a selection of desserts that delivers across Bawshar, Ghubrah and Al Khuwair. The concept of Dice is to provide the Omani market with a unique experience paired with a specific local taste that will diversify desserts. While visiting Dice, customers will be able to enjoy their favorite donuts with a twist on local taste and flavors.

They also put an emphasis on uplifting their marketing strategy through different concepts and platforms, and their presence on talabat since 2018 has been an example of it. Their partnership with talabat began with 500 orders a month, and made a significant rise in two years. Hudhaifa states that Dice "currently has set projections high and we - as a brand - are confident to achieve our target by the end of Q4. Dice is set to expand locally and soon to open in Mabbela, and in several new countries such as the UAE, Qatar, and Egypt."

"Growing a start-up business can be quite a challenge and having the right partner is always the key. Dice's talabat Key Account Manager, Islam Omran, has been a major player in the rapid growth of Dice in Oman with his full support, dedication, and management from day one" Hudhaifa proudly adds. "His expertise and professionalism are important factors as a representative of talabat, and have managed to gain the trust and confidence of partners like us."

Omani entrepreneurs, like Hudhaifa Al Maymani and Khalood Al Bakri, are the heart of the nation, and highlight the very important fact that the youth is the future of the Sultanate, especially the F&B industry. The home-grown businesses bring a taste of home to individuals, friends and families, and talabat is very proud to have inspiring stories as part of their platform and to be able to grow together.

## In brief

## ■ MUSCAT

SULTANATE TAKES  
PART IN ARAB MEET

The Sultanate, represented by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning, on Monday took part in the 37th meeting of the Council of Arab Housing and Construction Ministers held via videoconferencing from Tunisia. The meeting was chaired by Dr Khalfan bin Said al Shueili, Minister of Housing and Urban Planning. The meeting discussed the Arab Housing Day and the Award of the Council of Arab Ministers of Housing and Construction. The meeting also touched on experiences of Arab countries in social housing, methods of real estate financing, legislations and laws regulating the housing and construction sector, and the importance of supporting the construction sector.

SAI PARTICIPATES  
IN CORRUPTION  
CONTROL MEET

The State's Financial and Administrative Audit Institution (SAI) on Monday took part in the 4th meeting of governmental experts and representatives of independent authorities of countries that are party to Arab Convention Against Corruption (CAC). The meeting held via videoconferencing, discussed various topics on the agenda, including review of national legislations and best practices in the field of protection against crime and a mechanism to form a technical team to follow up the ideal implementation of the CAC. The Sultanate ratified the CAC under Royal Decree No 28/2014.

CULTURAL MEET ON  
AHMAD IBN MAJID

The History Committee in the Omani Society for Writers and Literates (OSWL) will organise online a cultural evening entitled "Science of the Sea and the Art of Navigation between Urjuza (A poem written in Rajaz meter) and the Tempest — Shihab Al Din Ahmad ibn Majid." The evening will be presented tonight by Dr Bassam al Khatib, Ambassador of Syria to the Sultanate.

The evening, to be moderated by Dr Salim al Hinai, Head of the History Committee at OSWL, will include an introduction to the Arab-Muslim traveller and seafarer Shihab Al Din Ahmad ibn Majid.

OVER 1.5M VEHICLES  
REGISTERED TILL NOV

The total number of vehicles registered in the Sultanate in November 2020 reached 1.55 million, according to a recent update from the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI). Private vehicles topped the list of total vehicles registered at the end of November 2020 with 78.4 per cent followed by commercial vehicles (15.4 per cent), taxis 1.9 (per cent) and rental vehicles (1.6 per cent).

## ■ FOREIGN MINISTER MEETS GCC SECRETARY-GENERAL



**RIYADH:** Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister today met Dr Nayef Falah al Hajraf, GCC Secretary-General. The meeting touched on the GCC march. It also exchanged consultations on several GCC action fields. They also expressed their joint support to all that would upgrade the GCC towards broader horizons. — ONA



Sayyid Badr bin Hamad al Busaidy, Foreign Minister met Prince Faisal bin Farhan, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, in Riyadh on Monday. During the meeting, held at the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they underlined the depth of fraternal relations between the two countries. They also stressed the joint keenness to sustain cooperation in various fields to achieve mutual benefits. They affirmed their support for the joint action march within the GCC framework. They also exchanged views on several issues and latest developments. — ONA

## Domestic and cargo flights will continue

## STAFF REPORTER

MUSCAT, DEC 21

In line with the directives of the Civil Aviation Authority, Oman Air will suspend all international passenger flights to and from Muscat from December 22 for a period of one week. Domestic and cargo flights will continue operating as per the schedule.

Travellers with Oman Air reservations are told to contact the contact centre and company representatives in various countries.

SalamAir also announced that domestic and cargo flights will continue as usual. Meanwhile, Mwasalat has suspended bus two routes operating from Muscat International Airport for one week.

Oman resumed international flights on October 1. Citizens and residents have been allowed to travel since then. Anyone entering Oman needs to observe a 14-day quarantine at home or in a hotel. All foreign citizens are required to be health-insured.

Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport offer passengers the choice to undergo a PCR



test and boost early detection and containment of the virus, in accordance with the health safety protocols and measures set by the competent authorities to ensure the safety and health of passengers, cabin crews, employees, and all individuals who utilise the airports.

According to the requirements set by the Ministry of Health and the Civil Aviation Authority, a mandatory PCR test at the expenses of the traveller is required

when entering the Sultanate. PCR tests will have to be pre-booked on Tarassud+ mobile application. The application serves to gather all relevant passenger details and gives the users secure and easy access to pay for their PCR tests online, with the price per test set at RO 25. By downloading the app and registering for their test online, passengers can significantly reduce waiting time at the test facilities at the airport.

If the tests findings are nega-

tive, passengers staying less than 7 days will continue their stay in the Sultanate normally and follow the guidelines of the Ministry of Health according to the adopted medical protocols.

## WRISTBAND

Passengers staying more than 7 days are required to wear a wristband and follow a 14-day quarantine. If the tests are positive, the passengers will have to abide by the self-isolation restrictions.

In addition, Oman Airports stated that drive-through PCR testing facilities have been installed at Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport to facilitate sample collection. Tests will have to be pre-booked via Tarassud+ app with test findings to be communicated within 24 hours through the same app. The price set for the drive-through PCR tests is OMR 19.

In addition to enhanced COVID-19 testing, Oman Airports is also ensuring observance of preventive measures and health controls, including mandatory wearing of masks in public, installing thermal cameras to identify persons with elevated body temperature, setting up hand sanitising and handwashing stations and applying social distancing within the terminals.

The airport testing facilities at Muscat International Airport and Salalah Airport will help maintain safe airport environment and stem the spread of the virus, as Oman Airports is getting ready to resume airport operations and receive scheduled flights.

## ■ EXPO ON COVID-19 THEME BEGINS



An art exhibition was opened under the auspices of Ali bin Khalfan al Jabri, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Information, at the Cultural Club, on Sunday. Titled 'steadfast despite the danger', the exhibition showcases 15 synthetic artworks featuring COVID-19 related themes. The exhibition will be open till January 7 from 10 am to 12 noon, and from 5 pm to 8 pm.

Photos by Khalfan al Ruzaiki



## Sultanate, Russia discuss bilateral ties



A video-conferencing was held on Monday between Shaikh Khalifa bin Ali al Harthy, Under-Secretary of the Foreign Ministry for Diplomatic Affairs, and Mikhail Bogdanov, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation. The meeting discussed the relations between the two friendly countries and means of enhancing them to serve the joint interests, besides exchanging views on the regional and international issues. — ONA

## AGREEMENT SIGNED FOR DUQM FISHING HARBOUR



The Special Economic Zone Authority of Duqm (SEZAD) on Monday signed an agreement with an alliance led by Fisheries Development Oman (FDO), an affiliate of Oman Investment Authority, for the development, management and operation of the multi-purpose fishing port in Duqm. — ONA

## Sultanate closes borders for one week

FROM PAGE 1  
Several countries have suspended flights from the UK after the British Health Minister Matt Hancock confirmed that the situation has gone out of control. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have also announced the closure of all ports and suspended all commercial flights until January 1, 2021.

Citizens and residents who arrived in Kuwait from the European Union and the United Kingdom between December 11-21 are required to carry out a PCR test on the fifth and tenth days since arrival. Saudi Arabia also suspended all international commercial flights for a week, while Emirates and Etihad have not changed their operations to the UK even though new curbs were announced for London.

## First batch of vaccines to arrive tomorrow

FROM PAGE 1  
Badr bin Saif al Rawahi, Director, Department of Infectious Diseases Control, said that a detailed national plan for vaccination has been prepared to distribute the vaccine and train health workers in all governorates of the Sultanate. “The vaccines are generally effective, especially from the past success in the elimination of epidemics such as smallpox and polio.” He said that the ministry has prepared a strategy for vaccination to cover 60 per cent of the population, which will be divided into different phases. Around 20 per cent of the



targeted group will be covered in the first phase due to the limited supply initially. “The target groups in the first stage are the groups most vulnerable to disease, including frontline workers and those with chronic diseases — the elderly, diabetics, people with chronic lung disease, kidney failures, and workers in intensive care departments for COVID-19 patients.” He said that there is a race to manufacture the vaccine due to the great demand, as some companies have reached advanced stages of clinical trials and others have obtained international approvals for

emergency use. Al Rawahi said that the Sultanate sought to create consultative channels with several scientific institutions and international organisations, as well as through direct negotiations with several companies. “Luckily, Oman was among the first countries to obtain the vaccine in 2020 itself.” The ministry has reported 648 new cases of COVID-19 on Monday, bringing the total number of cases registered in the Sultanate to 127,931. The total recoveries have reached 119,745, which is 93.6 per cent of the total cases reported so far.

## Jupiter and Saturn make ‘Great Conjunction’

FROM PAGE 1  
Neighbours Jupiter and Saturn pass their respective laps around the sun every 20 years. But, on Monday, Jupiter and Saturn were just one-tenth of a degree apart from our perspective or about one-fifth the width of a full moon. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (Nasa) said it’s been nearly 400 years since the planets passed this close to each other in the sky, and nearly 800 years since the alignment of Saturn and Jupiter occurred at night, as it happened for 2020, allowing nearly everyone around the world to witness this great conjunction. At the same time, another astronomical incident took place on December 21 which is the winter solstice. “This is a coincidence. Winter solstice is an annual event which coincidentally happened this year at the same time with the great conjunction. It is the day with

the shortest period of daylight and longest night of the year when the sun is at its lowest daily maximum elevation in the sky,” Al Busaidy added. According to astronomers, in this December solstice, Earth was positioned in its orbit so that the sun stayed below the North Pole horizon. As seen from degrees south of the equator, at the imaginary line encircling the globe known as the Tropic of Capricorn, the sun shined directly overhead at noon. This is as far south as the sun ever got. All locations south of the equator had day lengths greater than 12 hours at the December solstice. Meanwhile, all locations north of the equator had day lengths of less than 12 hours. For us, on the northern part of Earth, the shortest day comes at the solstice. After the winter solstice, the days get longer, and the nights shorter. It’s a seasonal shift that nearly everyone notices.

## All-new Mid-engine 2020 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray: Now in Oman

The 2020 Corvette Stingray with an all-new LT2 V8 engine can reach 100km/h from standstill in mere three seconds – that’s supercar performance of the most powerful Corvette in history

The All-new mid-engine 2020 Corvette Stingray was launched recently in Oman by Salim Saad Bahwan, Mohamed Saad Bahwan, Directors and Sudhir M, CEO of OTE Group in the presence of ardent Corvette fans. The 2020 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray is the culmination of over 60 years of evolution, ever since the first Corvette in the year 1953. Over the years and seven generations past, the eighth generation Corvette marks a radical leap forward in terms of capability.

The 2020 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray has altered the landscape when it comes to performance cars. With an unprecedented mid-engine layout and a substantial 495hp, as well as the exceptional value it provides, the 2020 Corvette Stingray delivers super car performance. The new location of the engine is truly the focal point for the car’s design. It’s the heart of this next generation Corvette and it sits like a jewel in a showcase, visible through the large rear hatch window. The added attention to detail optimized the appearance of every wire, tube, bolt and fastener.

### The first Corvette with Mid-Engine:

The biggest change in the 2020 Corvette Stingray is the engine layout: this is the first Corvette ever to sport a mid-engine configuration. Apart from the stunning exterior design that it affords, there are several benefits to this new approach.

The 2020 Corvette Stingray is largely being hailed as an everyday super car. The all-new LT2 V8 engine, which is visible through a rear hatch window, enables the driver to hit 100km/h from standstill in mere three seconds – that’s supercar performance. In fact, even in its base form, this is the most powerful Corvette in history.

Mid-engine Corvette is indeed a dream-come-true of Corvette’s creator Zora Arkus-Duntov, also considered as the father of Corvette. Duntov became Corvette’s first true chief engineer and pursued the mid-engine layout through various concepts and saw the mid-engine layout with the engine located ahead of the rear axle as the optimal configuration for weight distribution, excellent handling and forward visibility. Despite the layout’s innate performance benefits, its implementation in the scheme of mass manufacturing proved problematic. The previous mid-engine Corvettes were relegated to concept status by issues including engine cooling difficulties, limited passenger and luggage space, loudness and the inability to produce a convertible variant.



Advances in development, aided by computer-assisted engineering and virtual reality, helped the current Corvette team carefully plot out the 2020 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray’s architecture. Engineers worked closely with designers to ensure that the vehicle’s form met all of the necessary performance benchmarks, while preserving the Corvette legacy.

Mid-engine was always part of Corvette’s destiny. The 2020 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray pays off the vision of thousands of people who came before it and lives up to Corvette’s core fundamentals of performance, functionality and attainability.

### Form with function:

The mid-engine layout of the new Corvette enabled designers to chart new course when it comes to exterior design. The 2020 Stingray’s exterior has a bold, futuristic expression with mid-engine exotic proportions, but it is still unmistakably Corvette. It’s lean and muscular, with an athletic sculptural shape conveying a sense of motion and power from every angle. The short front and extended rear delivers performance intent. The several air intakes, while serving an aerodynamic purpose, also add to the visual appeal of the 2020 Corvette

Stingray. For instance, door handles and the hatch and hood releases have been hidden for a sleek appearance and improved aerodynamics to boost performance.

### Dynamics are key:

Every super car must be able to deliver when it comes to dynamics. The 2020 Corvette Stingray does, and more. To ensure that the Stingray performs as well around corners as it does in a straight line, Chevrolet engineers paid special attention to ride and handling. It boasts Magnetic Ride Control that can read the surface of the road and can adjust damping accordingly. This means that the ride quality can be stiff during hard driving and supple while cruising, without any intervention from the driver. All in all, it’s the perfect performance car for those who want the best of both worlds.

### Ground-breaking performance:

Jaws dropped when Chevrolet first announced the 2020 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray coupe would accelerate 0 to 100 km/h in less than three seconds with the Z51 Performance Package. Today, the brand confirms the sports car with the Z51 Package can reach 100 km/h in 2.9 seconds and cross the quarter mile mark in 11.2 seconds at

121 mph (195 kmph).

This groundbreaking performance is achieved through a formula of rear weight bias, tire technology, aerodynamics, chassis tuning and of course, the powertrain. The 6.2L LT2 Small Block V-8 engine and eight-speed dual-clutch transmission are in many ways the stars of the show.

The LT2 is the only naturally aspirated V-8 in the segment and is SAE-certified at 495 horsepower and 637 Nm of torque when equipped with performance exhaust, making it the most-powerful entry Corvette ever.

The next generation LT2 is paired with Chevrolet’s first eight speed dual-clutch transmission, which provides lightning-fast shifts and excellent power transfer. This transmission is uniquely designed with TREMEC to provide the best of both worlds: the spirited, direct connected feeling of a manual and the premium driving comfort of an automatic. The double-paddle de-clutch feature even allows the driver to disconnect the clutch by holding both paddles for more manual control.

Engineering decided to use a dual-clutch design because it better supports the Stingray’s

new mid-engine architecture and desired performance. The DCT aids vehicle performance with a very low center of gravity, enables desired weight distribution and offers maximum traction under acceleration. It is a highly integrated system, as it houses the differential, final drive, controls system, sensors, lubrication and cooling hardware.

Corvette’s structure is built around its backbone: the center tunnel. This enables a light, stiff structure to serve as the foundation for the suspension system to perform in an optimized manner. By removing unwanted body compliance, Corvette customers will experience the ultimate in ride performance with outstanding lateral grip capabilities. The car has a solid, connected-to-the-road feel with minimal vibrations at high speeds or on long road trips.

### It’s your Corvette:

Unsurprisingly, the all-new Corvette Stingray offers several options that discern it from other cars in the segment. Take the ability to record your driving performance in 1080p. It captures your acceleration, speed, braking, gear choice, sound and more with this available feature. On a daily basis, the Performance Data Recorder (PDR) can

also act as a dash cam with auto-record for your daily drives.

Additionally, PDR is equipped with Valet Mode that can be used to monitor the use of your Corvette when others are behind the wheel, recording video and vehicle data, letting you hand off your car with peace of mind.

C8 offers customers options to create their own design statement, with the most personalization options ever for Corvette such as 12 exotic exterior and 6 interior color themes, Six seat belt colors, Two optional stitch packages, 3 seat options GT1, GT2 & Competition Sport, etc.,

### Premium Interior:

The 2020 Stingray boasts premium interior materials executed at a high level of quality and craftsmanship such as hand-wrapped, cut-and-sew leather components with thick press stitching, generous use of real metal, stainless steel speaker grilles with Bose Performance Series audio system, carbon fiber trim on the GT2 and Competition Sport Seats, etc.,

Other ride and handling upgrades include Z51 Performance Package, electronic limited slip differential, Magnetic Ride Control 4.0, Front suspension lift that raises ground clearance by approximately 40mm at the front bumper in 2.8 seconds, etc.,

### 2020 North American Car of the Year:

Undoubtedly, the all-new Chevrolet Corvette Stingray has been selected as the 2020 North American Car of the Year by a 50-member jury of independent journalists. The Stingray was selected not only for its revolutionary mid-engine design, but for its level of refinement and impressive performance. The Corvette was previously honored with this award in 1998 for the introduction of the fifth generation and again in 2014 for the introduction of the seventh generation.

True to its origin, Corvette has always represented iconic American design, performance, technical ingenuity and attainability. The entry 2020 Stingray continues that tradition as a no-compromise value proposition. Overall, the new Chevrolet Corvette Stingray covers all the performance bases and more, while delivering superb control. For more information, please contact OTE Group, the exclusive representative of Chevrolet in Oman or call 800-50002.

# Republican lawmakers pledge tougher voting rules

**WASHINGTON:** Republican state lawmakers have begun to use President Donald Trump's baseless charges of voter fraud to push for new restrictions on voting.

Although the claims have failed in court to overturn Democrat Joe Biden's November 3 election win, Republican lawmakers, party officials and Trump's allies in some of the hardest-fought states have begun discussing new rules that rights advocates say could suppress votes in future elections.

Pennsylvania Republicans are considering ending absentee voting rules they backed a year ago. Georgia's Senate Republicans say they want to "fix" the state's election system with new restrictions. Republicans in Wisconsin want to change early-voting procedures. And new rules have been floated in Texas.

"This appears to be laying the groundwork for what may be a more massive and coordinated



As Trump pushes baseless fraud claims, Republican lawmakers, party officials in some of the hardest-fought states have begun discussing new rules that rights advocates say could suppress votes in future elections. — **AFP**

voter suppression effort in the new year," said Kristen Clarke, president of the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. "It is a brazen attempt to undermine and obstruct the progress that has been made in 2020 to make it

easier for people to vote amid the pandemic."

Steve Guest, a spokesman for the Republican National Committee, said claims that the party's proposals amounted to voter suppression were "completely base-

“The election in many ways was stolen and the only way it will be fixed is by in the future reinforcing the (state) laws

**RAND PAUL**

*Republican Senator, Kentucky*

less." "Election laws need to be properly followed so Americans can have confidence in the results," said Guest. "The RNC will never stop fighting to ensure free and fair elections."

State and federal judges — some appointed by Trump — have dismissed more than 50 lawsuits brought by Trump or his allies alleging election fraud and other irregularities. Independent experts,

governors and state election officials from both parties say there has been no evidence of widespread fraud.

A record 158 million people voted in November's elections, in part thanks to new rules that made voting easier during the worst public health crisis in a century. A survey by New York University's nonpartisan Brennan Center for Justice found that 29 states and the District of Columbia passed laws and changed procedures to expand voting access during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some eased rules on voting by mail or extended early voting to reduce crowds.

State-level Republican proposals to unwind such rules have gained traction with some of Trump's staunchest allies in Congress.

"The election in many ways was stolen and the only way it will be fixed is by in the future reinforcing

the (state) laws," Republican Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky told a recent hearing without providing evidence of fraud. Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said on November 9 that oversight of mail-in voting needed tightening. "If we don't do something about voting by mail, we're going to lose the ability to elect a Republican in this country," he told Fox News.

The new proposals would expand on past Republican Party-led restrictions, including strict voter identification laws passed by nine states since 2005 and voter roll purges that voting-rights advocates say have disproportionately affected minority voters, who tend to back the Democratic Party.

Marc Elias, an attorney who has led legal efforts for the Democratic Party and Biden's campaign, said he believes the latest Republican moves are a preview of a coming voter suppression strategy across the country. — **Reuters**

## US charges Libyan in 1988 Pam Am Flight 103 bombing

**WASHINGTON:** The United States on Monday unsealed criminal charges against a third alleged conspirator in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland that killed 270 people.

The Boeing 747 exploded and killed 190 Americans. "No amount of time or distance will stop the United States and our Scottish partners from pursuing justice in this case," US Attorney General William Barr told a news conference on Monday.

The suspect, Abu Agila Mohammad Masud Kheir al Marimi, a former senior Libyan intelligence official, is charged with two criminal counts related to the bombing. He is in Libyan custody, Barr said on Monday, and US officials are hopeful that Libya will allow Masud to be tried in the United States. The Justice Department said Masud worked in various capacities for Libyan intelligence, including as a technical expert in building explosive devices from approximately 1973 to 2011. It also alleged Masud was involved in the 1986 bombing of the LaBelle Discotheque in West Berlin, Germany that killed two US service members. In 1991, two other Libyan intelligence operatives were charged in the bombing: Abdel Baset Ali al Megrahi and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah. Megrahi was found guilty in Scotland of the Lockerbie bombing in 2001 and freed in 2009 on compassionate release grounds before dying of cancer in 2012. — **Reuters**

## Visits with Santa go virtual due to Covid

**CHICAGO:** As the pandemic rages, children's visits with Santa Claus are going virtual — to protect both them and the men in high-risk groups who dress up as old St Nick.

"I'm not fooling around with the pandemic," said Joe Harkins, an 87-year-old Santa from Jersey City, New Jersey. "I'm not going to risk my life for any family or public events. It's just too risky."

Harkins, like many of his brothers-in-red, as many Santas refer to each other, has taken his winter gig online, opting to swap in-person visits for virtual ones.

He has even gone so far as to start a company called Santa Encounters where prospective Santas can sign up to make personalised videos for children.

"By definition, most Santas are in the most high-risk category either by age or underlying medical conditions," said Ric Erwin, head of the California-based Fraternal Order of Real Bearded Santas.

"This is further compacted



Napoleao Gaudencio waves for a Santa Claus video call during the COVID-19 pandemic in Lisbon.

by the fact that our target demographic is young children, who are notorious vectors for all things infectious," Erwin added.

John Sullivan, an 81-year-old Santa from Streamwood, Illinois, has shifted to all virtual visits. This is the first year in his 30-year Santa career that he will not see children in person.

But this comes with the advantage of learning, in advance from the parents, about the kids he will speak to. — **AFP**

## Macron still displays Covid symptoms



Macron attends a weekly cabinet meeting by video conference. — **Reuters**

**PARIS:** French President Emmanuel Macron was still displaying some coronavirus symptoms but his overall condition was stable, government spokesman Gabriel Attal told reporters on Monday.

Macron, 43, has tested positive for COVID-19 on Thursday and has gone into quarantine at the presidential retreat of La Lanterne, close to the Palace of Versailles.

BFM TV broadcast live images of Macron chairing a government ministerial meeting via an audiovisual conference. Macron is working remotely and self-isolating as he recovers after testing positive for COVID-19 last week.

Macron said France needs to step up its vigilance regarding the COVID-19 situation in the country, given the emergence of a new strain of the virus in the United Kingdom. — **Reuters**

### Moore Stephens LLC Announces the commencement of liquidation process for OMAN INTERNATIONAL PETROCHEMICAL INDUSTRIES CO LLC (AS APPEARED IN OFFICIAL GAZETTE NO 1371)

Moore Stephens LLC, announces the commencement of liquidation process of Oman International Petrochemical Industries Company LLC, bearing commercial registration number 1180364, in accordance with the decision taken by the Company's Members on 1 December 2020. The liquidators alone have the right to represent the Company under liquidation before third parties, and all parties are to confirm with the liquidator for all matters concerning the company's business at the following address:

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

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

**Moore Stephens LLC**  
**Official Liquidators of**  
**Oman International Petrochemical Industries Company LLC**  
**(Under voluntary liquidation)**

### Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Heritage & Tourism

#### Advertisement of Public Tenders

| Tender No. | Tender Name                                                                                                                              | Tender Document's Fees (Non Refundable) | Last Date for Collection of Tender Documents | Last Date for Bid Submission |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 11/2020    | Provision of Cleaning Services at the Premise of Heritage and Tourism Directorate and places affiliated to it in Al Dhahirah Governorate | RO 25                                   | 29/12/2020                                   | 11/1/2021                    |
| 12/2020    | Provision of Cleaning Services at places affiliated to Heritage and Tourism Directorate in North Al Batinah Governorate                  | RO 25                                   | 29/12/2020                                   | 11/1/2021                    |
| 13/2020    | Provision of Cleaning Services at the Premise of Heritage and Tourism Directorate and places affiliated to it in Al Buraimi Governorate  | RO 25                                   | 29/12/2020                                   | 11/1/2021                    |
| 14/2020    | Provision of Cleaning Services at places affiliated to Heritage and Tourism Directorate in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate                     | RO 25                                   | 29/12/2020                                   | 11/1/2021                    |

Companies and firms specialized in the aforementioned works, registered with the Board of Tender in the category of SMEs and interested in subscribing to the said tenders may collect tender-related documents through the digital portal of the Tender Board via the following link (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>).

Bids are submitted in line with the technical specifications and requirements and attached thereto a temporary bank bond issued by a local bank at a sum not less than 1% of the bid's amount and valid for 90 days from the date of submitting it electronically. The original receipt of the temporary bond is to be submitted one day before the submission date at the Ministry's Tenders and Contracts Department, 2nd floor.

The bid's price is to be inked in Omani currency both in letters and digits and the price list has to be dated, stamped and signed by the tenderer.

The period for submitting the bids begins after the inquiry periods mentioned in the e-tendering system ends immediately and lasts till the last date for bid submission before 10:00 am.

Help and inquiries:

1. For inquiries related to the tender, kindly communicate electronically through the e-tendering system (<https://etendering.tenderboard.gov.om>)

2. For inquiries related to the technical support of the e-tendering system, kindly communicate through [etenderhd@ta.gov.om](mailto:etenderhd@ta.gov.om) or call 24166670.

*The Ministry is not bound to accept the lowest or any other tender.*

**[www.omantourism.gov.om](http://www.omantourism.gov.om)**

For further details, kindly communicate through [stotc@omantourism.gov.om](mailto:stotc@omantourism.gov.om) or telephone nos. 22088085- 22088348



**SULTANATE OF OMAN**  
**MINISTRY OF DEFENCE**  
**ENGINEERING SERVICES**  
**Announcement**



Ministry of Defence invites Contractors specialized in the under mentioned works and registered with the Govt. Tender Board and Ministry of Defence to participate in the following tender.

| Tender No | Tender Name             | Contractors Grade                     | Last date to obtain Tender | Tender Submission Date | Tender Price (RO) |
|-----------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 010/2020  | Electrical Work Maziona | Category "B" Electrical Works in DCRP | 31 Dec. 2020               | 26 Jan. 2021           | 800/-             |

- Tender Documents (Electronic Tender Document) can be obtained from the Tender office, Gate No: 14, Muaskar Al Murtafa'a after payment of the tender fee indicated above.
- The Payment should be made electronically by using SMART CARD, VISA CARD and VISA ELECTRON. Sunday to Thursday (0900 – 1300 Hours).
- The Bid to be accompanied by Tender Bond in the value of (1%) of the bid value in the form of a Bank Guarantee or Certified Cheque issued by a local bank and addressed to HE the Chairman of the Tender Committee.
- Bids are to be submitted in sealed envelopes addressed to HE the Chairman of Tender Committee and marked with Tender Number and Name. Name of Bidder or any other marks should not be printed on the envelopes.
- Bids to be deposited in the Tender office at Gate No: 14 Muaskar Al Murtafa'a before 1300 hours on the assigned day for submission of the Tender.
- We would like to draw your attention to the importance of adherence to the submission date, request and any queries related should not be submitted to MODES fourteen days prior to submission of offer.
  - You are requested to submit the following items within your tender submission, failure to submit the required information may result a disqualification of your offer without any further notification.
  - Percentage of Omanisation within the company supported by an authenticated certificate from the Ministry of Manpower (Updated Copy).
  - Detailed priced breakdown to be specified as per scope and drawings.
  - Site visit confirmation.
  - Full set of stamped drawings.
  - All addendums and circulars.
  - List of sub-contractors/suppliers and their acceptance letter to this project.
  - List of current and executed projects.
  - Valid Registration Certificates from Tender Board.
  - Financial Statement for the last Three years.
  - Grade (B) certificate from DCRP.



A Christmas tree made by Lebanese artist Hayat Nazer and decorated with uniforms of firefighters and rescuers as a way to pay tribute to those who died at Beirut port explosion, is illuminated in Beirut on Monday. — Reuters

## Rocket attack hits US embassy



The forefront of the US Embassy complex in the heavily fortified Green Zone, on the west bank of the Tigris River in Baghdad. — AFP

**BAGHDAD:** At least eight Katyusha rockets landed in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone in an attack targeting the US Embassy, causing some minor damage on the compound on Sunday, the Iraqi military and the embassy said.

The Iraqi military said an "outlaw group" fired eight rockets. Most of the missiles hit a residential complex and a security checkpoint inside the zone, damaging buildings and cars and wounding one Iraqi soldier, a military statement said.

Sirens blared from the embassy compound inside the zone, which houses government buildings and foreign missions.

An anti-rocket system diverted

one of the rockets, said one security official whose office is inside the Green Zone.

The US Embassy condemned the attack and urged all Iraqi political and governmental leaders to take steps to prevent such attacks and to hold accountable those responsible.

"The US Embassy confirms rockets targeting the International Zone resulted in the engagement of Embassy defensive systems. There was some minor damage on the Embassy compound but no injuries or casualties," it said in a statement.

In a subsequent statement, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said there had been at least one Iraqi civilian casualty and wished

those hurt a speedy recovery.

US officials blamed militia for regular rocket attacks on US facilities in Iraq, including near the embassy in Baghdad. No known groups have claimed responsibility.

Pompeo called such militias the most serious impediment to peace and prosperity in Iraq, and added:

"We call on all Iraqis to support their government's efforts to reinforce Iraq's sovereignty, to bring to justice those responsible for these reprehensible attacks and ensure that all the militias are under state control."

A spokesman for the Iraqi president also condemned the attack. — Reuters

# Iran nuclear deal parties eye US return to accord

**VIENNA:** The remaining parties to the ailing 2015 Iran nuclear deal said on Monday that they were preparing for the possible return of the US to the pact as President-elect Joe Biden readies to take office next month.

Biden, who takes office on January 20, has signalled Washington would rejoin the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that was aimed at limiting Iran's nuclear programme.

The deal has been unravelling ever since outgoing President Donald Trump dramatically withdrew from it in May 2018 and imposed crippling economic sanctions on Tehran.

"Ministers acknowledged the prospect of a return of the US to the JCPOA and underlined their readiness to positively address this in a joint effort," a statement on behalf of ministers from Iran, China, Russia, Germany, France and the UK said after Monday morning's online meeting.



People walk along a corridor at the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna. — Reuters

Tehran has retaliated to US sanctions by progressively abandoning limits on its nuclear activity laid down in the deal.

Most recently Iran announced it is planning to install advanced centrifuges at Iran's main nuclear enrichment plant in Natanz, a plan condemned by France, Germany and Britain — collectively known as the "E3" — as "deeply worrying".

German Foreign Minister

Heiko Maas said that the change of administration in the US meant that there was "a last window" for progress that "shouldn't be wasted".

"There can be no more tactical manoeuvres of the kind we have seen all too often recently," Maas warned at a press conference, adding that such actions "would only further undermine the agreement".

His British counterpart Dominic Raab said that at the meeting he had "made it absolutely clear Iran must not implement the recently announced expansions to its nuclear programme".

"To do so would undermine the opportunities for progress we hope to see in 2021," Raab added in a tweet.

The assassination last month of prominent Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh has heightened tensions in the region, with Iran blaming the killing on Israel.

In the wake of Fakhrizadeh's death, Iranian MPs passed a bill calling for further expansion to Iran's nuclear programme and an end to inspections of nuclear facilities by the UN watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The Iranian foreign ministry said it did not agree with the bill and President Hassan Rouhani has suggested he will not sign it into law. — AFP

## Morocco, Israel to seal ties with first direct flight

**RABAT:** Jared Kushner, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and adviser, is due to arrive on Tuesday in Morocco from Israel on the first direct commercial flight between the two countries since they normalised ties.

The flight from Tel Aviv to Rabat is seen as highly symbolic after Morocco announced on December 10 a "resumption of relations" with Israel.

It also aims to showcase the achievements of the Trump administration in Middle East diplomacy, weeks before Trump is replaced at the White House by President-elect Joe Biden.

Morocco became the third Arab state this year, after the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, to normalise ties with Israel under US-brokered deals, while Sudan has pledged to follow suit.

In return, the US president fulfilled a decades-old goal of Morocco by backing its contested sovereignty in Western Sahara.

Kushner will be heading an American delegation, and during his visit to Rabat a series of agreements will be signed between



Moroccans celebrate in front of the parliament building in Rabat after the US adopted a new official map of Morocco that includes the disputed territory of Western Sahara. — AFP

Morocco and Israel, according to officials.

Negotiations leading to Morocco's resumption of ties with Israel included the opening of a US consulate in Western Sahara, and US investments which Moroccan media described as "colossal".

At the same time Israel and Morocco are due to reopen diplomatic offices and activate

economic cooperation between them.

Morocco closed its liaison office in Tel Aviv in 2000, at the start of the second Palestinian intifadha, or uprising.

King Mohammed VI has said Morocco will remain an advocate for the Palestinians, but the Palestinians have cried foul and condemned the normalisation announcement. — AFP

### SHORT TAKES

#### BEIRUT

##### MEA warns of new ticket challenge

The head of Lebanon's airline said the carrier would at some point need to demand payment for tickets bought in Lebanon using "fresh dollars", or recently transferred currency that is not subject to restrictions imposed since a financial crisis.

Middle East Airlines (MEA) Chairman Mohamad El-Hout did not say when this rule would be introduced, but the warning will raise concerns for holders of dollars who have been virtually locked out of dollar accounts



since late 2019. The authorities have limited dollar withdrawals to about \$500 a month, with a few exceptions, and imposed an exchange rate of about 3,900 Lebanese pounds. — Reuters

#### RIYADH

##### Aramco to roll out Google Cloud services

Saudi Aramco Development Co, a subsidiary of Aramco, has teamed up with Google Cloud to offer cloud services to customers in Saudi Arabia, Aramco said on Monday.

Saudi Arabia, under its Vision 2030 reform plans, has encouraged foreign investment particularly in the technology sector and courted Silicon Valley players.

Aramco said Saudi Arabia is being added to the global network of Google Cloud Platform regions, as part of a strategic al-



liance agreement signed between the company and Google Cloud this month.

Google Cloud will establish and operate a new cloud region in Saudi Arabia. — Reuters

#### DIYARBAKIR

##### Court sentences Kurdish ex-MP to 22 years

A Turkish court on Monday sentenced a prominent Kurdish former lawmaker who went on a months-long hunger strike to more than 22 years in jail on terror-related charges.

Leyla Guven, an opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) deputy who was stripped of her parliamentary immunity in June, was convicted of membership of a terror group and disseminating terror propaganda for outlawed Kurdish militants, a reporter said.

The 56-year-old gained interna-



tional attention by launching a 200-day hunger strike in 2018 in a bid to end jailed Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan's isolation by securing him access to his family and lawyers. — AFP

## In brief

■ SEOUL



### HIGHEST DAILY CORONAVIRUS DEATH TOLL

South Korea banned gatherings of more than four people in the capital and surrounding areas on Monday as the country recorded its highest daily coronavirus death toll since the epidemic began.

While South Korea has suffered relatively lightly compared to other nations, officials said a surge in infections had left hospitals in the capital region with a chronic shortage of intensive care beds.

The country reported 926 new coronavirus cases Monday, and the death toll was now at 698 after 24 people died in the past 24 hours — a record high since the emergence of the epidemic. — **AFP**

■ TOKYO



### BIKERS PARADE AGAINST CHILD ABUSE

Harley Davidson bikers dressed in Santa Claus costumes rode through the streets of central Tokyo on Sunday for their annual parade against child abuse, saying more children were vulnerable in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The parade, followed by a toy run to donate toys to kids, is a global tradition around Christmas time. In Tokyo, the event is held by members of the “Harley Santa Club”, founded in 2008.

At the parade, bikers said this year’s event meant more, because more children were vulnerable to domestic violence during the coronavirus year. — **Reuters**

■ HONG KONG



### MASK BAN CONSTITUTIONAL FOR ALL PUBLIC MEETINGS

Hong Kong’s highest court on Monday ruled the city’s government had the right to invoke emergency powers last year to ban the wearing of masks at all public processions and meetings during the height of 2019’s protests.

During the anti-government protests which have largely died down, many demonstrators wore masks to hide their identities from authorities and to protect themselves from tear gas. Surgical masks have also long been common in the financial hub for when people are sick and the ruling comes at a time when Hong Kong people are mandated to wear masks to curb the spread of COVID-19. — **Reuters**

# Indian farmers vow to carry on protests

**NEW DELHI:** With foot-massage machines, a dental surgery, their own newspaper and even a tattoo parlour, it’s clear that the thousands of Indian farmers blocking roads into Delhi for almost a month are going nowhere.

The farmers marched on the capital in late November to protest at new farm laws they fear will destroy their livelihoods, but police firing tear gas and water cannon stopped them in their tracks.

So now, numbering tens of thousands, they are digging in at several entry points into the city, braving the bitter night-time cold with tents, blankets and fires, as well as hot samosas and sweet chai.

With music blaring from large speakers fitted to tractors, the largest such site at the Singhu border crossing north of Delhi now resembles a lively — and highly organised — festival.

Sunny Ahluwalia, a dentist, drove his van fitted with two dental



Protesting farmers get foot massage inside a tent in Singhu. — **AFP**

chairs and an X-ray machine, all powered by a generator, from his home 250 kilometres away to help.

“We may have become doctors but we are sons of farmers,” Ahluwalia said after scraping one

farmer’s yellowing teeth, one of around 100 patients he treats for free per day.

“It is very unfortunate that our government isn’t ready to accept the farmers’ demands. How can

the laws be good if they don’t like them?”

### TIRED FEET

The main camp snakes back almost a kilometre. Tractor-trailers are stuffed with bedding,

## Nepal PM’s ‘constitutional coup’ challenged in court

**KATHMANDU:** Opponents of Nepal’s prime minister turned to the Supreme Court on Monday to challenge his dissolution of parliament and the calling of an election, denouncing it as a “constitutional coup”.

Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli’s dissolution of parliament on Sunday raises the prospect of months of political turmoil in the Himalayan country as it battles the novel coronavirus. Seven government ministers stepped down after Oli’s dissolution saying it was a violation of the “popular mandate” given to them in a 2017 general election.

Protesters burned effigies of him in the streets. Supreme Court Spokesman Bhadrakali Pokharel said three petitions against the dissolution were “in the process



A demonstrator displays a placard to protest against the abruptly dissolving of the parliament in Kathmandu. — **AFP**

of being registered”.

“Under the constitution, the prime minister has no prerogative to dissolve parliament,” lawyer Dinesh Tripathi, who is one of the

petitioners, said.

“It’s a constitutional coup. I’m seeking a stay order from the court.” The president on Sunday set April 30 and May 10 as dates

for the general election - more than a year ahead of schedule - on the advice of Oli’s cabinet.

The prime minister has recently lost support within his own Nepal Communist Party (NCP), with some members accusing him of sidelining the party in government decisions and shunning members when making key appointments. They have called on him to step down. His supporters say that in a democracy, a new election is the best way out of a crisis like this.

The strife comes as Nepal, one of the world’s poorest countries, battles the coronavirus. Nepal has had 253,772 infections and 1,788 deaths and the pandemic has battered its tourism-and-remittance-dependent economy.

— **Reuters**

## Cambodia’s giant Tonle Sap lake in peril as reverse Mekong flow delayed

**KOH CHIVANG:** As night falls over his floating village, fisherman Leng Vann puffs on a cigarette and heaves a sigh for Tonle Sap, the great inland lake that has sustained Cambodia for centuries.

More than a million people live on or around the lake, the world’s largest inland fishery, but water levels have plummeted and fish stocks dwindled because of climate change and dams upstream on the Mekong.

Tonle Sap was once renowned for its abundance of fish and wildlife — 43-year-old Leng Vann recalls catching hundreds of kilos a day in his nets. His house, which floats on the lake, sits five metres lower than it should in mid-October, at the end of the rainy season, and when he draws his net from the waters, it is empty.

“We fishermen survive by water and fish. When there is no water and fish, what else can we hope for?” said Leng Vann.

“Our future is dark,” he said, as he rowed his boat back to his modest home.

### REVERSING FORTUNES

The lake, a world heritage ecological reserve, depends on an



Prek Toal floating village in Battambang province. — **AFP**

unusual seasonal reversal — in the dry season, it drains into the Mekong via a fast-flowing river artery.

But when the rains come from May to October, the mighty Mekong is so powerful that the water flows backwards, replenishing the lake.

It swells over four times its

smallest size to 14,500 square kilometres at the height of the floods, according to the Mekong River Commission (MRC) — an area bigger than Lebanon.

But lately, the reverse flows have been seriously delayed.

Last year the amount of water that flowed into the lake was down around a quarter from the average

levels seen around the turn of the century.

The reverse flow effect has been at its lowest since 1997, leading to “extremely dry conditions”, the MRC says. Weather conditions linked to climate change, such as a major drought last year and the “El Nino” climate effect, have contributed to the crisis. — **AFP**

while tents are set up around makeshift stalls offering anything from toothpaste to free medicine.

The makeshift settlement is a hive of activity throughout the day, as the farmers — mostly without COVID masks — weave in and out of the bustling area, chatting and getting free food from community kitchens.

In one tent, volunteers have set up two neat rows of about 20 foot-massage machines to put a fresh spring in the step of the many grey-bearded, multicolour-turbaned farmers.

“Since many of the protesters are elderly farmers, they used to ask us for massages because of pain in (their) knees and feet,” volunteer Bhupinder Singh said.

“We felt that we could serve more people and do it better by purchasing these cheap machines.”

“I told them how it feels good and they are doing a very good job,” said satisfied customer Harbans Singh. — **AFP**

## Philippines to get 30m doses of Novavax vaccine

**MANILA:** The Philippines expects to receive 30 million doses of Novavax Inc’s COVID-19 vaccine by July next year, its foreign minister said on Monday, boosting the country’s effort to secure supplies to inoculate more than 100 million people.

Despite consultations with numerous vaccine makers, the Philippines has so far signed only one supply deal, with the help of its private sector, to acquire 2.6 million shots of a vaccine developed by AstraZeneca.

It plans to buy 25 million doses of a vaccine from China’s Sinovac Biotech for delivery by March and aims to secure between four and 25 million doses of vaccines from Moderna and Arcturus Therapeutics Holdings Inc.

“Thirty million dosages of the Indian-made Novavax vaccines are assured possibly with no cash advance. It will be available by July 2021,” Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin said in an interview with CNN Philippines. He said the information came from Serum Institute of India, the world’s largest vaccine producer, and that the terms of the supply deal may be signed before the end of the year.

There was no immediate comment from the institute, which in August entered a supply and license agreement with Novavax Inc for the development and commercialization of its COVID-19 vaccine candidate. Talks with Moderna, which has been granted emergency use authorisation by the US Food and Drug Administration, will begin next week, Locsin said. With 459,789 infections and 8,947 deaths, the Philippines has recorded the second-highest number of COVID-19 infections and casualties in Southeast Asia after Indonesia. — **Reuters**



Cars wait to enter the Eurotunnel Calais Terminal as countries worldwide banned arrivals from the UK. — AFP

# World closes borders to Britain

**DOVER:** A slew of countries closed their borders to Britain on Monday over fears of a highly infectious new coronavirus strain, heightening global panic, causing travel chaos and raising the prospect of UK food shortages days before the Brexit cliff edge.

India, Poland, Spain, Switzerland, Russia, Jordan and Hong Kong suspended travel for Britons after Prime Minister Boris Johnson warned that a mutated variant of the virus, up to 70 per cent more transmissible, had been identified in the country.

Several other nations have suspended travel from Britain including France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Ireland, Belgium, Israel and Canada — although scientists said the strain may already be circulating in countries with less advanced detection methods than the United Kingdom.

The discovery of the new strain, just months before vaccines are expected to be widely available, sowed fresh panic in a pandemic that has killed about 1.7 million people worldwide and more than 67,000 in Britain.

Australia said two people who travelled from the United Kingdom to New South Wales state were found to be carrying the mutated virus.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo urged the US government to take steps to prevent the new strain entering the country, which has been worst hit by COVID-19 with almost 318,000 deaths.

“It’s high time the federal government takes swift action, because today that variant is getting on a plane and landing in JFK, and all it takes is one person,” he said.

US Assistant Health Secretary Brett Giroir said nothing had yet been decided on any travel ban.

## EU authorises conditional Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine

**BRUSSELS:** The European Medicines Agency (EMA) on Monday recommended the conditional authorisation of the coronavirus vaccine jointly produced by BioNTech and Pfizer.

This is the first vaccine the EMA has recommended for approval. Britain already authorised the jabs in early December. The recommendation applies for those of at least 16 years of age, EMA director Emer Cooke said.

The European Commission still needs to formally approve the vaccine.

“It’s a decisive moment in



our efforts to deliver safe and effective vaccines to Europeans!” Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Twitter. — dpa

Johnson will chair an emergency response meeting on Monday to discuss international travel, in particular the flow of freight in and out of Britain. EU officials held a meeting on coordinating their response.

France shut its border to arrivals of people and trucks from Britain, closing off one of the most important trade arteries with mainland Europe.

As families and truck drivers tried to navigate the travel bans to get back home in time for Christmas, British supermarket chain Sainsbury’s said shortages would start to appear within days if transport ties were not quickly restored.

“If nothing changes, we will start to see gaps over the coming days on lettuce, some salad leaves, cauliflowers, broccoli and citrus fruit — all of which are imported from the continent at this time of year,” Sainsbury’s said.

France’s FNTR national road haulage federation said: “No driver wants to deliver to the UK now, so the UK is going to see its freight supply dry up.”

**SICK MAN OF EUROPE**

The global alarm was reflected in financial markets.

European shares slumped, with travel and leisure stocks bearing the brunt of the pain; British Airways-owner IAG and easyJet fell about 8 per cent, while Air France KLM lost about 7 per cent.

US carriers Delta Air Lines also suffered, with American Airlines, United Airlines and Southwest Airlines dropping 5 per cent to 7 per cent in premarket trading.

The British pound tumbled 2.5 per cent against the dollar, and was on course for its biggest one-day drop since March, while the yield on two-year UK government bonds hit a record low. — Reuters

SHORT TAKES

### ANCHORAGE

#### Trump cuts size of land offered for exploration

In a last-minute change, the Trump administration cut about 30 per cent of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge territory that it plans to auction off for oil exploration.

The decision was announced by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the agency managing the oil lease sale.

The ANWR lease sale is scheduled for January 6, but under the BLM’s plan, companies may submit bids starting on Monday. The reduction comes



as the US Department of the Interior prepares a legal defence for its ANWR leasing plan, and as the Trump administration tries to engineer a lease sale just weeks before Democrat Joe Biden, an opponent of ANWR drilling, takes office on January 20. — Reuters

### ISLAMABAD

#### Govt signs \$1.7 billion debt relief deal

Pakistan has secured a \$1.7 billion debt relief agreement to help offset the financial headwinds sparked by the coronavirus pandemic, officials said on Monday.

The deal, following months of negotiations with creditors, will provide a moratorium on debt payments for large swathes of the current fiscal year and help ease the cash-strapped country’s massive financial obligations.

“The Government of Pakistan has successfully negotiated



and concluded rescheduling agreements with 19 bilateral creditors, including members of the Paris club,” the country’s ministry of economic affairs said in a statement. — AFP

### BANGUI

#### Russia, Rwanda send troops after coup bid

The Central African Republic said on Monday that Russia and Rwanda had sent in hundreds of troops after an alleged attempted coup ahead of upcoming elections.

The government in CAR, one of the world’s poorest and most unstable countries, accused former president Francois Bozize on Saturday of fomenting a would-be putsch by three rebel groups. The groups on Friday started to advance on the capital Bangui along key highways



after declaring an alliance, the government said. The UN peacekeeping force MINUSCA announced on Sunday that the rebels had been stopped or pushed back and the situation was “under control”. — AFP

# Disruptions are the new reality...

There are plenty of points we need to learn about life from the animals. We humans quite often forget about the actual purpose of life.

From between learning to survive to live to excelling in all conditions we are at loss most of the time and rushing to spirituality only when entangled in the web of life.

The animals have clear cut objectives and that is to survive and multiply instinctively so their species do not go extinct. But man is the biggest threat to them compared to the natural calamity as even when it comes to climate change man has a major contribution. Nature on its own can maintain the balance of the ecosystem, but human interference and greed resulted in commotion.

For some reason, man concentrated on looking down for resources from oil to coal to minerals. Although we look up while we think we have failed for all these years to realise the biggest source of energy is up there in the sky which is also the cleanest. As they say it is never too late and it is better late than never. Was quite excited to come across decorative outdoor lights powered by the sun recently – perfect for the festive season. Small changes move towards a better tomorrow. It is exciting to look at the little lamp adding light to the night with no electricity or batteries.

Now I do not know much about animal's celebrations but was enchanted to watch the Siberian cranes dance and learnt that they



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MAN  
CONCENTRATED  
ON LOOKING  
DOWN FOR  
RESOURCES FROM  
OIL TO COAL TO  
MINERALS

stay as twosome until death do them apart. They could live for decades. Now watch them closely and you realise they both have responsibilities and equal representations – qualities sometimes human relationships lack.

Meanwhile in a wildlife documentary, the narrator said that 'patience' is a secret weapon of the tiger to survive during the winter. The tiger can even go up to five days in hunger but it does not throw a tantrum but actually patiently tries to catch its prey using its unique skills as a hunter.

We, on the other hand, when it comes to life's challenges would immediately move on to depressions and self doubts. That is not all – given the opportunity others will try to bring down a person so they do not outshine themselves, however when it comes to animals they would teach the younger ones the survival techniques while we humans teach the younger ones on the importance on accomplishments rather than teaching them how to survive life's ups and downs.

The Himalayan jumping spider has learnt to survive the cold by staying close to the rock and surface where there is slight warmth and the fact is the adaptation to this condition ensured that there are no major predators to worry about.

Adaptations could be a skill we need to learn as we move closer to the New Year. We learnt to work from home, then partial from back at office and now we hear about the new strain of COVID and the travelling has come to

a standstill.

We would have to learn to continuously move from one situation to another. The fact is there is more that we need to learn. It just makes one wonder whether at times disruptions are a good thing? Where life had become quite predictable, now we have educators, scientists and economists thinking of what would be the best way forward — from vaccines to energy to health and education as well as careers.

If data is the next oil so is Artificial Intelligence and the questions we are still coming up with are about 'who would be using this data? Is there a danger to privacy? Would privacy be something of the past? Would it be used for protection or invasion of privacy? Who would be utilising Artificial Intelligence? What are the pros and cons of Artificial Intelligence?'

Of course we know what AI is and how it is being currently used. But what is the future? The current scenario has taught us to expect more changes and the best way to survive and thrive in the challenging time would be to learn to adapt. It would be best to embrace the change.

There have always been changes in societies and in the world as a whole. It is not a new concept but it is now time to accept disruptions as part of life.

And the best gift we can give the youngsters would be the ability to adapt and the understanding of why not to expect the usual and that solution remains in thinking out of the box.

## PANDEMIC BYPRODUCT?

### Colleges see soaring interest in health fields

SUSAN SNYDER

Vanessa Oppong thought about delaying her pursuit of a Master's degree in public health at Temple University, given that classes were moved online this fall as a result of the pandemic. Then, as the devastating effects of the coronavirus raged around her, she reconsidered.

"I felt in a way called to continue my education," Oppong, 23, of Woodbridge, Virginia, said. "There's no better time than right now."

And apparently she's far from alone in her thinking. Temple saw a 120 per cent increase in first-year students enrolled in its Master's of public health programme this year, from 69 to 152, with interest particularly high in epidemiology and behavioural sciences, said Laura A Siminoff, dean of the College of Public Health.

Applications and deposits are up for the spring semester and the fall is looking good, too, she said. "The pandemic has really shown a spotlight on public health, what it is and why it's important," she said.

"I'm so excited that young people are answering the call." It's not just public health that's seeing the spike. Temple and other area colleges say interest in medical school, nursing and other health-related fields also are soaring. Applications are up by double digit percentages to medical schools, a rate of increase not seen in recent years. And that mirrors a national trend. Applications at medical schools nationwide are up 18 per cent, compared to an increase of less than 3 per

cent annually in the last decade, said Geoffrey Young, senior director for student affairs and programmes at the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Osteopathic medical schools also have reported larger numbers. "In many ways, we think this increase is unprecedented," Young said.

Entry to medical school has always been extremely competitive and the higher numbers mean it will be even more competitive this year. Not all of the increase is because of the pandemic, officials say. In times of economic downturn, enrolments tend to rise as students who may have taken a few years off to work seek to continue their education instead. More students are applying to a larger number of schools. And numbers had been on the rise anyway, with a shortage of physicians projected by 2032.

But the fact that Anthony Fauci, the benevolent doctor who leads the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has become a household name and that everyone's life has been altered by the coronavirus have certainly stoked interest.

"There is a sense of respect and in some cases newfound respect for health care workers, for scientists, for this idea that during a pandemic, when so many other aspects of life were unavailable or deemed non-essential, that the one source of inspiration was the role of healthcare workers, of doctors and nurses on the front lines helping people get through this frightening time," said Neha Vapiwala, associate dean of admissions for the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine and a professor of radiation oncology.

Penn received 7,303 applications to its medical school for about 150 spots, a 20 per cent jump. Prospective students noted on applications the effect the pandemic had on their decision to apply, Penn said. Some said they were inspired by frontline workers and wanted to make a difference.

— dpa

## MOST VULNERABLE

# Climate risks to health set to worsen inequity and harm children

LAURIE GOERING

Rising global health risks driven by climate change will hit the poorest, most vulnerable people the hardest - and failure to prepare for those threats will mean more deaths and suffering, according to a leading environmental health scientist.

From impoverished families living in flood-prone homes to women whose cultures require them to stay covered in extreme heat, climate impacts on health have "a strong equity component", said Kristie Ebi, a professor at the University of Washington's Center for Health and the Global Environment.

Besides hiking dangers from deadly heat and spreading diseases, climate change will fuel a rise in basic health problems — from diarrhoea to poor nutrition — that will affect the poor most and likely widen global inequalities, she said.

"Future health risks will be determined not just by the hazards created by a changing climate but also by the sensitivity of individuals and communities exposed to these hazards," she noted in an article published this month in the journal *Health Affairs*.

Many of the biggest health concerns from climate change "boil down to maternal and child health issues", said Ebi, who has helped countries plan how to adapt to climate-linked health threats from Africa and Asia to the



This photo shows people cutting the heads off fish in Prek Toal floating village in Battambang province. – AFP

CLIMATE CHANGE  
WILL FUEL A RISE  
IN BASIC HEALTH  
PROBLEMS FROM  
DIARRHOEA TO  
POOR NUTRITION

Pacific and Central America.

Children face particular risks, she said. Because they breathe in more air for their body size than adults, for instance, they are particularly susceptible to air pollution, such as from worsening global wildfires, she noted.

"They handle it much more poorly than adults do," Ebi said in an interview.

High levels of child stunting and

wasting, as extreme weather destroys crops and hits food security for many families, also will drive lasting health problems, she said.

"Without sufficient food, brain development is affected. Children end up learning less and earning less," said Ebi, who has led many national and international climate assessments.

— Thomson Reuters Foundation

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# sport

## Al Nasr face Bausher in HM Cup Round of 32

OL CHAMPS SEEB MEET AL TALEIAH, SUR TAKE ON BAHLA

ANUROOP  
ATHIPARAMBATH  
MUSCAT, DEC 21

Five-time champions Al Nasr face Bausher and current runner-ups Al Oruba meet Salalah while Omantel League champions Seeb take on Al Taleiah in the His Majesty’s Cup 2020-21 tournament Round of 32.

Four-time winners Sur clash with Bahla and former runner-ups Sohar (2018) face off with Al Khabourah in other interesting matches in the knockout stage.

The draw for the prestigious football championship in the Sultanate was unveiled at Oman Football Association (OFA) headquarters at the Seeb Stadium on Monday.

Faisal Ali al Tamimi, General Director of Qatar National Bank (QNB), official sponsor of the HM Cup, was the chief guest for the draw ceremony in presence of OFA officials led by General Secretary Said Oathman Mohammed al Balushi.

Defending champions Dhofar are directly seeded to the Round of 16.

Dhofar edged Al Oruba 5-4 on penalties after a goalless draw in 120 minutes of playing time at



Officials during the draw ceremony of the HM Cup. – Faisal al Balushi

the Rustaq Sports Complex on November 29. This was a record-equalling ninth title triumph by the Salalah giants. Fanja also have won nine HM Cup trophies.

In the other matches of the

Round of 32 knockout stage, Saham will meet Al Mudhaibi, Muscat take on Samayil, Al Musannah meet Al Shabab, Masirah play against Al Rustaq and Al Bashayer clash with Al Suwaiq.

Oman Club, who earned a promotion to Omantel League recently after the pull out of Fanja from the season, take on Jaalan for a place in the last 16 round.

Among other matches in the

round, Majees clash with Nizwa, Ibri are drawn against Mirbat, Al Ittihad meet Al Ittifaq and Ahli Sidab will host Al Nahda in a tight clash.

The matches will be held on

January 1, 2 and 3 in 2021.

The matches will be held following COVID-19 medical protocol and the OFA will announce further details of the schedule later.

## Milan clubs jostle to end year top of Serie A

**MILAN:** AC Milan and Inter Milan will be vying to end the year top of the Serie A table on Wednesday as the city rivals push to deny Juventus a 10th consecutive ‘Scudetto’ this season.

Leaders AC Milan’s unbeaten league run, which stretches back to March, faces a stiff test against Lazio in the San Siro.

“We have one game left against Lazio and we might be able to achieve our first objective (staying top of Serie A) on December 23,” said Milan coach Stefano Pioli.

“It would add to our success in the Europa League this season, so we’d end a very positive year.”

But Antonio Conte’s Inter Milan are just one point behind in second before their trip to ninth-placed Hellas Verona.

Inter last won the Serie A title in 2010, with Milan taking the honours the following year.

Since then Juventus have dominated.



AC Milan’s Portuguese forward Rafael Leao (C) celebrates after opening the scoring during the match against Sassuolo in Sassuolo. – AFP

even without the towering presence of the 39-year-old Swede.

But Pioli also has a crisis in midfield with Ismaël Bennacer out, Franck Kessie suspended, and Sandro Tonali, Ante Rebic and Simon Kjær in doubt.

“I’d like to have more options to choose from but we’ll make the best of the situation as always,” said Pioli.

“The squad has always done well in turning difficulties into a chance to show something different and better.

“But we still have a very difficult match to play, probably with few players available but we have the right mentality and character.

“We’ll try and do it on Wednesday against a difficult opponent. We have to grit out teeth and dig deep and then enjoy Christmas.”

**PROLIFIC INTER**

Inter coach Antonio Conte’s focus is firmly on the league after his Champions League hopes came to an abrupt end.

Inter’s domestic form has been better. They are on a six-match winning streak and have proved a tighter unit in December with fewer goals conceded.

They also have the top strike force in the Italian league, led by Romelu Lukaku. Collectively Inter’s forwards have scored 32 goals in 13 games.

“We want to finish this cycle of fixtures in the best possible fashion,” said Conte.

“We don’t want to give up now and we need to hold firm

against Verona, despite only having one training session beforehand.

“The hope then is to recover a bit of energy over Christmas because our lads haven’t stopped, particularly with international commitments.”

Behind the leading trio, Roma host Cagliari days after crashing 4-1 at Atalanta.

Paulo Fonseca’s side are pushing for a return to Champions League football along with Napoli who are just one point behind in fifth. — AFP

### ITALIAN SERIE A TABLE AFTER SUNDAY’S MATCHES (PLAYED, WON, DRAWN, LOST, GOALS FOR, GOALS AGAINST, POINTS):

|               |    |   |   |   |    |    |    |
|---------------|----|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| AC Milan      | 13 | 9 | 4 | 0 | 29 | 14 | 31 |
| Inter Milan   | 13 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 32 | 16 | 30 |
| Juventus      | 13 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 28 | 10 | 27 |
| Roma          | 13 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 28 | 21 | 24 |
| Napoli        | 13 | 8 | 0 | 5 | 26 | 14 | 23 |
| Sassuolo      | 13 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 23 | 15 | 23 |
| Atalanta      | 12 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 26 | 18 | 21 |
| Lazio         | 13 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 20 | 20 | 21 |
| Hellas Verona | 13 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 17 | 12 | 20 |
| Sampdoria     | 13 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 21 | 21 | 17 |
| Udinese       | 12 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 14 | 15 | 15 |
| Benevento     | 13 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 15 | 23 | 15 |
| Cagliari      | 13 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 19 | 24 | 14 |
| Bologna       | 13 | 4 | 2 | 7 | 19 | 25 | 14 |
| Parma         | 13 | 2 | 6 | 5 | 12 | 23 | 12 |
| Fiorentina    | 13 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 13 | 21 | 11 |
| Spezia        | 13 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 18 | 27 | 11 |
| Torino        | 13 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 21 | 31 | 7  |
| Genoa         | 13 | 1 | 4 | 8 | 12 | 26 | 7  |
| Crotone       | 13 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 11 | 28 | 6  |

**NOTE:** Napoli handed 3-0 defeat and deducted one point for no-show against Juventus on October 4

### ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS

|                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>On Sunday</b>                                                                 |
| Torino 1 (Verdi 69) Bologna 1 (Soriano 78)                                       |
| Cagliari 1 (Lykogiannis 27) Udinese 1 (Lasagna 57)                               |
| Benevento 2 (Insigne 57, Sau 89-pen) Genoa 0                                     |
| Sassuolo 1 (Berardi 89) AC Milan 2 (Leão 1, Saelemaekers 26)                     |
| Inter Milan 2 (Hakimi 52, Lukaku 71-pen) Spezia 1 (Piccoli 90+4)                 |
| Atalanta 4 (Zapata 59, Gosens 70, Muriel 72, Illicic 85)                         |
| Roma 1 (Dzeko 3)                                                                 |
| Lazio 2 (Immobile 9, Alberto 56) Napoli 0                                        |
| <b>On Saturday</b>                                                               |
| Fiorentina 1 (Vlahovic 19-pen) Verona 1 (Velooso 8-pen)                          |
| Sampdoria 3 (Damsgaard 26, Jankto 36, Quagliarella 65) Crotone 1 (Simy 45+1-pen) |
| Parma 0 Juventus 4 (Kulusevski 23, Ronaldo 26, 48, Morata 85)                    |



### Leverkusen's Bender twins to end career

Bayer Leverkusen's twin brothers Lars and Sven Bender will not renew their contracts after the season and end their careers, the Bundesliga club said on Monday. The 31-year-olds said in a club statement that health reasons played a major role that they would quit in summer.



### Heading caused Nobby Stiles death, says son John

The son of Nobby Stiles, one of England's 1966 World Cup winners, said on Monday that he believes his father's diagnosis of dementia and subsequent death was caused by years of heading a football.



# Ulsan crowned Asian champions

**HONG KONG:** Ulsan Hyundai reasserted East Asian dominance with victory in the Asian Champions League final but, as the trophy was packed up for the journey to South Korea, it was Qatar who emerged as the major winners of the heavily disrupted competition.

Ulsan's 2-1 win over Iran's Persepolis in Doha on Saturday marked the 12th time a K-League team had been crowned Asian champions, and the eighth in the last nine years from the eastern half of the confederation to secure the title.

Al Hilal's win last year interrupted East Asia's dominance and the Saudi Arabian side also threatened to dictate the narrative of the 2020 edition, though this time because of their early exit. The nature of their elimination reflected the difficulties faced by organisers determined to conclude the competition when it reconvened in Doha in September after a six-month suspension caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Qatari capital had set itself up as a bio-secure venue to host games involving teams from the west of the continent but a rash of infections within the Al Hilal squad saw the Saudis effectively kicked out of the tournament.

Players and officials had celebrated their domestic league title win on the eve of their departure and, as a result, infections steadily picked off players until Al Hilal were no longer able to field a team for their final group game.

### Qatar hosted the tournament centrally, and matches in the knockout rounds were played as one-off affairs

The negative headlines generated by the loss of one of Asia's most successful clubs could have derailed the competition but, after fine-tuning already stringent protocols, games continued with minimal further disruption.

"It was unique in the world," Dr Abdul Wahab al Musleh, the adviser to the minister of public health of Qatar on sports affairs, said about the set-up.

"I don't think there had been a similar experience by anybody in the world before we did it in Qatar, so it was definitely a learning curve for us. We learnt so many lessons."

for us. We learnt so many lessons."

### 'KEPT ASIAN FOOTBALL ALIVE'

Those experiences carried into the hosting of the eastern side of the competition in November and December, dates which closely matched those when Qatar will host the World Cup finals in two years' time.

As a result, the Gulf state was given the opportunity to showcase its much-vaunted stadium cooling systems, which maintain conditions inside venues at levels conducive to high-performance sport.

ductive to high-performance sport.

"We hadn't experienced this cooling system before," said Shanghai SIPG defender Yu Rui.

"I think as players we consume less energy and we sweat less, which can make our body react better during the game and keep us in a condition to play all the time."

In a year when many of its tournaments were cancelled, the Asian Football Confederation needed to ensure its premier club competition was completed to limit potentially damaging compensation claims from broadcasters and commercial partners.

With international travel all-but-impossible, Qatar hosted the tournament centrally, and matches in the knockout rounds were played as one-off affairs instead of the usual two-legged ties. This year's final was the first since 2012 - when Ulsan also won the title - to be played as a standalone game.

"Facilities here are exceptional," Persepolis head coach Yahya Golmohammadi told Iranian state television ahead of Saturday's decider.

"I firmly believe that had it not been for the Qatari football family, this tournament would have been suspended and not resumed, as there was no other country that would have organised these matches."

"In my opinion, Qataris kept Asian football alive and we, across the whole continent, should be extremely grateful to them." — **Reuters**

# Jatinder powers Muscat home; Al Turki, ARTT win

**MUSCAT:** A scintillating 153 by Oman opener Jatinder Singh powered Muscat CT to a massive 275-run victory against a hapless Renaissance in a Premier Division 50-over League mismatch on Oman Cricket turf 1 in Amerat on Friday.

Undefeated so far this season, Muscat posted an impressive 352 for 7 on the board thanks to Jatinder's brilliant knock that included 6 big sixes. Shoaib Khan (48) and Kashyapkumar Prajapati (45) were the other notable scorers. Sufyan Mahmood and Rafi Ullah bagged two wickets each.

Renaissance failed to make it an even contest, folding up for a paltry 77 in the 28th over, Ganesh Shandrashekhar doing most of the damage with a five-wicket haul.

Syed Aamir Kaleem and Rajesh Ranpura bowled well too, taking two wickets each.

### Kail stars in Al Turki win

In another Premier Division game on Saturday, Kail Khalid's splendid hundred helped Al Turki NMC to an exciting 38-run win over IT Works at OC Turf 1.

Kail's 100 off 127 balls was the highlight of Al Turki's 255 for 9 that also included a solid 62 by Karan Sonavala and 41 by Sindo Michael. Shakeel Ahmad was the pick of IT Works bowlers, taking 4 for 41 whereas Imran Muhammed and Khawar Ali claimed

**BRIEF SCORES**

**PREMIER DIVISION**  
Muscat CT 352 for 7 in 50 overs (Jatinder Singh 153 - 15x4, 6x6, Shoaib Khan 48 - 5x4, 1x6, Kashyapkumar Prajapati 45 - 6x4, Sufyan Mahmood 2-50, Rafi Ullah 2-54) beat Renaissance 77 all out in 27.4 overs (Abdul Rauf 25 - 3x4, Ganesh Chandrashekhar 5-21, Syed Aamir Kaleem 2-04, Rajesh Ranpura 2-10) by 275 runs.

**Al Turki NMC 255 for 9 in 50 overs** (Kail Khalid 100 - 9x4, 1x6, Karan Sonavala 62 - 7x4, 1x6, Sindo Michael 41 - 2x4, 1x6, Shakeel Ahmad 4-41, Imran Muhammed 2-21, Khawar Ali 2-53) beat IT Works 217 all out in 47.2 overs (Jahanzeb Asghar Ali 47 - 1x4, 3x6, Waseem Akhtar 34 - 6x4, Jitenkumar Ramanandi 2-38) by 38 runs

**A DIVISION**  
Awtad International 120 all out in 33.5 overs (Pradeep Kumar Chennupalli 30 - 4x4, Joel Biju Kumar 27 - 2x4, 1x6, Aqil Khan 5-31, Sanjaya Raj Ravindra 2-08, Muhammed Moshin Qureshi 2-18) lost to ARTT 121 for 6 in 31.5 overs (Zeeshan Siddiqui 42 - 3x4, Shehbaz Nasar 22 - 1x4, 1x6, Aqib Javed 2-21, Parameswaran Shankar 2-32) by 4 wickets.

two wickets each.

IT Works made a cautious start reaching 50 without loss in 12 overs but lost track from thereon, slumping to 106 for 6 in 28

overs before being dismissed for 217 in 47.2 overs. Jahanzeb Asghar Ali top-scored with a fluent 47 while Waseem Ahtar contributed 36. Jitenkumar took 2 for 38.



Aqil Khan and Zeeshan Siddiqui receiving their prize from ARTT Managing Director Ali Anwar.

### Aqil bowls ARTT to victory

Aqil Khan's five-wicket haul steered Arabian Region Travel and Tourism (ARTT) to a 4-wicket victory against Awtad Interna-

tional in an A Division 50-over match at OC Turf 2 on Friday.

Awtad's decision to bat first did not pay dividends as it was bundled out for 120 in the 34th over due largely to Aqil's unplayable spell in which he claimed 5 for 31. Sanjaya Ravindra and Mohammed Mohsin Qureshi bagged two wickets each.

ARTT found itself in deep trouble too, teetering at 64 for 5 in 18 overs before old fox Zeeshan Siddiqui came to its rescue with a match-saving unbeaten 42. ARTT sealed the win in the 32nd over, scoring 121 for 6. Aqib Javed and Parameswaran Shankar took two wickets each.



• KHAWAR ALI

# Oman’s STAR ACT on track

HARIDEV PUSHPARAJ  
MUSCAT, DEC 21

Khawar Ali has been a regular fixture in the Oman cricketing set-up for the last five years and he continues to be one of its shining lights.

After bagging the coveted Player of the Year Award for his excellent performance in the 2019-2020 domestic season, Khawar is an elated man.

“I’m very happy that I received the award. I was close to receiving it earlier on a few occasions but I feel great to have got it finally. I feel lucky too,” he added.

Khawar had struck over 500 runs and scalped 15 wickets in the Covid affected season in the domestic scene.

The Pakistan-born player stated that he was satisfied with his performance over the last couple of years.

“I am also quite happy with my performance over the last couple of years. At the international level in the T20I format and at the domestic circuit as well, I have been able to come up with some good performances.”

Khawar is one of the best performing players for Oman becoming the first Oman player to pick up a T20I hat-trick and also featured among the top three runscorers and wicket-takers in the 2019 T20 World Cup Qualifier.

In what is a measure of his value to Team Oman, Khawar is currently also ranked seventh in the ICC Men’s T20I All-Rounder Rankings. He has scored

three half-centuries, one in ODI and two in T20I, out of 11 ODIs and 32 T20Is played.

Khawar has been working on his batting technique and felt some work with the coach has helped him.

“My batting technique has improved under the head coach Duleep Mendis. We have worked out a way in which I can come up with the best efforts.”

No discussion this year is complete without the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and Khawar revealed the effects of it on him as well.

“It has been a tough time for me just like everyone else and as a sportsperson it is challenging. My fitness was a concern post-Covid and it was something I had to work on but gradually in the last few months I have been able to recoup and get myself back on track. I am not yet 100 per cent fit but slowly but surely getting there,” he explained.

With the 2020 T20 World Cup postponed to 2021, Khawar stated the Oman cricket team’s main goal was to focus on the preparations.

“We want to focus on the T20 World Cup next year in India and the ODIs at the World Cricket League Two event,” Khawar added.

“I would like to thank Oman Cricket and especially Pankaj Khimji and Madhu Jesrani along with the coach Duleep Mendis for all the support that they have given me that has helped me in my career so far,” Khawar stated.

Khawar is one of the best performing players for Oman becoming the first Oman player to pick up a T20I hat-trick and also featured among the top three runscorers and wicket-takers in the 2019 T20 World Cup Qualifier

|       | MATCHES | RUNS | HS | AVE   | 50 |
|-------|---------|------|----|-------|----|
| ODIs  | 11      | 245  | 79 | 24.5  | 1  |
| T20Is | 32      | 601  | 72 | 20.72 | 2  |

# business

MUSCAT  
STOCK  
MARKET

3,603.89

CRUDE  
OIL PRICE

|             |         |
|-------------|---------|
| Oman Crude  | \$50.40 |
| Brent Crude | \$52.32 |
| Light Crude | \$48.61 |

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## Second REIT to launch next month

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, DEC 21

The Capital Market Authority (CMA) has approved the prospectus of Oman REIT Fund, the second such Real Estate Investment Trust fund (REIT) to be rolled out following the promulgation of laws regulating Real Estate Investment Funds in the Sultanate.

The fund will offer 261 million units for public subscription which represents 40 per cent of the total capital of the fund at RO 65 million with the potential of increasing the percentage to 60 per cent as indicated in the prospectus.

The prospectus sets the issue price of the unit is 102 baisas comprising 100 baisas as unit value plus 2 baisas as issue expenses. The units will be offered from January 17 to 31, 2021.

The portfolio of 20 properties offered through the fund includes residential, commercial, retail and warehousing properties distributed all over the Sultanate.

The prospectus states that the assets converted into investment units are income generating.

Real estate funds provide options for investors to invest in real estate and own investment units in addition to allowing foreign investors to own investment units in the fund to attract foreign capital.

## Omantel eyes revenue of \$500m in tower deal

CONRAD PRABHU  
@conradprabhu

Majority government-owned telecom services provider Omantel has revealed that it hopes to earn in excess of \$500 million in a deal that involves the sale and leaseback of its sprawling telecom tower passive infrastructure.

The publicly listed company said in a filing to the Capital Market Authority (CMA) that offers received from a number of interested companies are currently being evaluated for their technical, commercial and legal merit.

Commenting on the expected revenue from the deal, it noted: "Given that the contemplated transaction is still at an evaluation stage, it is not possible to ascertain accurately the financial impact it will have on the company. However, it is expected that the sale proceeds will be in excess of USD 500 million."

According to telecom experts, passive infrastructure typically

5G Sunset Cell Tower: Cellular communications tower for mobile phone and video data transmission

encompasses all of the non-electronic elements of a mobile network, including the tower itself or pylon, any support structure or building or related shelter, electricity generation or back-up

facility, air conditioning plant, and security. Not included are base stations, microwave radio equipment, switches, antennae and transceivers, which are collectively referred to active infrastructure.

It is understood that Omantel, the biggest player in the Sultanate's expanding telecom landscape and the third-largest in the MENA region, has around 3000 towers distributed across the country.

Offering all or part of all of massive passive infrastructure for sale, the telecom company is set to join its peers in the wider region, and globally as well, in sharing this capital intensive component of mobile telecom infrastructure – a move designed to raise revenue amid the ongoing economic downturn.

Earlier this year, Kuwait's Zain Group clinched a deal to sell and leaseback its passive infrastructure, comprising around 1,600 mobile towers, worth around \$160 million. Omantel owns a 21.9 per cent shareholding in Zain, the

Kuwait-headquartered regional mobile telecom group, which it purchased in 2017.

A number of international and local firms are understood to be in the race for the rights to acquire Omantel's passive infrastructure.

The successful bidder is expected to lease this capacity to multiple operators, thereby optimising returns on the initial investment made towards these towers. Passive infrastructure sharing is a growing trend globally, experts note.

Oman Investment Authority (OIA), the integrated sovereign wealth fund of the Sultanate of Oman, owns the government's 51 per cent stake in Omantel.

As with other state-owned entities (SOE) in the Sultanate, Omantel is required to raise its own funding to support its expansion and growth requirements – a practice being encouraged by OIA to reduce dependence on the government for funding assistance.

## Jump in company registrations

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, DEC 21

The total number of companies registered with the 10 most popular commercial activities has jumped to 45,673 by the end of the third quarter of 2020, up from 42,692 companies registered during the same period of 2019, according to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion (MoCIIP).

The Ministry pointed out that the increase in the registration process of the 10 most registered commercial activities is due to the

commitment of investors to the conditions and regulations of the investment, as well as the facilities provided by the electronic portal "Invest Easy" in addition to the speed of completion of transactions in record time.

The Statistics Department at MoCIIP shows that the building, construction and contracting activity was the

most recorded activity, with 8,111 activities during the third quarter of this year, followed by the export and import offices with 6,053 activities, grocery stores with 4,721 activities, cafes that provide meals with 4,644 activities, and coffee shops that serve drinks recorded 4,360 activities.

The statistics also show that the number of restaurant activities registered during the same period reached 3,593 activities, while haircutting, hairdressing and men's shaving activities recorded 3,588 activities and refrigeration recorded 3,438 activities.

## MEDC holds 7th Annual Technical Forum

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, DEC 21

Muscat Electricity Distribution Company (MEDC), a member of Nama Group, will hold the seventh edition of its annual technical forum today, December 22. The forum discusses a set of working matters for innovation projects that enhances the company's

future vision in applying the latest and most advanced technologies in the field of electricity.

MEDC organises this forum to exchange ideas and benefit from the existing expertise in the company in order to develop the electricity network and find creative solutions to the challenges facing the company.

## ACFE to organise online talk on fraud prevention today

BUSINESS REPORTER  
MUSCAT, DEC 21

The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (Oman) Chapter is organising a talk on 'Fighting Fraud- Prevention and Detection' by Alan Harte, Head of Audit Bank Muscat, at its annual general meeting scheduled to be held online at 4 pm on Tuesday, December 22.

According to a new report from the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE), a single case of occupational fraud costs the victim organisation an average of more than \$1.5 million, and Certified Fraud Examiners (CFEs) estimate that organisations lose 5 per cent of their revenues each year to fraud.

In the ACFE's 2020 Report to the Nations, a study of 2,504 cases

of occupational fraud investigated by CFEs in 125 countries, the typical fraud lasted 14 months before it was detected and caused a median loss of \$8,300 a month. The amount of fraud detected exceeded \$ 3.6 billion, not counting the billions of dollars lost in incidents that go reported,

undetected or unknown.

"We see more recognition of fraud risks in many organisations than we saw 10 years ago," said Davis Kallukaran, President ACFE Oman Chapter. "It is estimated that globally about \$ 4.5 trillion is lost to fraud annually. It will never be possible to eliminate all fraud. A strong system of internal controls is considered by the ACFE to be 'the most valuable fraud prevention device.'"

Membership of the ACFE Oman Chapter has tripled during the last two years. It is encouraging to note that almost 50 per cent of qualified CFEs in the Sultanate are Omanis.

The Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) is the world's largest anti-fraud organisation incorporated in the United States and headquartered

in Austin Texas. The Association is the premier provider of anti-fraud training and education.

Together with more than 85,000 members, the ACFE is reducing business fraud worldwide and inspiring public confidence in the integrity and objectivity within the profession. Certified Fraud Examiners (CFEs) possess unique expertise in preventing and detecting fraud, and are highly valued by organisations spanning all industries, sectors and sizes.

The Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE) credential denotes proven expertise in fraud prevention, detection and deterrence. CFEs around the world help protect the global economy by uncovering fraud and implementing processes to prevent fraud from occurring in the first place.

# Landmark power and water subsidy reforms: What they mean for consumers in Oman

The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) has issued a detailed list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that provides greater clarity on the implications of the restructured tariffs for electricity and water which come into force in the Sultanate with effect from January 1, 2021. The applicability of these new tariffs for citizens and residents is clearly outlined as well.

GENERAL QUERIES

**As a citizen, what am I required to do after the implementation of the new tariff?**

All you have to do is update your data for all electricity accounts that you own by contacting the electricity service providers in your area. You must also update your data for all water accounts with Diam or through the Water Directorate in the Office of the Minister of State and Governor of Dhofar for customers of this directorate. The system will automatically determine the accounts associated with the civil ID for each customer and ensure the implementation of the Citizen Account Tariff for the highest-consuming two accounts owned by any Omani citizen. Any additional accounts will be subject to the Resident tariff and additional accounts tariff.

**What documents are required to update customer data?**

**For electricity:** Civil ID; Electricity accounts details; Property deed of ownership (Mulkiya) or a municipality-approved lease agreement  
**For water:** Civil ID; Water accounts details; Property deed of ownership (Mulkiya) or a municipality-approved lease agreement

**How long does it take to update my data in the electricity distribution companies' databases?**

When the customer submits the required documents to the electricity and water companies, the update will appear automatically in the invoice of the following month after the update.

**What if the customer is late in updating his data?**

The new system has allowed a six months' period, ending on June 30, 2021, for customers to update their data following the implementation of the new tariff. However, we advise the customers to update their data as soon as possible so that they can benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff.  
The Citizen Account Tariff will be applied retroactively to the customer who updated his data between January 1, 2021 and June 30, 2021, but only for two accounts.

If the customer updates data after June 30, 2021; he will not benefit from the retroactive calculation of the Citizen Account Tariff. This Citizen Account Tariff will only reflect on customer bill in the month following the date of data update.

**I updated my details, but the bill I received is not modified?**

You have the right to obtain a reference number from the service provider stating the date on which your data was updated. When you submit the required documents through the available data update channels, the system will electronically process your data within a period not exceeding one month.

In case you updated your data at the time that the system performs the necessary processing for the issuance of bills, the bill of the next month following the month in which you updated your data may reflect the previous tariff. As soon as the data appears in the system after the update, the tariff will be adjusted and the value of the bills will be corrected as of the date your data is updated.

**How can I know the tariff applicable on my account?**

You can know the applicable tariff applied to each of your electricity and water accounts by one of the following ways:

- Check your electricity and water bills; the applicable tariff name will

be indicated.

- Call the electricity or water supplier call centre and enquire about the tariffs applied to each of your accounts.
- Visit the service supplier website.

**Will electricity meters be changed?**

Electricity meters will be changed for the category of Large Customers who are subject to the cost-reflective tariff. The new meters will be able to calculate electricity consumption and send it automatically to the service provider for the purpose of calculating the value of the monthly bill.

**What should I do when buying or renting a home?**

When you buy or rent a home, contact the electricity or water service provider and update the property ownership or the lease contract information.

**What are the best practices to save on my bills?**

You can take a look at the Energy-Saving Home Guide from the (Yaseer) program at (<https://apsr.om/pdfs/ee/guide-en.pdf>). The guide provides valuable tips on choosing high-efficiency electrical appliances, in addition to a number of solutions that help households to save energy and ultimately make more savings on their electricity bills.

FAQs

**I am a citizen and I have five electricity meters under one account; am I eligible for the Citizen Account Tariff?**

Yes, you are eligible for the Citizen Account Tariff if the meters are registered within the same account.

**I am a citizen but living in a rented property; can I benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff for this property?**

All Omani citizens will be entitled to benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff for two accounts as a maximum. If you live in a rented property, contact the service provider to update your information. A copy of the lease contract approved by the municipality should be submitted; so that you can benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff.

**I am a citizen owning two properties, and I have rented out one of them to a resident, will the tenant get the Citizen Account Tariff?**

The Citizen Account Tariff is applicable only to Omani citizens up to a maximum of two accounts; thus, residents are not entitled to the Citizen Account Tariff. The Resident (and additional accounts) Tariff will be applied once the tenant's data are updated with the service provider.

**I am a citizen and a new tenant of a property registered in the name of a resident. What should I do to change the account information?**

In order for the service provider to apply the Citizens Account Tariff, you will first be required to submit a lease agreement approved by the municipality, following which the service provider will register the electricity/water account under your name.

**I am a citizen and I own a unit in a multi-apartment building (residential apartments). Will I be eligible for subsidies for my residential unit?**

If you have electricity and water accounts linked to your civil ID, the Citizen Account Tariff applies automatically to those two accounts. If you have two accounts for electricity and other two accounts for water linked to your civil ID, the Citizen Account

Tariff applies automatically to those four accounts. If you have more than two accounts linked to your civil ID, the Citizen Account Tariff applies automatically to the highest consuming two accounts; and the Resident Account Tariff applies to the third account onward.

**I am a citizen and I have two properties; none of them is included in the Citizen Account Tariff, what should I do?**

All you have to do is update electricity and water accounts with the provider through the available channels.

**I am a citizen owning three properties, and I have rented out two of them. Will I be eligible for subsidies for the three?**

Eligibility for Citizen Account Tariff, in such a case, depends on tenants; if the properties are leased to a resident with a lease agreement under his or her name, the Resident and Additional Accounts Tariff shall apply. However, if the properties are leased to an Omani citizen under a lease agreement, the Citizen Account Tariff shall apply.

**A relative of mine lives in a property registered in my name with the accounts of electricity and water also registered in my name; shall I benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff?**

If the account is registered in your name, it will be considered among the accounts benefiting from the Citizen Account Tariff, leaving you with one account to benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff category. However, to fully benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff for two accounts registered in your name, you should register a lease agreement with your relative with the Municipality. After that, update your data through the relevant channels.

**We are a group of brothers and sisters living in the same property. Are we eligible for the Citizen Account Tariff?**

The electricity and water accounts should be registered under one civil ID to benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff. If the two accounts of electricity and water are registered under two different names, the eligibility criteria shall not apply. In such a case, the members of the household can agree to have both accounts registered under one person's name (with no legal effect on the ownership of the property itself). The same person shall then update his or her data through any channel available to benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff which shall apply to two accounts registered under the name of that person.

**Can I change my account that benefits from the Citizen Account Tariff? How?**

Yes, you can change the accounts benefiting from the Citizen Account Tariff via the designated communication channels of the service provider. You will be eligible to benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff for up to two accounts only.

**How many times can I change my account that benefits from the Citizen Account Tariff?**

Once you choose one of your accounts to be the one that benefits from the Citizen Account Tariff, you can't change it until 12 months have passed. However, if you are changing your key data (such as the ownership of the property or the lease agreement), you are allowed to choose the two accounts that will benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff.

**I am a resident living in a rented apartment, what will be the applicable tariff?**

The tariff regulations stipulate that resident owners or tenants are not entitled to benefit from the Citizen Account Tariff for electricity and water accounts, and the Resident and Additional Accounts Tariff shall apply to their accounts.

National Subsidy System (NSS) for electricity and water subscriptions

**What is the National Subsidy System for electricity and water?**

It is a platform that facilitates providing subsidy to eligible Omani households to mitigate the impact from implementation of the electricity and water subsidy reform programme. Households covered under the National Subsidy System will receive support in the form of deduction in their electricity bill, in the first stage, and in their water bill in the following stages.

**How can I benefit from the National Support System?**

Register in the National Support System for electricity and water subsidies by downloading the NSS Application on your smart phone or visit the official website [www.nss.gov.om](http://www.nss.gov.om)

For more information and updates about the NSS, kindly follow the NSS on Twitter: @nationalsubsidy

**When will the NSS support be rolled out?**

You can register in the NSS starting from 20th December, 2020. Eligible Omani citizens that have registered in the NSS will receive the additional subsidies starting from their January 2021 bill, which will be issued in February 2021 by their electricity service provider.

| NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS         | MONTHLY INCOME OF HOUSEHOLD (OMR) | ELIGIBILITY |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| Regardless of the number of members | OMR 500 or less                   | covered     |
| Five members or more                | OMR 750 or less                   | covered     |
| Seven members or more               | OMR 1000 or less                  | covered     |
| Nine members or more                | OMR 1250 or less                  | covered     |
| Regardless of the number of members | More than OMR 1250                | Not covered |

**What are the categories targeted by the NSS?**

Eligibility is met based on both the size and income criteria of the household, according to the table below:

**Will families covered in the Social Security system be eligible for subsidies in the NSS?**

The highest social security monthly salary is within the category of (RO 500 or less). Accordingly, if the beneficiary is an independent household, it is eligible for the additional subsidy under the NSS. But, if the beneficiary of the social security system is living within a larger family in the same household, the above-mentioned eligibility criteria shall be considered.

**How did you devise the categories eligible for additional subsidies?**

It was based on the results of the 2019 Household Income and Expenditure Survey, coupled with the adoption of one of the relative calculation methodologies in determining the applicable thresholds. Accordingly, two eligibility criteria have been established; the total income and the number of household members.

**What is the mechanism for providing subsidies to the households covered by the NSS?**

The subsidy will be reflected in the form of a discount in the total bill value based on a certain percentage to be determined annually by the National Subsidy System Committee. The subsidy is, however, capped to 4,000 kWh/month consumption for electricity. A similar mechanism will apply in respect of water upon roll-out in the later stages.

**How are the household members identified?**

Members of a household are the individuals who are associated with of the applicant (head of the family) and live in the same property for which the ap-

plicant will receive electricity and water subsidies.

**Are domestic workers counted among the members of the household?**

Domestic workers are not included in the number of household members when determining eligibility.

**How is household income calculated?**

A household income is basically the sum of salaries and wages received by members of such household, whether generated from the private sector, the public sector, or the civil sector, in addition to any other income generated from pensions, commercial revenues (renting houses, cars... etc.), investment profits and revenues, and incomes generated from agricultural activities, fishing, or otherwise which are estimated monthly.

**Is seasonal income included in calculating the household income? How are seasonal and non-fixed incomes calculated?**

Yes, the total household income includes all types of income that the family gains throughout the year. The total of these incomes is calculated and divided by 12 months and added to the monthly income.

**Which income is taken into consideration? Is it only the income of the head of the household; or that of all working family members?**

The total income of the household, including the head of the family, the spouse, and all income of earners within the same household is calculated to establish eligibility.

**Why are earning of all members of the household being calculated and not just the income of the head of the household?**

When comparing the economic and living standards of families, and to assess the economic status of one household, it is necessary to consider the total incomes of its members. Such collective income positively impact the standard of living of the household in general, regardless of the extent of the members' contribution to household spending

**Will the rent value paid by the tenant be deducted from the total income of a household?**

The total household income is calculated without any deductions

**How will the income be calculated if the head of the family has a loan and monthly installments are being deducted from his/her salary? Will the total income be calculated after deducting the loan value or not?**

Deducting loan instalments or other liabilities and household income is calculated without total expenses.

**Who is in charge of implementing and supervising over the NSS?**

NSS is supervised by the National Subsidy System Committee (formerly known as the Fuel Pricing Committee), whose membership includes representatives from: Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Social Development, and OQ Group.



## In brief

## ■ BIELEFELD



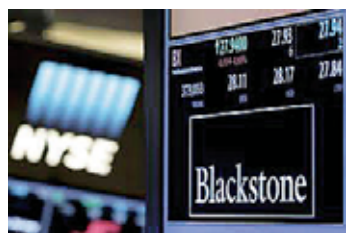
## AMAZON WORKERS WALK OFF THE JOB AHEAD OF CHRISTMAS RUSH

Multiple German Amazon facilities reported their staff had walked off the job amid a labour dispute, just as more people than ever are relying on the Internet retailer to get packages delivered for the Christmas holiday.

Work stoppages involving about 800 employees were reported at facilities in Rheinberg and Werne. Labour union Verdi has called for a strike to get Amazon to recognise a pay deal that applies to small businesses and delivery operations in Germany. It is also calling for improved working conditions.

Striking workers have said they intend to stay off the job until Thursday. - dpa

## ■ NEW YORK



## BLACKSTONE IN TALKS WITH BLANK-CHECK ACQUISITION FIRM

Private equity firm Blackstone Group Inc is in talks to merge US benefits services provider Alight Solutions LLC with a blank-check acquisition firm backed by veteran investor Bill Foley, according to people familiar with the matter.

The merger with Foley Trasimene Acquisition Corp would result in Alight becoming a publicly-listed company at a valuation of more than \$8 billion, including debt, the sources said.

The deal talks come more than a year after Blackstone cancelled an IPO of Alight as it was about to raise up to \$800 million. — Reuters

## ■ WASHINGTON



## LAWMAKERS TO BACK \$1.9 BN TO REPLACE TELECOM EQUIPMENT

US lawmakers are expected to endorse \$1.9 billion to fund a programme to remove telecom network equipment that the US government says pose national security risks as part of a year-end spending bill and COVID-19 bill, a source briefed on the matter said on Sunday.

Lawmakers are also expected to back \$3.2 billion for an emergency broadband benefit for low-income Americans.

The Federal Communications Commission said in June it had formally designated China's Huawei Technologies Co and ZTE Corp as threats, a declaration that bars US firms from tapping an \$8.3 billion government fund to purchase equipment from the companies. — Reuters

# Stocks falter, sterling skids as new COVID strain shuts UK

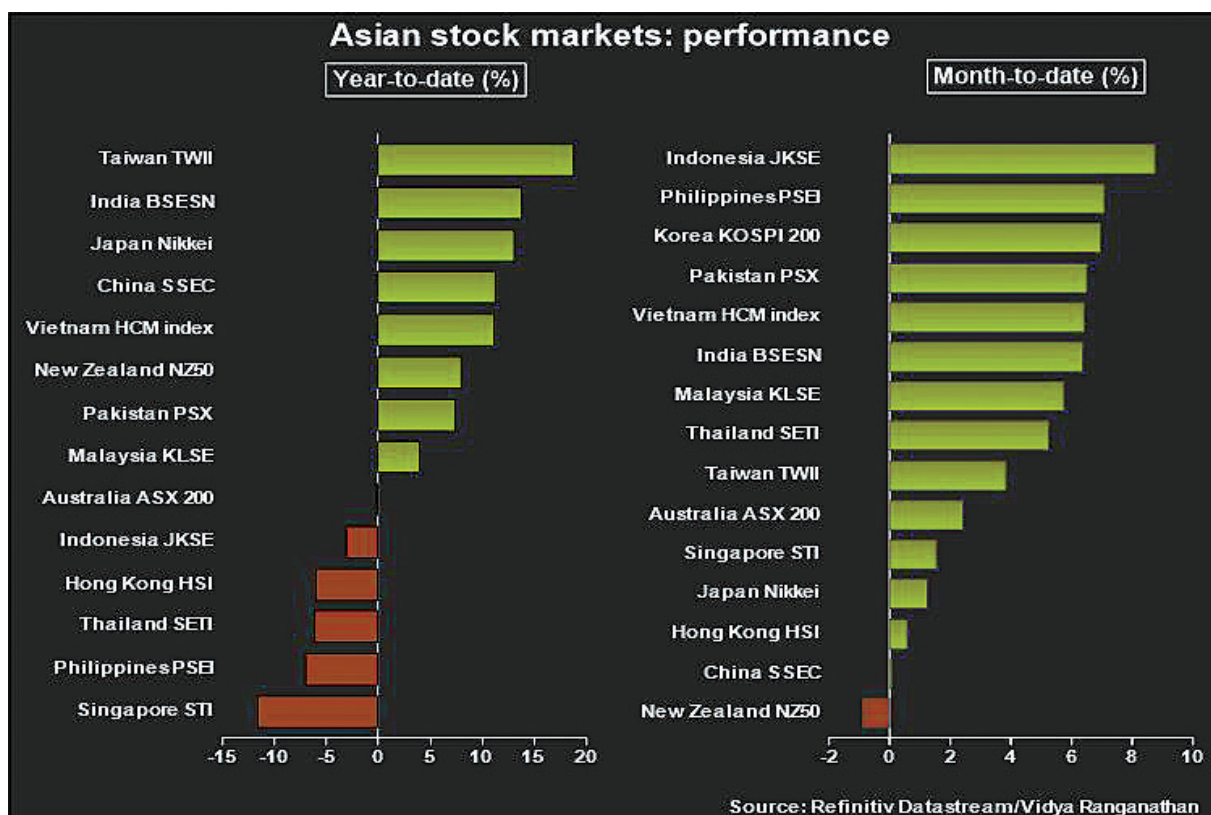
SYDNEY: Asian stocks faltered and sterling slid on Monday as unease over a new coronavirus strain that was shutting much of the United Kingdom offset news that a deal had finally been struck on a long-awaited US stimulus bill.

The pound sank 1.2 per cent to \$1.3352 after several European countries closed their borders to the UK as the country entered a tougher lockdown to fight a new strain of coronavirus.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson will chair an emergency response meeting on Monday to discuss international travel and the flow of freight in and out of Britain. That combined with the lack of a Brexit deal to slice 1.1 per cent off FTSE futures, while EURO STOXX 50 futures shed 1.7 per cent.

MSCI's broadest index of Asia-Pacific shares outside Japan dipped 0.2 per cent after hitting a string of record peaks last week. Japan's Nikkei reversed early gains to be down 0.4 per cent, off its highest since April 1991.

In the United States, Republican US Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell said an agreement had been reached by congressional leaders on a roughly \$900 billion COVID-19 relief bill. The news saw futures for the S&P 500 jump at first, only to fade to a loss of 0.2 per cent as the session progressed.



Analysts at BofA noted a huge \$46.4 billion flowed into equities in the latest week, while the outflow from cash was the largest in four months. There were record flows into tech shares and large flows to the consumer sector, healthcare, financials, real estate and value stocks.

BofA chief investment strategist Michael Hartnett said a "sell signal" had been triggered for the first time since February as cash levels declined to 4.0 per cent

in the latest Global Fund Manager Survey. "Positioning is getting over-extended as policy support and profits are peaking," he said in a note.

"Expectations for higher growth, inflation and lower interest rates have become consensus and investors are positioning for a very rosy scenario of low volatility and high growth."

Another popular trade has been shorting the US dollar and

again positioning was looking over-extended by many measures, giving the currency some respite on Monday. "FX markets await final outcomes of a possible Brexit deal and US fiscal package," said Ned Rumpeltin, European head of FX strategy at TD Securities.

"We remain biased to fade any 'good news' kneejerk USD-selling on both fronts, however. These factors look fully priced and the short-USD trade appears increasingly crowded." — AFP

## After tough 2020, Iraq eyes more economic pain ahead

BAGHDAD: A year of economic agony for pandemic-hit and oil-reliant Iraq is drawing to a close, but a draft 2021 budget involving a hefty currency devaluation could bring more pain for citizens.

Officials who prepared the document said their goal was to aim for "survival" solutions after an unprecedented fiscal crisis brought on by the coronavirus pandemic and the collapse in the price of oil.

Iraq, which relies on oil sales to finance 90 per cent of its budget, projects that its economy has shrunk by 11 per cent this year, while poverty doubles to 40 per cent of the country's 40 million residents.

A slew of measures included in the 2021 budget draft, to be discussed at an extraordinary weekend cabinet session, is an attempt to offer a remedy.

The toughest decision at play is an official devaluation of the Iraqi dinar from 1,182 to the US dollar to 1,450, the first such recalculation in a half-decade.

"We are trying to reduce pressure on the public sector wage bill, which is our single biggest expenditure," an Iraqi official said as the budget was being prepared.

He explained that authorities can make inroads into the deficit — projected by the IMF at 20 per cent of GDP for 2020 — if they continue paying state employees in dinar, while the government rakes in dollars from oil sales.

"We can spread that money further," he said.

The government is Iraq's biggest employer with around four million public sector workers,



An employee of a currency exchange counter, counts local currency banknotes in the southern Iraqi city of Nasiriyah in the Dhi Qar province. — AFP

plus three million pensioners and one million people on welfare.

News of the devaluation has enraged public sector workers, in a country that lacks a developed manufacturing sector and is heavily reliant on imported goods.

"Our salaries will be worthless," complained Mohammad, a doctor at a COVID-19 ward in Baghdad.

State employees already saw their October and November salaries significantly delayed, straining their purchasing power — and their patience.

"I'm nervously watching the rate go up, and I'm angry at the government," Mohammad said.

Over the last week, the unofficial rate at exchange houses across the country had edged up, with the dinar trading at 1,300 against the dollar from around

1,240.

During a global recession, when other countries are trying to encourage more spending, a devaluation of the dinar could do more harm than good, said economic expert Ali al Mawlawi.

"Yes, the government is desperate and has no other options. But my worry is that it will hit poor people the hardest by knocking their purchasing power down," he said.

Iraqi officials hinted there could even be another dramatic devaluation next year with the dinar reaching 1,600 against the dollar, following pressure by the International Monetary Fund.

Adding to the pain, mid-level and senior public servants will take home fewer dinars next year than they did this year, as their salaries will be subject to a new income tax set at 15 per cent. — AFP

## Japan cabinet approves record budget, higher defence spending

TOKYO: Japan's cabinet on Monday approved a record budget proposal for the next fiscal year from April, including stimulus for the pandemic-hit economy and another hike in defence spending to counter China.

The budget proposal totals 106.6 trillion yen (\$1.03 trillion), a 3.8 per cent rise from the current year and the ninth straight annual increase.

Once again the government is seeking a record defence budget, for the seventh year running, this time of 5.3 trillion yen, up 0.5 per cent from fiscal 2020 as Japan faces threats from an assertive China and North Korea.

Among the key items of military spending are 57.6 billion yen to develop a next-generation fighter and 33.5 billion yen for the development of a new missile.

"We will strengthen the capacity necessary for national defence... in order to keep pace with the security environment which is becoming increasingly tough," Chief Cabinet Secretary Katsunobu Kato told a regular briefing. The overall budget reflects the long shadow cast by the coronavirus pandemic and the growing cost of supporting the country's ageing population. — AFP

## US lawmakers reach deal on \$900 bn stimulus package

WASHINGTON: US lawmakers agreed on a nearly \$900 billion COVID-19 relief package for millions of Americans on Sunday, in a deal that follows months of wrangling and comes as the nation battles the world's largest outbreak of the virus.

The package includes aid for vaccine distribution and logistics, extra jobless benefits of \$300 per week, and a new round of \$600 stimulus checks — half the amount provided in checks distributed in March under the CARES Act.

It comes after months of partisan debate and finger-pointing as well as last-minute negotiations that culminated in a deal lawmakers said they hoped to formally approve on Monday.

Negotiations had taken place amid a highly contentious campaign for the US presidency and Donald Trump's subsequent

refusal to concede defeat to Democrat Joe Biden.

"We've agreed to a package of nearly \$900 billion. It is packed with targeted policies to help struggling Americans who have already waited too long," Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell said in a statement.

Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer confirmed an agreement had been reached with Republicans and the White House on a deal that "delivers urgently needed funds to save the lives and livelihoods of the American people as the virus accelerates."

The agreement also contains \$25 billion in housing aid to prevent evictions and nearly \$100 billion to help schools and childcare facilities re-open, a statement from Pelosi and Schumer said. — AFP

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The crew of the trawler 'Good Fellowship' process the day's catch after berthing in Eyemouth Harbour in the Scottish Borders. Scottish fishermen specialising in shellfish destined for the tables of some of Europe's top restaurants and hotels fear that extra red tape at Channel ports from January 1 when the UK leaves the Single Market will slow down the supply chain and put their lucrative but perishable cargo at risk. — AFP

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# features



## Inspired by nature, colour, emotion

Muscat-based Pakistani artist Sara Riaz Khan is a visual artist and an educational consultant. In 2007, a family crisis led to her work becoming fully abstract. She explores ideas about shared humanity, transformation and how the creative process can support during these challenging times. With a long term vision, she is inspired by nature, emotion, colour and sustainability... **P18**

### INSIDE STORIES

FILM FESTIVAL

**BERLIN FILM FEST POSTPONED, DIVIDED INTO ONLINE AND LIVE EVENTS**

Berlin's international film festival postponed on Friday its February 2021 edition as the coronavirus pandemic continues to take a harsh toll on the global entertainment industry...

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CULTURE

**UNESCO PUTS FINNISH SAUNA CULTURE ON HERITAGE LIST**

Finns' penchant for relaxing in blazing hot steam-filled rooms was on Thursday put on the UN's list of the world's intangible heritage...

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READ

**NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR**

BY GEORGE ORWELL

Nineteen Eighty-Four: A Novel, often published as 1984, is a dystopian social science fiction novel by English novelist George Orwell. It was published on June 8, 1949 by Secker & Warburg as Orwell's ninth and final book completed in his lifetime.

MUSIC

**'#CHANGEMUSIC' PLAN AIMS TO GIVE BLACK ARTISTS BIGGER CLOUT**

The organisers of the Grammy awards on Thursday launched an initiative to elevate Black voices at all levels of the music industry and ensure that Black artists are fairly compensated for their work...

**Story on Page 19**

CHRISTMAS

**SANTA WELCOMES VISITORS AT WINTER WONDERLAND IN CHINA'S ARCTIC TOWN**

Santa Claus and his elves have been busy at work turning a Christmas village in northern China into a winter wonderland for visitors. In a two-storey wooden house with about 100 Father Christmas dolls, the white-bearded figure in a red suit writes down seasonal wishes with a quill and poses with tourists at the theme park on the outskirts of Mohe, China's northernmost city.



Sara Riaz Khan



# Inspired by nature, colour, emotion

LIJU CHERIAN  
@cherianmathiker

Muscat-based Pakistani artist Sara Riaz Khan is a visual artist and an educational consultant. In 2007, a family crisis led to her work becoming fully abstract. She explores ideas about shared humanity, transformation and how the creative process can support during these challenging times. With a long term vision, she is inspired by nature, emotion, colour and sustainability.

Maryam al Zadjali, Director, Omani Society for Fine Arts (OSFA), opened Sara's exhibition on December 13 at Art & Soul Gallery, the Waterfront Mall, following COVID-19 protocols. In an interview, Sara talks about herself and how the exposition is a gratitude to the people of Oman and the place where she belongs.

**Excerpts:**  
**Why have you named the present expo, 'Under a peaceful sky'? Explain**

I am at a time of my life taking stock of many things; this exhibition is a form of gratitude. Oman is a place like no other; it is uniquely connected to its history, while simultaneously moving forward. My experience of being in this peaceful space, close to nature has been an important part of my artistic development and growth.

**Mountains, water and spaces inspire you. Any particular reason for this?**

I find inspiration in the land itself (the plains, desert, mountains, forest or scrubland) and this probably relates to spending time on a farm and being in the countryside as a child. Coming to Muscat from London in 2002, I was struck by how closely nature surrounds us. Often in cities, trees are the major natural landmarks that break up our horizon, but here we are close to open water and mountains. Life can often be challenging and when I can, I choose to focus on the beauty of nature.

**Any reasons for highlighting nature, human emotions in your works?**

Making sense of our world



and expressing ourselves, are fundamental human needs. Understanding my place in the world through my connection with nature and reflecting on emotions are important aspects. Living in different countries, nature made the unfamiliar, familiar and gave me a sense of belonging. It is something I always notice which gives me peace and strength. The process of painting often helped me work through challenging times and emotions. I am also inspired by ideas and connections, and often these relate to how and what I feel.

**How has your role as visual artist, educational consultant influenced your works?**

Imagine being in a constantly changing feedback loop, where ideas and connections continually flow and impact each other. Both these roles offer opportunities to share and create knowledge as well as to be curious and keep learning. Sometimes being a visual artist is a very introspective process and can take



**Sara Riaz Khan says**  
the process of painting often helped her work through challenging times and emotions. "I am also inspired by ideas and connections, and often these relate to how and what I feel."

me more inside myself, so the educational consultant steps out and opens connections to the world and all its inspiring people again.

**Have you been influenced by any prominent artists in India, Pakistan, UK or Oman?**

Artists play diverse roles and have different influences. I would like to mention Howard Hodgkin (UK), Anwar Jalal Shemza (Pakistan) and V S Gaitonde (India). I have seen many changes in the Omani

art scene regarding the use of techniques, materials and content. Maryam al Zadjali is one of the Omani artist whose versatility, skill and tremendous contribution I admire.

**How did COVID-19 affect your work and how best did you manage your lockdown days?**

While thinking about emotional and mental nourishment in COVID-19, I decided to explore the idea of 'Substrate' — what nourishes an organism? When Oman went into lock-



Dilemmas MYP 1, 2 & 3' and 'Interdisciplinary Thinking for Schools: Ethical Dilemmas MYP 4 & 5' (Harbord & Khan) published by John Catt Educational Ltd, UK.

Does your multi-cultural identity show in your works?

Having experienced different cultures, creative practices and places has most likely influenced who I am and how I experience in the world. Although this may not be visible in the abstract work itself, it does impact the ideas that interest me, such as exploring our shared humanity and what the essence of being human is. Ultimately people are people with similar joys, fears and needs.

**What initiated you to abstract forms, will you deviate to contemporary art?**

I was just turning towards abstraction, when a family crisis in 2007 transformed my work overnight. Using abstract forms to express myself honestly and deeply, without feeling vulnerable has been important and I continue to develop my understanding of the potential and possibilities of abstract approach. I also work with digital and hand-drawn collages. If I had the skills, I would love to work with film because of its potential for storytelling.

**How do you feel you will be in about 10 years from now?**

There are so many ideas I still want to explore and challenges to set myself, both personally and professionally. It has taken me time to become confident about my work practice but today I am sure about what a meaningful life looks and feels. I would love to be in a position to purposefully encourage dialogue between diverse creative communities and actively support women. As an educator, Harbord & Khan Educational Consultants are now presently using our ethical educational model and curriculum in different parts of the world and we hope to go from strength to strength!

**'Oman: Under a peaceful Sky' is on at The Waterfront, Muscat till December 26 from 10 am to 10 pm**



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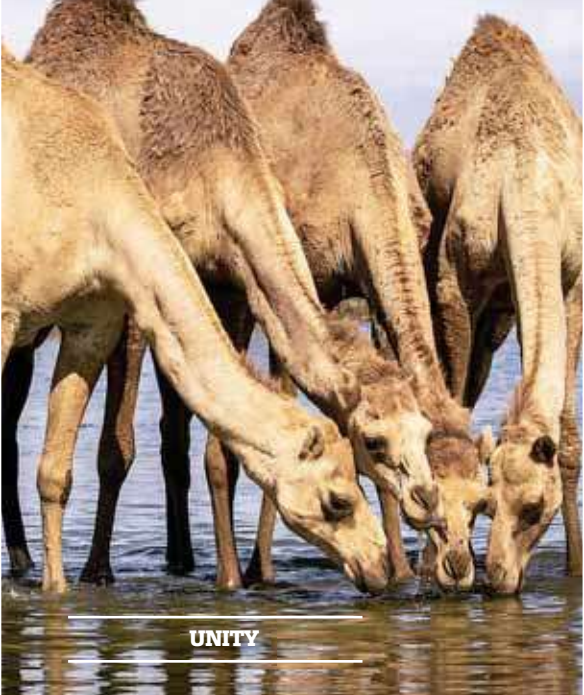
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CULTURE

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MUSIC

‘#ChangeMusic’ plan aims to give Black artists bigger clout

The organisers of the Grammy awards on Thursday launched an initiative to elevate Black voices at all levels of the music industry and ensure that Black artists are fairly compensated for their work. The #ChangeMusic Roadmap, launched by the Recording Academy and racial justice non-profit Color of Change, said that Black contributions to the industry have historically been undervalued.

Black artists “have created styles of music, the culture, the trends, and the success of this business - yet too often are left unheralded and excluded from the rooms in which the most important decisions are made,” the organisers said. The initiative follows a cultural reckoning that was spurred by nationwide street protests this summer over systemic racism, and pressure on the music business to improve the numbers of Black people in its corporate ranks. Rap and R&B music overtook rock in 2017 to become the biggest music genre in the United States but there are only a handful of

Black executives in senior jobs in the industry. The Recording Academy, which votes on the Grammys, has come under fire in recent years from the likes of Drake, Jay-Z and Kanye West for seeming to favour white artists. In more than 60 years of the Grammys, only two hip-hop albums have ever won album of the year and the last Black artist to win the coveted accolade was Herbie Hancock in 2008. The Recording Academy in October launched the Black Music Collective in response to the criticism. The #ChangeMusic Roadmap calls for the fair distribution of royalties, an examination of old recording contracts for potential inequities, anti-racist training, annual reports on pay disparities and an increase in the numbers of Black people in leadership positions. “This moment offers an unparalleled opportunity to change patterns of exclusion and degradation,” the Recording Academy and Color of Change said in a statement.

— Reuters





# UNESCO PUTS FINNISH SAUNA CULTURE ON HERITAGE LIST

Finns' penchant for relaxing in blazing hot steam-filled rooms was on Thursday put on the UN's list of the world's intangible heritage.

With an estimated three million saunas for 5.5 million people, the steam bath is a traditional Finnish institution which goes back hundreds of years.

"Sauna culture in Finland is an integral part of the lives of the majority of the Finnish population," the UN body said.

The culture "involves much more than simply washing oneself. In a sauna, people cleanse their bodies and minds and embrace a sense of inner peace", Unesco said.

Saunas are ubiquitous in Finnish homes, blocks of flats and at swimming pools, where bathers gather often in the nude in temperatures of around 85 degrees Celsius (185F).

Over the years, Finnish leaders have regularly invited their counterparts and foreign dignitaries into the sauna to continue discussions, and Cold War president Urho Kekkonen's "sauna diplomacy" became a keystone of Finland's relations with neighbouring Soviet Russia.

But the practice has also come in for heavy criticism for excluding women, as the sexes usually bathe separately.

In winter the sauna is often followed by a dip in a hole in the ice of one of Finland's many thousands of lakes, a ritual which many sauna devotees insist improves health and mental well-being.

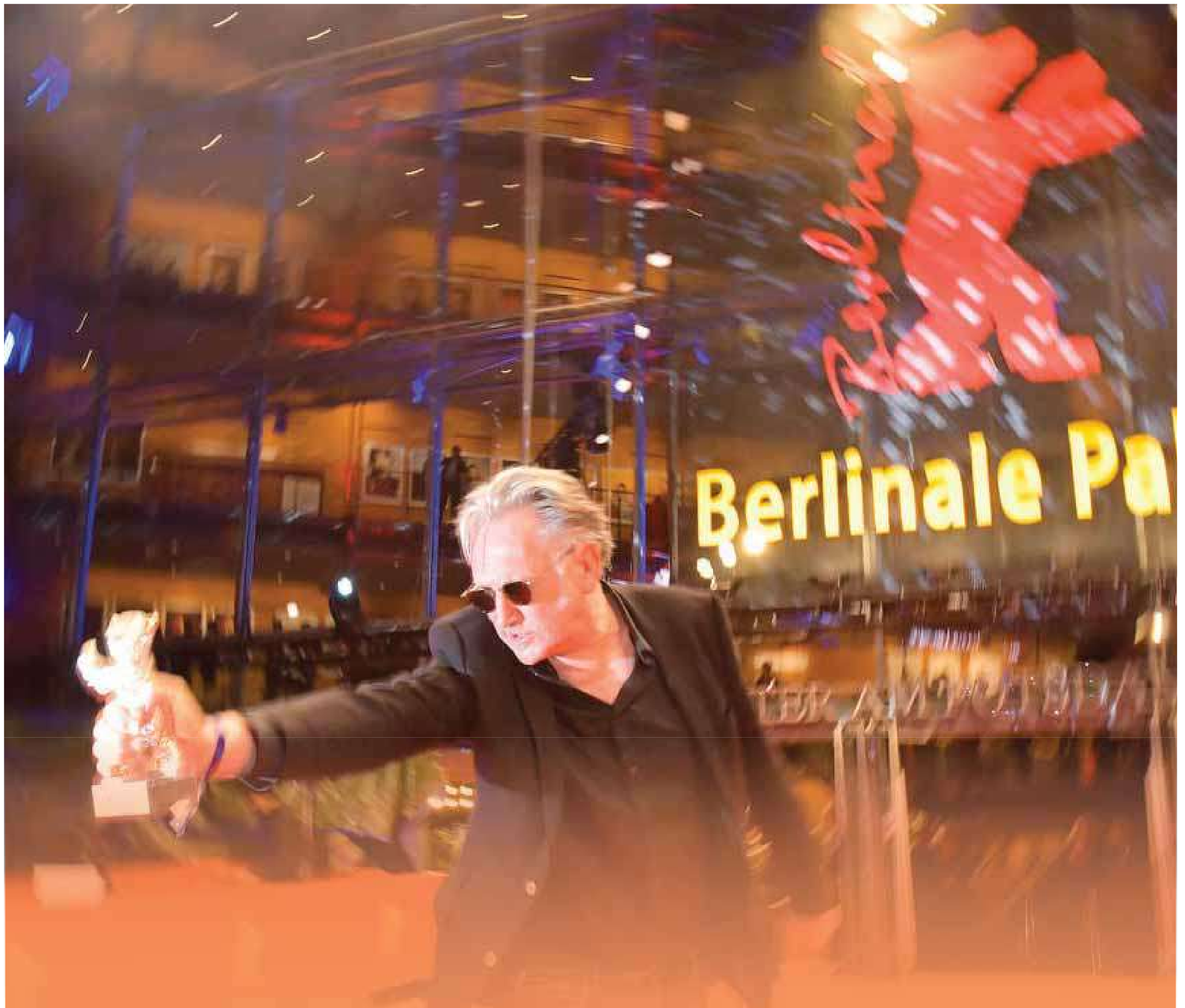
The often quiet contemplation inside the sauna, alone or with others, is something of a sacred ritual for Finns, for whom regular churchgoing is rare.

Traditionally the sauna has also been the place where life began and ended — up until the 1940s rural women often gave birth there, as the only place in the home with hot water and privacy, and the sauna is where the last rites were performed after death.

The term "sauna" is one of the few words from the notoriously obscure Finnish language to pass into international use, and the name is thought to have originally referred to the hot stones upon which water is thrown to create steam.

For 11 years the Finns hosted a sauna endurance world championship although it was abandoned in 2010 after the death of a competitor in the 110 degrees (230 Fahrenheit) heat.

However, in 2019 the country successfully reclaimed the world record from China for the highest number of different nationalities in one sauna, when bathers from 101 different countries squeezed into an enormous steam bath in the capital Helsinki. — AFP



# Berlin film fest postponed, divided into online and live events

Berlin's international film festival postponed on Friday its February 2021 edition as the coronavirus pandemic continues to take a harsh toll on the global entertainment industry.

Usually, Europe's first major cinema showcase of the year, the annual Berlinale, as the event is known, will now take place as a strictly digital event for industry players in March.

An international jury, whose previous presidents include Meryl Streep and Tilda Swinton, will watch the films in competition in Berlin and choose the winners of the Golden and Silver Bear top prizes.

Featured films would only be screened for the public in June, the festival said in a statement.

"There is a great desire to meet face-to-face. The current situation does not allow a physical festival in February, at the same time it is important to offer the film industry a market within the first quarter of the year,"

Berlinale Executive Director Mariette Rissenbeek said.

"With the change in the festival format in 2021, we will have the chance to protect the health of all guests and to support the restart of the cinema industry."

**Crippling impact**

Festivals serve as a celebration of films on the big screen at a time when the pandemic is accelerating the drive toward streaming.

The traditional pageantry of gala premieres and stars on the red carpet are the life's blood of the events — elements that will be sorely missing at online editions.

Cannes was cancelled entirely this year while Toronto — North America's largest movie gathering — took place largely online.

Venice managed to benefit from a break in high infection levels to take place in September with a range of special precautions to prevent infections.

The Sundance film festival unveiled plans this month to screen premieres at drive-ins and arthouse theatres across the United States and online.

The second wave of the coronavirus outbreak has had a crippling impact on the global entertainment industry, with blockbuster premieres postponed and movie production grinding to a halt in many regions.

The Berlinale, which ranks with Cannes and Venice among the top European film festivals, prides itself on being the only one of the trio to sell tickets to the public for nearly all screenings. Rissenbeek said the June screenings, to take place in open-air and indoor movie houses, would "offer the Berlinale audience the long-awaited community experience of cinema and culture".

Organisers had earlier ruled out a purely online edition of the event given its popularity with

movie lovers in the German capital.

Germany mothballed all cinemas in the country in early November as part of a shut-down to tame the virus but the restrictions have failed to bring infection numbers down.

The closures have been extended until at least January 10 and are expected to last through most of the winter.

**Holding back movies**

Alongside the competition for the Golden Bear and screenings of hundreds of new films, the normally 11-day Berlinale also hosts the European Film Market where movie distribution rights are bought and sold.

Moritz Hemminger, deputy head of sales and acquisitions at sales agency ARRI Media, said pushing the Berlinale into the spring wouldn't have a major impact on the festival circuit, even though it would be closer to Cannes, usually held in May.

— AFP